

# COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS

An explanation of the epistle to the Hebrews  
and related passages of Scripture,  
showing how humanity may acceptably approach the Deity.

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him:  
for he that cometh to God must believe that He is,  
and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”*

*“Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.”*  
(Hebrews 11:6; 10:22)

For  
The Glory of God  
To  
Honour His Son  
To  
Comfort His People

1 Corinthians 10:31; John 5:23;  
John 17:17; Philippians 2:9-11;  
Revelation 5:13; 15:3,4;  
Romans 16:4.

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**NEW COVENANT FELLOWSHIP**

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## PREFACE

Among the mental qualities or faculties with which the Creator endowed man at the beginning were those which inclined him to reverence and prostration of himself in worship. Other faculties were stirred by the grandeur of the material universe, appreciation of the beauties of the garden, and gratitude for the liberality of the provision for their sustenance in such beautiful surroundings. To their sense of equity there was a direct appeal, in the provision that the fruit of one particular tree should not be eaten, for surely God who made and provided all was within His rights in any reservation He might make. The prohibited tree was a tree like the other trees, in that it produced fruit, afterward described as pleasant to the eyes and good for food. There is no valid reason for supposing that the prohibition involved anything more or less than obedience to a known command of their Creator.

Created perfect, our first parents had a knowledge of good. God was good, they were good, all that God had made was good. To eat of the forbidden tree was not necessary as a means of acquiring a knowledge of God. As James said long afterward, *"Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"*. There was no magic in the tree to impart either good or evil. The knowledge of evil came only when they listened without scorn to the slanderous imputations of the evil one, and permitted themselves to doubt God's goodness and ascribe an evil motive to His commandment. The tree is called *"the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"* only because by reason of it they came to recognise that their conduct and Satan's was evil, and to contrast that experience with what they had previously known of good at the hand of their Creator, God. As said before, there was nothing in the tree itself to make them bad, because God had made the tree, and all His work was perfect. But the tree became a test, and they failed under the test because they allowed themselves to be influenced by Satan's innuendoes.

From these remarks it will be seen that we stand squarely on the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired word of God. We believe Genesis to be a true and accurate account of what took place in the garden, of Satan's malevolence, of our first parents' weakness, and of the penalty which came upon them on account of their transgression. We stand squarely also on the promise of Genesis 3:15 that the serpent's head would be bruised by a deliverer to come, and on the statement of Revelation 13:8 that Jesus Christ was *"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"*, who should in due time accomplish that bruising and that deliverance, and on all the Bible in between, of history, type, prophecy, gospel story, and epistolary instruction.

In the present volume is shown from the wonderful epistle to the Hebrews how God provided in His Son the atonement sacrifice through which sinful and condemned humanity, now worshipping the gods of their own fancy, may turn from those to serve the living and true God. He seeks such to worship Him as will do so in spirit and in truth, and it is our earnest prayer that the comparisons and contrasts presented in the following pages will lead some to a clearer conception of divine worship and of the means by which the weakest and humblest may be assured that their prayers have entered the ears of a loving Father and God.

To modern translators and commentators credit has been given throughout for renderings and comments made use of, but our greatest debt we owe to the Lord himself, who caused His apostles in the first place to expound these things for us by the power of His Spirit dwelling in and moving upon them. May that same Holy Spirit illuminate the mind of each reader, as we trust our minds have been aided by that power from on high - to the glory of God, to honour His Son, to comfort His people.

E. C. & R. B. HENNINGES.  
*Melbourne, Australia,*  
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## Chapter 1

### THE SON AND THE ANGELS

As a series of comparisons between the Law Covenant and the New Covenant the book of Hebrews is well known. Great signs accompanied the introduction of the Law Covenant, and great signs also accompanied the introduction of the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:18-21; 2:3,4). The Law Covenant had a mediator, Moses; the New Covenant also has a Mediator, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:5,6; 9:15; 12:24). The Law Covenant mediator sprinkled the blood of sacrifice on *"the book and all the people"*, the New Covenant Mediator sealed the New Covenant with His own blood shed on the cross, and sprinkles with that covenant blood all who come unto God by Him (Hebrews 9:18-20; 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2; Luke 22:20). The Law Covenant had a priesthood. The New Covenant also has a priesthood (Hebrews 7:23,24; 8:1-3; 9:7-12). The Law Covenant had sacrifices and a cleansing from sin. The New Covenant provided the complete cleansing from sin by the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ *"once for all"* (Hebrews 9:14; 10:22; 1 John 1:7).

#### Shadows - Not Exact Images

While these similarities are to be noted and carefully studied, the apostle's comment (10:1) must be given full consideration. He says that the Law had a *"shadow of good things to come"*, but *"not the very image of the things"*. It is equally then the duty of the reader to discover in what ways the *"shadow"* falls short of the *"very image"*, in other words, to discern what differences exist, what contrasts are afforded, between the Law Covenant: its terms; its priesthood; and its sacrifices; and the New Covenant with its own distinct terms and priesthood, and its one sacrifice *"once for all"*.

As we study the book, therefore, we shall seek to draw attention to the contrasts that lie side by side with the comparisons, and which show that, while there are notable resemblances, the New Covenant is what its name implies and the prophet foretold, a **New** Covenant, *"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt"* (Hebrews 8:9; Jeremiah 31:32).

#### The Writer of the Book

Before taking up the book verse by verse, it may be well to understand, if possible, the question of authorship. The writer's name is not mentioned in the epistle, and the subscription or postscript simply states, *"Written to the Hebrews from Italy by Timothy"*. This does not signify that Timothy was the author, for he is mentioned in 13:23 as the travelling companion of the author. For a similar postscript to an epistle see Colossians, *"Written from Rome to the Colossians by Tychicus and Onesimus"*. The postscript to the Colossians was, however, in part added to some of the later Greek manuscripts, the most ancient manuscripts available, the Sinaitic and Vatican, reading simply, *"To the Colossians"*, while the Alexandrine adds *"from Rome"*. Doubtless some later transcriber judged from Colossians 4:7-9 that Tychicus and Onesimus had served as scribes, and from verses 3 and 18 that the letter was written from Rome where Paul was *"in bonds"*. The fact that brethren acted as scribes for the apostle is further borne out by Colossians 4:18, *"The salutation by the hand of me Paul"*, as much as to say that he adds a few words in his own hand by way of signature and acknowledgment of the epistle written for him by the hand of a fellow servant of the gospel.

The postscript to the epistle to the Hebrews, according to the Sinaitic manuscript, is *"To the Hebrews"*, and the Alexandrine, *"To the Hebrews was written from Rome"*. The Vatican manuscript No. 1209 ends with Hebrews 9:14, consequently cannot be quoted respecting the remaining portions of the epistle. From this manuscript the epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, as well as the Revelation, are also missing. The Sinaitic manuscript, accounted to be even older than the Vatican 1209, contains the book of Hebrews in full, as does also the Alexandrine, a somewhat later uncial manuscript.

In a day when letters were laboriously written by hand, it is only to be expected that an apostle of the standing and authority of Paul should be thus served by the younger brethren, his devoted companions in tribulation, particularly when it is remembered that his eyesight was defective, not having recovered entirely from the blinding vision seen on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

A reference to this physical disability is found in 2 Corinthians 12:7, where he calls it *"a thorn in the flesh"*, also in Galatians 4:15, where he reminds the Galatians that in the ardour of their first love they would gladly have plucked out their own eyes to give to him, a useless sacrifice if their eyes were not required. In Galatians 6:11 he says, *"Ye see how large a letter [or, 'with how large letters'; RV] I have written unto you with mine own hand"*. A natural peculiarity often found in the



handwriting of persons with poor eye-sight is that they make their letters large. That this was Paul's meaning may be inferred from verse 12, the making of large characters immediately reminding him of worldly pretensions and the outward sign of circumcision, "*as many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh*", and this suggests an exhortation to self-abnegation and glorying only in the cross of Christ.

Since Timothy had been for some years the apostle's companion in travel, and for a time shared his imprisonment (Acts 16:1-5; Hebrews 13:23), and since Paul was given certain liberties while in prison or under guard (Acts 28:23, 29-31), what more to be expected than that he should dictate to Timothy the important information contained in this epistle for the guidance specially of his brethren of Jewish birth who were already acquainted with the formalities of the Jewish Law? And Timothy, just being liberated, would carry the letter to the Hebrew Christians residing at all the places he would visit, for Paul, who had "*the care of all the churches*" was wont to send Timothy and other brethren here and there as the needs of the early church required (2 Corinthians 11:28; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 2:2; 3:10,11; 4:1,2,13,21; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:1,2).

The apostle Peter's two epistles were addressed "*to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion*" (1 Peter 1:1, RV; 2 Peter 3:1), that is, to Christians of Hebrew birth scattered throughout the various provinces named. In 2 Peter 3:15 he mentions that "*our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom give unto him hath written unto you*", that is, to Hebrew Christians. The only writing known to answer to this statement by Peter is the epistle to the Hebrews.

All these considerations point to Paul as the author of the book of Hebrews, or, rather, we should say that God was the author, since we take the epistle to be an inspired writing, like the work of other prophets of God, "*holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Peter 1:21). Paul was then the honoured instrument for communicating the true interpretation of the types of the Law dealt with, while Timothy's was the hand which committed the matter to writing.

The argument sometimes put forward, that Paul could not have been the writer because the style of the book differs from that of epistles bearing his name, is not convincing for three reasons. First, a Pharisee of education and ability, such as Paul was, having sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the celebrated councillor and doctor of the law (Acts 5:34; 22:3), might be expected to display considerable versatility. Second, the subject matter lends itself to a different style of treatment from that, for instance, of reproving the Corinthians for carnality. As a general letter, also, there is less occasion for reference to individuals and personalities than in one addressed to some specific congregation to which he had ministered during his evangelistic tours. Third, the influence guiding, that is, the Holy Spirit, while allowing latitude for the individual characteristics of the prophets and apostles, must not be understood to be in any way limited thereby. The divine mind would impress such thoughts and language as would best serve the objective sought, namely, in the case of the book of Hebrews, the enlightenment of those to whom the epistle was addressed, and of the disciples generally to whom it would afterward come.

But Paul's personality does show most markedly in the concluding exhortations, prayer, and greetings, his intense love of the brethren, his great desire to be restored to them through the efficacy of their prayers, his reference to his good conscience expressing the conviction that he was imprisoned wrongfully. He who had so great a love for his "*kinsmen according to the flesh*" that he was willing to be "*accursed*" if only they would repent and enter into the glorious high calling, was surely a fitting instrument to convey to those very blood relations the illuminating comparisons and contrasts of this wonderful epistle (Romans 9:1-4; 10:1).

### **To Whom Written**

While the lessons of the book of Hebrews were written primarily for those Hebrews who had become Christians through acceptance of Christ as their promised Messiah, they were also suitable to convince any Hebrew who had not yet seen that the Law Covenant was superseded by the New Covenant, as well as to refresh the memories of those mentioned in chapter 5 who had forgotten, and needed to be taught again, the first principles of the doctrine of Christ.

The lessons of the book of Hebrews are spiritual "*meat in due season*" to Gentiles also, for from the beginning of the age until now false teachers have sought to bring the Gentiles under more or less bondage to the Law (Acts 15:1,5,19,20; Galatians 2:14; 3:1-5). It is as essential for the Gentile as for the Jew to understand the purpose of the Law given at Sinai, the reason it failed to bring life, why it was nailed to the cross, and how the perfect sacrifice of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ was the complete fulfilment of all the offerings under the Law.

Romans 11 describes how believers from the Gentiles are grafted into the "*olive tree*", partaking of the promises originally made to the Hebrews, but now to be realised only through Christ, for Christ has reconciled both to God in one body by the cross (Ephesians 2:11-16). To search the scriptures is profitable to Christians of all nationalities (Romans 3:1,2; 15:4; John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:14-17).

### **The Theme of the Book**

The theme of the epistle to the Hebrews is cleansing from sin. Almost the first words (1:3) are that Christ made purification for sins. The Hebrews, by their Law, had been made well acquainted with the exceeding sinfulness of sin (Romans 7:12,13). Sin in all its forms was denounced, penalties were imposed for transgression, and provision made for forgiveness by a ritual in the hands of a God-appointed priesthood (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). Notwithstanding all this, sin continued as a mighty barrier between the people and God, and as a burden on the mind and conscience of even the most sincere and devout worshipper (Psalm 106:6-43; Daniel 9:4-19; Isaiah 64:6). No human agency could remove this barrier and this burden. Every Jew was vitally concerned in this question, but God was the only one who could offer a solution.

To that solution the apostle devotes himself in this epistle, showing how in Christ (and not by the Law) the barrier of sin is removed from between God and the penitent, and the conscience of the true worshipper cleansed.

Three main lines of argument are followed. The first to establish that Jesus Christ is a High Priest, and hence that the Levitical priesthood is superseded. The second to show that His sacrifice on the cross of the "*body prepared*" was the antitype of the Day of Atonement offerings for sin, and hence that the sacrifices of the Law are abolished. The third that the blood of Jesus Christ was the antitype of the blood of bullocks and of goats carried by the Jewish high priest once a year into the Most Holy, consequently that the Jewish Day of Atonement with its now useless ritual was to be observed no more.

In the book of Hebrews no specific reference is made to Jesus as the antitype of the Passover sacrifice, a review of the Passover rites and their significance not coming within the scope of the apostle's present discourse. That Jesus was the antitype of the Passover lamb, the blood of which was sprinkled on the doorposts for the protection of the firstborn of the children of Israel from the destroying angel in Egypt, he stated in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "*Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*".

The sacrifice on Calvary as the ransom price for the whole of the human race was intimated by our Lord before the great event occurred, and was referred to afterwards by the apostle (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:4-6), but in the epistle to the Hebrews this aspect of our Lord's sacrifice seems to be mentioned only in 2:9, where the statement is made that He, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man. Thus the epistle to the Hebrews associates itself with the ransom without devoting itself particularly to the explanation in detail of that most important and fundamental doctrine of scripture.

In Hebrews 9:13,14 reference is made to the purifying power of our Lord's blood as the antitype of "*the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean*", in 9:21,22, as the antitype of the blood which purged "*almost all things*" under the Law, and in 9:15-20 He is shown to have been the covenant victim for the ratification of the New Covenant, antitype of the beasts slain for the ratification of the Law Covenant.

But beyond these references to other sacrifices, the apostle maintains throughout the epistle the several lines of reasoning in support of his theme, conclusively proving our Lord's priesthood with all it involved of a change of the law (7:12), the introduction of the New Covenant (8:6; 9:15), the offering of Himself to God as the completely efficacious sacrifice for sins (9:14; 10:5-10; 13:11,12), to accomplish the purging or cleansing of the consciences of the true worshippers, as sin bearer to bear away the sins out of sight, and finally as blessing of all who come to God through Him (9:7,15,28; 10:4-22).

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.

Let us now proceed with our study of the epistle, asking for God's blessing, and submitting our minds to the enlightening influence of His Holy Spirit, with a consideration also of corroborative passages in other portions of the divine word.

### **God hath Spoken by His Son**

**1:1,2** That God should speak to the Hebrew people by a special messenger in the last days of their age was no new thing, for He had in times past spoken unto the fathers by the prophets. Here is a comparison, indicating a similarity of dealing.

But there is also a contrast, for whereas in time past it was by the prophets, members not only of their own nation and Covenant but of the Adamic race, now the messenger is no less a personage than God's own Son. True, He also was a Jew by birth, yet He was not wholly of themselves, for He was apart from both the condemnation on the race of mankind and the extra condemnation of the Law resting on Israel, being born of a virgin, and having no sin for which He could be condemned by any tribunal of God or man (John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22).

In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, our Lord mentions the sending of the son of the owner of the vineyard as a very special act, to appeal to the reverence and sense of justice of the husbandmen (Matthew 21:33-43). The scribes and Pharisees immediately placed themselves in the position of the wicked and unfaithful servants of the parable by deciding to lay violent hands on the son in their midst. They were restrained only by fear of the people (Matthew 21:45,46).

The prophets sent in ancient times were honourable men, of good standing in the community, but the fathers of Israel would not receive their message nor heed their rebukes. They stoned, imprisoned, and otherwise mistreated them (Matthew 23:27-32). When the prophets died, their writings still spoke to the people, and the descendants of the murderers garnished their sepulchres. All these prophets foretold of one to come as a deliverer, to whom the people should look, someone to be anointed to sit on David's throne (Luke 24:27,44; John 5:39; Acts 3:22-24; 2:25; 24:22). But when He came those who garnished the sepulchres showed themselves of the same spirit as their ancestors, for they put to death the Son of God.

Here again is a similarity. There is also a contrast.

The sepulchres of the prophets remained to that day. The prophets themselves slept, awaiting the resurrection, as Peter said, *"For David [one of the greatest of the prophets] is not ascended into the heavens"*. On the other hand, the Lord Jesus, though crucified, dead, and buried, was raised from death the third day, and is now declared by the apostles, His chosen witnesses, to be the one of whom David spoke when he wrote, *"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool"*. This was fulfilled when Christ rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens. *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."* (Acts 2:22-36; 10:42; 13:29-33).

As a prophet, our Lord spoke while on earth. He does not cease to speak by reason of His new and glorious estate. He speaks, in fact, with added authority and power, and His message deserves our most humble and careful attention. After His resurrection, the apostle Peter declared to the men of Israel, *"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the LORD your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you"*. Samuel and the prophets likewise foretold of these days, and now, he adds, *"Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities"*. That was the first message of the risen prophet like unto Moses, to call on all the Jews to repent (Acts 3:22-26; 2:38; 5:31).

The same message of repentance was afterwards sent to the Gentiles (Acts 10:34-43; 17:30). If the Jews were reprov'd for not heeding those who spoke on earth, how shall we escape condemnation if we refuse to listen to Him who now speaks to us from heaven (Hebrews 2:3; 12:25)?

The Son is now *"heir of all things"*, a position not offered to the prophets (verse 2). All power in heaven and on earth is given unto Him (Matthew 28:18). In His pre-human existence our Lord *"made the worlds"*, literally, *"ages"* (John 1:1-3). He was the Father's instrument in laying out the ages which should progressively develop in the outworking of God's glorious purpose, and superintended that outworking up to the time He left all to become a man for the suffering of death (Philippians 2:5-8). And now, as *"heir of all things"*, He is prepared, commissioned, and qualified in every respect, to carry out the yet unfinished portion of that great plan of ages or epochs (Isaiah 9:6,7; 49:7-9; Acts 4:10-12; 13:47; Hebrews 5: 9,10).

### **The Brightness of His Glory**

**1:3** Here is graphically described the further honour and glory given to the Son at His resurrection. He was raised from death in the brightness of the Father's glory, and in the express image of His person, or, as the Revised Version margin has it, *"the impress of His substance"*. Our Lord's sojourn on earth is called by the apostle *"the days of his flesh"* (Hebrews 5:7). In the days of His flesh He was *"a little lower than the angels"*, it having been necessary that He become a man in order to give the ransom price for mankind (Hebrews 2:9; Philippians 2:7,8; 1 Timothy 2:3-7). But this fleshly nature was not given Him again at His resurrection.

To have confined Him to the flesh would have been an everlasting humiliation. Instead, He was raised in the likeness of His heavenly Father. God is a Spirit, hence, Christ also is now a Spirit, without the limitations incidental to the flesh (John 4:24; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 Corinthians 15:45-47). God's mighty power "*wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come*" (Ephesians 1:19-21). Exaltation above other 'names' manifestly means more than in name only. It means in fact, as the apostle goes on to show in the remaining verses of Hebrews 1, 'name' or title standing for the position or office.

"*Upholding all things by the word of His power*" indicates that God is still using Him as His instrument in the ordering of the universe, and not only so, but in the carrying out of the redemptive plan, of which He performed the foundational part when He offered Himself on the cross for our sins.

"*Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*" is another significant statement of our Lord's superior position. The right hand is the place of favour at a banquet. The right hand of the Majesty represents not only the place of favour, but of honour and dignity as joint sovereign with His Father, even as He said in the last message to the Laodicean church, "*As I ... am set down with my Father in his throne*" (Revelation 3:21.) This position in the throne is not one of rest or relaxation, it is not an empty authority. It is a place of activity, of governing, of power.

### **Purged our Sins**

"*When he had by himself purged our sins*". When was this purging accomplished? Was it before He was exalted to the glory at God's right hand, or after? Was it while on earth, or after His resurrection? The Revised Version reads, "*When he had made purification of sins*", the word "our" not being in the original. But though the word "our" does not occur in Hebrews 1:3, and therefore it is not stated specifically whose sins Christ "purged", yet an equivalent expression is found in Hebrews 9:24, where it is said that He appeared in heaven "*for us*".

Here a comparison is evidently being made with the purging of sins practised under the Law Covenant. The high priest on the great Day of Atonement entered into the Most Holy with the blood of the sin offering, and sprinkled it upon the mercy seat. The ark, with the mercy seat covering it, the overreaching cherubim, and the 'shekinah' light, was an emblem of God's presence. And God's acceptance of the sprinkled blood was necessary before atonement could be effected. Offerings not made according to the prescribed manner were not acceptable, nor were those offered by unauthorised persons (Exodus 28:1-4,29,30,38,43; Numbers 16:1-35). On the Day of Atonement if the high priest failed to perform a part of the ritual, or if he entered at unprescribed times "*within the veil*", he would die on the threshold of the Most Holy as a punishment for his laxity (Leviticus 16:2,13). Prescribed offerings correctly made were "*a sweet savour unto the LORD*" (Leviticus 1:9,13,17; 2:2,11).

But God's gracious acceptance of the sprinkled blood was not the only requisite. It was also necessary for the people for whom the offering was made to acknowledge it, to have faith in its efficacy, and furthermore to fast and pray and humiliate themselves in token that they were genuinely sorry for the sins for which the offering was being made (Leviticus 23:27-30; 16:29-31).

Hebrews 1:3 is a reference to the high priest's part in this work, and indicates that our Lord not only gave His blood on the cross as the sacrifice for sins, but also performed the antitype of the Jewish high priest's taking the blood into the Most Holy. In Hebrews 9:24 this truth is further elucidated by the statement that Christ entered "*into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*".

But the actual forgiveness of the sins of the individual transgressor does not take place unless and until he sees in that blood the offering for his sins, repents of his wrong course of life, and accepts the blood of Christ as for himself personally. This is in line with the appeal of the apostles to the people met in their missionary journeys, to become reconciled to God by accepting Christ's shed blood anti-typically applied on the heavenly mercy seat, and with Peter's statement that Christ was then ready to bless the people by turning them from their iniquities, obviously with their consent and co-operation (Acts 3:26; 13:38,39; Ephesians 2:12-18; Colossians 1:20,21; 2 Corinthians 5:20,21). Those Jews who did not believe on the Lord Jesus did not receive the cleansing from sin placed within their reach (Acts 13:38-41).

We who have accepted Christ's cleansing work may truly say that He appeared in heaven "*for us*" and purged "*our sins*". This has led some to suppose that the Lord appeared only for those who believe in this age and become members of the Church. Such a limitation is not, however, even implied, for herein comes a contrast between the method of the Jewish Day of Atonement under the

Law Covenant and that which our Lord pursues under the New Covenant. In the Jewish Age all for whom the service was performed in any given year were personally present in body, or if unavoidably absent were present in mind, to enter into that which the high priest performed, and to accept the forgiveness secured. This method was followed year after year, and for the benefit of generation after generation gathered at Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement.

Whereas in the New Covenant arrangement but one sacrifice was made at the beginning of the age, the efficacy of which extends right through two ages, the present Gospel Age and the ever nearer-coming Kingdom Age. And the forgiveness and blessing as a consequence of that sacrifice, which were extended on the Day of Pentecost to the waiting disciples, are made available to any penitent, whether Jew or Gentile, whenever and wherever he becomes a believer and accepts it. Thus we, of our day, living nearly two thousand years after the sacrifice was offered and the sins of the apostles and early believers were purged, have taken advantage of the open offer that our sins, too, would be purged when we accepted it as for us, hence we can say as in Romans 5:8-11:

*"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners [in our cases, yet unborn], Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son [on accepting his finished work], much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement [or, 'reconciliation']".*

The same distinction between what was accomplished by our Lord's death and what He accomplishes for us after we accept Him is observed in Romans 4:25, *"Who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification"*. And, still following along the same line, Paul concludes his argument by saying (Romans 5:1), *"Therefore being justified by faith"*, thus clearly showing that justification does not come to the individual until after the exercise of his personal faith.

We should say then that the thought the apostle expressed in Hebrews 1:3 was that our Lord *"made a purification of sins"* after His resurrection, when He appeared in the presence of God as the high priest, to sprinkle as it were His blood just shed for the purging or cleansing away of sin, upon seeing which God can justly justify him that believes (Romans 3:24-26). There was in heaven no literal mercy seat upon which the blood of Christ was literally sprinkled. That literalness had to do with the type. In the antitype the death of Christ was accepted by God as accomplishing a certain pre-arranged purpose, as already described.

So intimately is the blood of Christ associated with the display of mercy toward us by God when we come to Him through Christ our Mediator, that He is Himself called our *"propitiatory"*, or *"mercy seat"*. An alternative translation of Romans 3:25 is, *"Whom God hath set forth to be a mercy seat [propitiation] through faith in his blood"*. The Jewish mercy seat was temporary. Our mercy seat is permanent, it is always there ready, with the ever-efficacious blood for us to plead, when we are in need of forgiveness for daily transgressions, failures, and faults. *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-22).

### **Higher than Angels**

**1:4** The high exaltation which our Lord experienced at His resurrection is then emphasised by comparing the glory and honour of His position at the right hand of the Majesty on high with that occupied by the angels. He was made *"so much better than they"*. And this *"more excellent name"*, name signifying office or status, was obtained by Him as an inheritance. The position of the angels had been fixed by their creation. No change of status, or elevation to a higher position, had been promised to them. But our Lord, who was in the first instance higher than they, being God's agent in their creation (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16,17), and who was later on known as *"Michael the archangel"* (Jude 9), *"Michael, one of the chief princes"*, *"Michael your prince"* and *"the great prince that standeth for the children of thy people"* (Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1), was given a promise of a still higher rank.

An inheritance in earthly affairs comes to the heirs by the death of the father or other benefactor. In the case of our Lord, He is called God's heir, but God did not and will not die in order that the Lord may acquire the estate. The estate which Jesus inherited was given to Him by promise, and before He could enter into it, it was necessary for Him to die in accordance with the plan arranged before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, and the Son so loved the world that He gave Himself willingly and gladly on their behalf.

An understanding existed between the Father and the Son on this matter long before the Son came to earth. In death our Lord Jesus gave His all, but God abandoned not His beloved Son to the tomb: He raised Him up again (Acts 2:27, 31-36; 1 Corinthians 15:15). So then it was on His resurrection that the Lord Jesus received this special inheritance, as the next verse explains.

**1:5** Not to any of the angels had God said, *"Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee"*. Of Jesus only were these words spoken by the inspired prophet (Psalm 2:7). Generally they are thought to apply to His birth, but since the apostle Paul applies them to His resurrection, we cannot do otherwise. Jesus was God's Son while on earth, being born of a virgin, and was so acknowledged, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Luke 1:27-35; Matthew 3:17). But He is also God's Son since His resurrection, His Son on a higher level of being, even partaking of God's own nature, as stated in verse 3, and in Romans 1:4, *"declared to be the Son of God with power, ... by the resurrection from the dead"*. While on earth He was God's Son in the flesh (though of the seed of Abraham and David through his mother Mary), suffering the *"contradiction of sinners against himself"* even unto death (Hebrews 5:7; 12:3).

Since His resurrection He is the Son of God with power. The apostle's application of the promise to our Lord's resurrection is found in Acts 13:33, and is in harmony with the remainder of the psalm, which speaks of the time when our Lord was set on God's holy hill of Zion, and given the heathen (nations) for His inheritance, that is, at His resurrection, when He was made King over all the earth, since which time all are called upon to *"kiss the Son"*, give allegiance, and thus gain His favour (Psalm 2). He is indeed our King, and we delight to honour Him.

Another promise given to the Son, and not given to the angels, was, *"I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son"*. As the words occur in 2 Samuel 7:14, their application would appear to be to Solomon, David's heir to the throne of Israel. And doubtless had he been loyal to God, Solomon would have been blessed by many evidences of God's love and favour. But evidently, from the application made in Hebrews 1:5, this promise was intended for another heir of David who should live long afterward, and who should belong not to the fractious line of Solomon (Jeremiah 22:28-30; Ezekiel 21:25-27), but to the loyal line of Nathan (another of David's sons, Luke 3:31), even our Lord Jesus Christ, whose birth as David's heir was heralded by the angels and recorded by the evangelists (Luke 2:10-14; 1:32,33; Matthew 1:25; 2:1). Privileged as was the position of the angels, God went past them to take a branch of Jesse and David to become the root or source of life for the salvation of mankind (Isaiah 11:1,10; Romans 15:12; Revelation 21:16).

The angels also are in scripture called the sons of God (Genesis 6:1; Jude 6). They are such by creation, as was also Adam (Luke 3:38). But Jesus now is the Son of God by a resurrection *"from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefined, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"* (1 Peter 1:3,4), and not reserved for the angels. Oh, what an honour is bestowed on us by this precious promise. We too shall be sons of the resurrection, as we are now by faith and adoption (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5-7), and then we, with Him, shall enjoy the many other privileges of our inheritance, not the least of which will be the pleasure of assisting in the great work of blessing to be undertaken during the Kingdom Age for the enlightenment of all men now groping in the darkness of this evil world and under bondage to the prince of darkness and his emissaries:

*"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure"* (1 John 3:2,8).

**1:6** That all these promises pertained to our Lord in His resurrection is confirmed in verse 6, particularly by the marginal reading, *"And when he bringeth again the first begotten into the world"*. The exhortation or command to the angels of God to worship Christ was given them after He was raised from death, for the exaltation above angels is specifically associated in 1 Peter 3:22 with His going to heaven, *"Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him"*. Ephesians 1:21 says that when raised from the dead He was exalted *"Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named"*, therefore far above the angels.

The word "world" in this place is neither 'aion' (age) nor 'kosmos' (order of things), but a word signifying the 'habitable'. As our Lord's death, when He was three days in 'hades', involved a departure from among the inhabitants of the universe, angelic as well as human, so His resurrection involved bringing Him again into a conscious association with His Father, with the angels, and with other living beings of the 'habitable' (Acts 2:24-32).

In His pre-existence our Lord was superior to the angels, for He made them, and He is called "*Michael the archangel*", or chief angel (Jude 9). But when He came to earth and died He forsook all that honour and power. He really and truly died. Hence, before He could resume His former position He would need to be reinvested with authority. In His prayer before His crucifixion He asked only that He might be restored to the position He occupied with the Father before the world was (John 17:5).

But when He raised Him from death God gave Him more than that. He glorified the Son with a nature superior to that previously possessed, "*For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself*" (John 5: 26). The Son was made the exact impress of the Father's substance. He was endowed with incorruptibility, a condition of being in which it will be impossible for Him ever to die again (Hebrews 1:3; Diaglott rendering; 1 Corinthians 15:42; 2 Timothy 1:10.) In 1 Timothy 6:15,16 our Lord Jesus is called "*the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only [of all kings and lords] hath immortality*".

The angels have been tested in past ages in regard to their attitude toward God and Christ. Some of them were disobedient in the days of Noah (2 Peter 2:4,5; Genesis 6). The angels, both good and bad, have since been spectators of the development of God's purpose. They saw the Lord come to earth, they witnessed His betrayal and death. They saw Him raised again and exalted to God's right hand, and they have heard the command to worship and serve Him. This involves them in a test of loyalty and obedience. Will they acknowledge Him in the position in which God has placed Him?

The good angels were used as messengers to men, the word "*angel*" transferred from the Greek, meaning 'messenger' (Genesis 18:2; Judges 6:11; Daniel 6:22; 9:21). "*The angel of the LORD encampeth about them that fear him, and delivereth them*" (Psalm 34:7). They desired to "*look into*" or understand the teachings and promises set forth by the Holy Spirit through the prophets. They sang with joy when announcing the birth of the Saviour, and they were His comforters in the agony of Gethsemane. They are also interested spectators of the trials and progress of the Church throughout the age (1 Peter 1:12; Luke 2; Matthew 26:53; Luke 22:43; 1 Corinthians 4:9).

The fallen angels have (though there may be exceptions who have repented) continued to oppose God, and they resisted the Lord when He was on earth, and the apostles also. But as 1 Corinthians 6:3 says that the saints shall "*judge angels*", and Jude 6 says that they are confined in chains of darkness unto the day of judgment, it is believed some of these will acknowledge the Lord Jesus in that day. In the meantime there is reason to hope that the example set them by the Lord of obedience to God (1 Peter 3:18-20), and may we hope also what they see of the saints on earth persevering in holiness and faith, will strongly influence them to forsake their evil course and come humbly to Him who has been set far above them with all power, and who is also compassionate.

The bruised reed He will not break, nor will He quench the smoking flax. God grant that they may not continue to harden themselves against so loving and merciful a deliverer and King. But should they persist in their present activities through spiritualism and other channels, and despise the mercy that God is showing them and will show them still more, there can be but one end, and that is to be cast into everlasting fire (the symbol of destruction), "*prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41).

**1:7** "*And of [or, 'unto'] the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.*" This thought should serve to humble the angels, and also us who read the words, as recorded in Psalm 104:4. The sense is more readily discerned by a slight transposition, as in the Revised Version rendering of the psalm, "*Who maketh winds his messengers; his ministers a flaming fire*".

In Psalm 104 the greatness of God is eulogised. Verse 3 says He "*walketh upon the wings of the wind*". Thus the wind is made God's servant. God can use anything or anybody as His angel or messenger, anything or anybody as His minister or servant. Hence the fact that one is so used, whether an angelic or a human messenger, is not an occasion for pride. Rather is it an occasion for appreciation of the honour bestowed by being used at all. Everywhere in scripture we (and the spiritual angels also) are reminded that God does not need us. As He could raise up children unto Abraham out of the stones trodden under the feet of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, so He can raise up and use any instrumentality He pleases. God resists the proud, but shows His favour to the humble (Matthew 3:9; John 8:33-40; 1 Peter 5:5).

A few thoughts in regard to the Hebrew and Greek words rendered "*spirits*" in Psalm 104:4 and Hebrews 1:7. The inherent idea in these words is an unseen power or force. They are used primarily of wind, breath, blast, all of which are unseen, although their effects may be observed. By

analogy the words are used of other than natural phenomena such as the wind. In a figurative sense the words are used of the mind and the disposition, these being unseen and yet exerting force. They are also used of beings who are unseen. God is a Spirit, an unseen power, but in this case a person, as exhibited in intelligent creation and reason. The angels are spirits, unseen yet powerful beings. The Holy Spirit is an unseen power exerted or sent forth by God.

In Psalm 104:3 the word rendered "*wind*" is the same word rendered "*spirits*" in verse 4. God walks upon the wings of the wind, and makes the winds His angels or messengers. The spirit beings called angels have therefore every reason to be humble, seeing that they are only God's messengers, as the wind is when He requires it [see Revised Version].

Similarly, fire may be used by God as His "*minister*", the word "*minister*" simply meaning servant. Fire (and probably lightning) was used by God as His servant to destroy Sodom (Genesis 19:24; Luke 17:29). Fire was His servant to testify to the Jews that He was the true God (1 Kings 18:30-39). If God can and does use the natural element fire to accomplish His purposes, let both angels and men whom he deigns to use as His servants observe a proper humility.

**1:8** But unto the Son God spoke a different word (Psalm 45:6). The Son showed Himself both in His pre-human estate and in His earthly ministry a humble, trustworthy, obedient servant. Now God invites Him to a different position. He appoints Him to an office of authority, wherein He shall command the services of others, "*But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom*".

Here is a contrast. The angels were not given a throne, the Son was. True, it is a throne for the purpose of carrying out God's purposes, and in that respect the Lord Jesus is still God's servant. But He occupies and exercises the office of the throne in the spirit of Son-ship, and not as an uncomprehending agent such as the angels often were and fire and wind always are (Isaiah 42:1; 49:6).

The appellation "*god*" applied to our Lord Jesus is consistent with His high office. The word means, literally, a 'mighty one', and was applied in the Old Testament to persons in authority, such as the judges and heads of tribes. Moses was made a "*god*" to Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1; Psalm 82:1). Our heavenly Father is the supreme God or mighty one. Our Lord Jesus has been made by Him the mighty one next to Himself, as ruler over all things, including mankind.

A sceptre [the symbol of ruler-ship] of righteousness [straightness, justice], is the natural outcome of a righteous character. Who would not willingly come under the rule of the holy and just, as well as merciful, Jesus?

**1:9** "*Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows*" (Psalm 45:7). The psalm relates, and the apostle quotes, the reason why the Lord Jesus is given this everlasting throne, this position of trust and power, this personal authority over others. It is because during the severe tests to which He had been put He demonstrated invariably that He "*loved righteousness and hated iniquity*" (Psalm 45:6; Hebrews 1:9). He demonstrated this not in empty words, such as many in themselves unrighteous are ever ready to employ against other evil doers, but by absolute rightness in Himself, in His very thoughts. He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Hebrews 5:8 is in harmony with this, "*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him*". Also Philipians 2:5-11, he was "*obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, wherefore God also hath highly exalted him*". The whole passage, of which we quote only part, should be read to get its full strength. In His love for righteousness and hatred of iniquity our Lord suffered Himself to be crucified as a malefactor rather than compromise with the opponents of God's will.

Comparing different versions, we find the following best expresses the thought, "*therefore, O God, thy God hath anointed [or, did anoint] thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows*". Here is a very clear contradiction of the theory of the Trinity introduced into the Church from heathen mythology, which claims that God and Christ are equal in power and authority. Quite to the contrary, the Father is stated to be "*thy God*", the God of Christ, who is here prophetically addressed. Our Lord acknowledged this relationship after His resurrection, saying to Mary, "*I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God*" (John 20:17). In 1 Peter 1:3 God is called "*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*". Why anyone should think that Christ is dishonoured by this conception of His relationship to the Father is a mystery. No honour is done Him by denying His true relationship, or seeking to invent another for Him. Those who are so careful of the honour of



the Son seem to forget the honour due the Father as the great first cause, who alone is spoken of as being *"from everlasting to everlasting"* (Psalm 90:2); that is, without beginning or ending.

Ours is the duty to look upon and reverence both God and His blessed Son in the capacities and offices in which they are presented to us in the word of truth. Our Lord did not aspire to occupy His Father's position. He *"did not meditate a usurpation to be like God"* is the Diaglott rendering of Philippians 2:6, *"not a thing to be grasped"*, Revised Version margin. Surely then He is not pleased when some of His people try to usurp the place for Him, and insist that He is equal with God. The very fact that God raised the Son from death and gave Him the throne is proof that the Father is greater, since we are told in this very book (regarding the blessing of Abraham by Melchisedec) *"without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better"* (Hebrews 7:7).

Anointed *"with the oil of gladness"*. Two special anointings are mentioned under the Mosaic Law: of the priests and of the kings. A perfumed oil was prepared for use in the tabernacle which it was unlawful for anyone but the priests and Levites to make (Exodus 30:22-33). This oil was also used to anoint Aaron and his sons in connection with their consecration to the priesthood. The oil used in anointing the kings of Israel, who were counted as sitting *"on the throne of the LORD"*, was probably supplied for the purpose by the priests. At the same time the spirit of God was caused to rest on the anointed one (1 Samuel 9:16; 16:12,13; Psalm 89:20). The anointing which our Lord received was the antitype of this anointing of priests and kings, since He combined in Himself both offices, as shown in later chapters of the book of Hebrews.

Anointed *"above his fellows"* is understandable when compared with 1 Samuel 16:18, *"Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him [David] in the midst of his brethren"*. David's brethren were fellow members of his father's family. This is true in our Lord's case, that He was anointed by the Holy Spirit in the midst of His Jewish brethren, when He offered Himself to John for baptism. Taking His fellow Jews to be the *"fellows"* of Psalm 45 and Hebrews 1:8, the reference would be to His anointing as their King, for He was their King by divine appointment (Matthew 3:13-17; Acts 13:23-26).

We may, however, take a larger view of our Lord's *"fellows"*, and consider them to be other members of the heavenly Father's family on whatever plane of being they live, whether the Church, or angels, or men generally. In Hebrews 1 the apostle is comparing and contrasting the position of our Lord with that of the heavenly angels, hence the *"fellows"* mentioned in the decree may refer to them particularly. Another psalm which speaks of Christ in the midst, and yet as leader, is commented on by the apostle in chapter 2, and will be considered in due course (Psalm 95:7).

The anointing of the Holy Spirit received by Christ at His baptism was a demonstration of God's approval and acceptance, and the Holy Spirit given without measure continued with Him to the very last (John 3:33-36). Yet that was more especially a preparation for His earthly work. The apostle's application of the psalm in Hebrews 1:8 places the fulfilment after His resurrection, when He was inducted into the office of High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, that is, as combined King and Priest (Hebrews 5:5-10; Acts 2:33). This position is unique, nothing even remotely resembling it having been given to the angels.

**1:10-12** Another psalm (102:25-27) is now called in evidence to show the superiority of the Lord's position to that of the angels, and also to establish His identity with *"the angel of His [God's] presence"* who accompanied the Israelites in their journey out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into Canaan (Isaiah 63:9; Exodus 14:19; 32:34).

Symbolic language is employed in harmony with its use elsewhere, *"the earth"* signifying society as organised among men, and *"the heavens"* the ruling authorities. In the beginning, in Eden, the Lord established the social order by creating our first parents, from whom has been developed our entire race, and He arranged also, after the fall if not before, the heavenly supervision of angels. This order of things came to an end at the flood (2 Peter 3:5,6). After the flood a new *"heavens and earth"* was instituted which, in some of its arrangements, endures to this day (2 Peter 3:7).

According to Hebrews 1:2, our Lord Jesus was concerned in the arrangement of these 'ages'. But the heavens and earth particularly referred to in 1:10-12 are probably the Jewish arrangement under the Law Covenant. Our Lord Jesus was the instrument in its inauguration also, as He was the guide out of Egypt to the mount where the Law was given (Hebrews 3:3).

The foundation of this *"earth"*, or social order, was laid under the direction of Moses, who gathered the people to the foot of the mount and communicated to them the code received from God. The *"heavens"* of that arrangement were composed of Moses, the mediator of the Covenant, and Aaron the high priest, under the LORD God, who proclaimed Himself their ruler. In other words, there was founded at Sinai a theocracy.

Yet this arrangement was doomed to perish. It looked promising, and the people were eager for it, yet by reason of their inability to keep that Law what they thought would bring them life proved to be only a fresh instrument of death (Romans 7:10; Galatians 3:10-12; James 2:10).

That arrangement waxed old as a garment. Although God showed infinite patience in patching things up again and again, it could not endure for ever. It lasted nearly two thousand years, and then was 'scrapped'. It could not endure the wear and tear of an imperfect nation, a rebellious people, "*which my covenant they brake*" (Jeremiah 33:30,31; 31:32). Jesus said that to put a new patch on an old garment is useless. Nor do men put new wine into old, already stretched, wine skins. He came with an entirely new garment, and with a new wine of truth in new bottles (Matthew 9:16,17). Hence both the "*heavens*" and the "*earth*" constituting the old garment were folded up and laid to one side. And the greatness of the Lord Jesus is shown in that, while He laid the foundation of that covenant, He was also the one who, 2,000 years later, accomplished its destruction. This He did by nailing it to His cross (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:13; Galatians 3:13).

"*And they shall be changed, but thou art the same.*" God's purpose to have an Israel was not frustrated by the failure of the Jews to live up to their privileges. A "*people of God*" was to be chosen, and the Law was demonstrated as not the best method of choosing that people. Therefore that "*heavens and earth*" were "*changed*". A New Covenant, with the Lord Jesus Christ as Mediator, was inaugurated, ratified by the sacrifice on the cross, and by means of it the people desired are chosen. By it the "*remnant*" from the Jews and the added Gentiles receive the promised inheritance as "*the people of God*", "*the Israel of God*" (Hebrews 8:6; 9:11-15; Romans 2:28,29; 11:5-7,12-22; Galatians 6:16; 1 Peter 2 9,10).

Here is a "*change*" from the Law Covenant operation to the New Covenant operation, and Christ, by whom the change was accomplished, not only lived the entire period covered by the Law Covenant, but also lives to carry on all the operations of the New Covenant, with His own character and purpose unchanged by the long flight of time and the indifference and opposition of men, and even angels. "*And thy years shall not fail.*" The highly exalted Son, in the brightness of the Father's glory, and the exact impress of His substance, endowed with honour far above angels, and given by the Father "*life in himself*", a quality of life not given to the angels, His years shall not fail (John 5:26).

There is another folding up of heavens and earth over which the exalted Son has control, that 'heavens and earth' set up after the flood, described by Peter, and which continues down to our own day, being reserved for destruction at the second presence of our glorious Lord (2 Peter 3:7-13).

The thousands of years covered by the period from the flood to the end of the thousand years' reign are but as one day or a watch in the night to the highly exalted Son, as they are to the heavenly Father over all.

**1:13,14** Another prophecy showing the superior position of the Son is found in Psalm 110, for, says the apostle, though he puts it in question form, the angels were not addressed in this language. The psalms were the hymns of the Jewish people, and many of them simply recount their experiences and render praise to God for His many deliverances. They also record David's personal experiences.

But this first chapter of Hebrews, as well as other New Testament quotations of the psalms by our Lord and the apostles, clearly shows that many psalms and portions of psalms were Messianic prophecies. They foretold the high offices He would occupy and the work He would do. The LORD God said unto David's Lord, "*Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool*" (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:13). The Lord Jesus was David's son in the fleshly line of His descent, but He is David's Lord in the resurrection, for to Him it is given to call David and the other prophets from the dead and give them their reward (Revelation 11:18; Hebrews 11:38,39; John 5:28,29; 11:25).

The placing of the foes under Christ's feet began at His resurrection, when He was given the personal victory over death, the great enemy. Since then He has gained the victory over the hearts of those who love Him for what He is and what He has done for them. He assists them to gain the victory over sin, and will in due time deliver them from death.

He also gains the victory over the "*beast*" (Daniel 7). At the close of the Gospel Age He will receive His saints to Himself, and then will be inaugurated the great work of ruling over and blessing the nations (including the resurrected dead) for the thousand years.

During this Kingdom reign all remaining enemies will be put under His feet, including "*the last enemy death*" (1 Corinthians 15:24-27). Death and 'hades' shall be destroyed (Revelation 20:14). In all this great work He sits at the Father's right hand, sharing the divine throne, and carrying out the divine purpose, for God has committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22; Revelation 5:6,14).

All this about the inferiority of the angels to the Lord Jesus Christ is not said in disparagement of the angels. There is no desire on God's part to belittle them, nor is our Lord, in accepting and exercising Himself in the position over them, manifesting any feeling of pride or vainglory.

Nor should we, who gratefully accept the invitation to the over-comers to sit down with Him in His throne, be guilty of feelings of exultation or contempt, as though there were something in us which pleased God more than the loyal service of the holy angels. We have rather cause for gratitude that these holy and devoted messengers are set apart for the service mentioned in verse 14, "*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*". This ministry was engaged in when they sympathised with and encouraged our Lord on earth, the first and chief of the heirs of salvation, when they liberated Peter from prison, and stood by Paul when similarly placed (Luke 22:43; Acts 5:19,20; 12:7-11; 23:11).

As guardian angels over the Lord's "*little ones*", His faithful disciples, they have always access to the heavenly Father (Matthew 18:10), said our Lord when warning against causing one such to stumble. From then till now these good angels have served faithfully in the capacity to which God appointed them. Their reward, in part at least, will be the honour of accompanying the Lord Jesus at His second advent (Matthew 25:31; Jude 14).

On the ministry of angels, the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and other churches have built up a mass of fables, as though these angels were intercessors with the virgin, with a special commission to keep the individual they are attached to in subservience to the priest.

Others regard the angels as the spirits of their dead relatives and friends, here supposed to be represented as hovering over them and interested in all their affairs. Those who understand the scriptural teaching on the state of the dead\* will not be deceived by the latter error with its tendency toward spiritualism and the occult. Nor will they accept the former error, that the angels are intercessors, for the scripture sets forth but one intercessor with the Father, and that is our High Priest, the Lord Jesus.

Nor is there warrant in scripture for praying to angels, or seeking communication with them. They are the servants of Christ, to do His bidding, not ours. So while we may take every comfort from the knowledge of their guardianship and service we must yet do as we would with any servant of another master, deal with the master, ask His aid, and let Him appoint and direct His own messengers as He will for our care and protection or otherwise.

Were we to have the control of these angels for our own welfare we should be strongly tempted to use their powers to ward off all evils, trials and sufferings, all pain and loss, and thus lose much of that character development that comes from the illnesses and sufferings incidental to the present life and that discipline and chastening, not joyous, but grievous, which the Father sends as tokens of His love and our son-ship (Hebrews 12:6-13). But with the Lord Jesus set over the angels to direct them in their ministrations, we know that all will be well with us.

One word more about the contrast between the Son and the angels. We have said that it is not introduced for the purpose of disparagement. Its aim is to give to us, the heirs of salvation, a clear idea of the position now occupied by our Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

When we wish to describe to a friend the appearance of a thing, that he may approximate its value, we compare it with some object with which he is already familiar. We may say that a certain town hall our friend has not seen is built in the same general style as the Melbourne town hall, but is three times as large, with entrances from three streets lined with almost equally fine buildings, is set in large grounds, and so on. From this description our friend will draw a picture in his own mind of the probable appearance of this town hall and its surroundings, and will agree that undoubtedly it surpasses the Melbourne town hall in every respect. We make such a comparison, not because we wish to belittle the Melbourne town hall (for it is a fine building), but because we wish to give as concrete an idea as possible of one unseen in another city.

Now, the angels were the highest and finest beings known to the Hebrews. Their history records many miracles in which angels played a prominent part, and their ability to assume human form and vanish again was well known (Genesis 18;19; Hebrews 13:2; Judges 13:2-20; Luke 1:26). To have said that our Lord Jesus was exalted far above human beings, even the greatest, contrasting Him with Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander, Caesar, or with great inventors, musicians, and artists, would have conveyed to their (and our) minds an idea of greatness, but not nearly so impressive an idea as by comparing Him with angels, whom they already knew to be superior to men. If the angels have greater powers than men, and our Lord is "*far above*" angels, His height above men is seen to be very great indeed. And the importance of the offices He holds is emphasised to our minds by reason of the various aspects in which they are presented to us as superior to those held by the angels.

All the Lord's enemies are to be made His footstool, they are to be ashes under His feet, they are to be burned up root and branch (Malachi 4:1-3; Hebrews 10:12,13; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26). All these scriptural statements figuratively express the fact that the Lord's enemies, those that are knowingly and wilfully such, will be destroyed. Let us not be among those. Let us be found among those who gladly acknowledge His Sovereignty, and rejoice to engage in His service in whatsoever capacity He is willing to use us.

## Chapter 2

### THE CAPTAIN OF SALVATION

In considering chapter 2 of the book of Hebrews it is desirable to keep in mind the general principles already enunciated, and observe the contrasts as well as the similarities drawn to our attention by the inspired apostle.

**2:1** For this reason, *“therefore”*, because God now speaks to us through His Son, and because of the high offices occupied by Him, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip, or, margin, *“let them run out as leaking vessels”*. The importance of the messenger emphasises the importance of the message, and requires special attention on the part of its recipients, *“give the more earnest heed”*.

**2:2** The gospel message under the New Covenant is contrasted with the message under the Law Covenant. The *“angels”*, or messengers, here include both the human angels and the spirit angels. God spoke through Moses and the prophets. He also spoke at various times through heavenly angels, and, according to Deuteronomy 33:2, the heavenly angels accompanied God when He gave the Law at Sinai. Acts 7:53 also refers to these angels.

The word spoken by these messengers was steadfast, or binding, and those who transgressed the commandments received *“a just recompense of reward”*. See accounts of these various transgressions and their often swift punishment, beginning with those who ventured too near the smoking mount, and right down the Jewish Age to the day these words were written, and applying later still to the last punishment and dispersal of Israel by the Romans, AD 68-70.

**2:3** If transgression of commands under an inferior covenant and by less honoured mouthpieces was punished, how can we expect to escape punishment if we neglect the great salvation open to us?

The Jews were delivered from Egypt and the wilderness; we are delivered from sin and death, two greater enemies, as our deliverer is greater than theirs was. Many passages show our Lord's emphasis on the necessity of repentance as the first step in the deliverance from sin. Many denied His claim to forgive sin, but that is a point in His message we cannot afford to ignore or minimise.

It was a salvation from one thing to another, from sin to righteousness, from death to life, from the bondage of the Law to the liberty of the gospel (among many texts, note Acts 10:38-43; 13: 38,39), and the salvation includes also an offer of a reward correspondingly high to all who repent and believe during the age this special call is open (John 5:24; 7: 37-39; 14:2,3; 1 Peter 1:3-5). The last reference speaks of the salvation to be revealed at the last time, when the saints enter into their inheritance. All this salvation *“began to be spoken by our Lord”*. It was not spoken before. Those who did not heed the call were rejected as unworthy of the reward, because their attitude toward sin and their hardness of heart demonstrated their unfitness (Romans 11:7,20; Acts 13:44-46). If we in our day neglect so great salvation, we need expect no other consequence but a similar fate of rejection (Romans 11:20,21; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Hebrews 10:28,29,38,39; 2 Peter 2:10-22).

That this was our Lord's message was confirmed to the early Christians by those who heard Him.

#### God Bearing Witness

**2:4** But the human witnesses were not the only ones. The truth of their teaching and the validity of their apostleship was testified to in a miraculous manner by God Himself, so that there was no excuse for doubting their mission. The signs and wonders and miracles displayed, and the gifts the apostles were able to impart by the laying on of their hands, all constituted God's witness to the apostles' bona fides, yet all benefits were distributed according to the will of God and not the will of man.

Thus the power was shown to be of God, and as the Holy Spirit was sent through the Son, the miracles and miraculous gifts added further glory to the risen Lord as the direct giver of them (Acts 2:33; 8:14-17; Romans 1:11; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Acts 3:6; 4:10). The fact of these miracles and gifts makes rejection of Christ the more reprehensible, for we in our day have no reason to doubt their genuineness as manifested before those faithful eye-witnesses, the apostles and early disciples.

**2:5** God bore witness to Christ as the one to whom He had put in subjection *“the world to come, whereof we speak”*. Here *“world”* is neither ‘aion’ (age) nor ‘kosmos’ (order of things), but a word meaning the ‘habitable’, as in 1:6. *“The world to come”* is a reference to the future state of the earth and its inhabitants at that time (Daniel 2:44; 7:13,14; 2 Peter 3:13).

This will be quite a different order of things from that over which the angels (spirit beings) had a measure of control before the flood. It will also differ from the dominion exercised by Moses and the prophets during the Jewish Age. The new dominion, the Kingdom of God, is unique, and our Lord’s position in that Kingdom is also unique. Upon Him is placed all the authority and power. Then will be fulfilled the prayer He taught His disciples, *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10).

### **Adam and Christ Compared**

**2:6,7** Our Lord’s position in that Kingdom is also unique because of the manner in which He obtained it from God His Father. That Kingdom has to do with man. Verse 6 is a quotation from Psalm 8, all of which may be profitably read in this connection. The psalm declares the littleness of man as compared with the glories of the heavens. Why then should God notice him? Also man was created a *“little lower than”* the *“angels”*. Man’s sphere is more lowly, his abilities less, than are those of the angels. Yet, Psalm 8:6 says, God placed man over the works of His hands. (Compare with Genesis 1:26-28.) The *“glory and honour”* here referred to are the glory and honour with which the perfect man was crowned, namely, the dignity of his person and position, as exercising on earth a dominion similar to that which God exercises in the universe. Man was created to be the sovereign of the earth.

In this passage *“the son of man”* is not a reference to Christ, but is a form of Hebrew poetry by which the thought of the first clause of the sentence is repeated in slightly different terms in the second clause. In this case both *“man”* and *“son of man”* refer to the human race.

**2:8** The concluding clause of Psalm 8:6 is here quoted as showing that God had put all things on earth under man’s feet when He made him ruler over all. And now begins the apostle’s comment on this psalm. The apostle’s comment is that though God put all things under Adam’s feet, and left nothing not put under him, we (that is, the apostles, the church, and mankind generally) do not now see all things put under man’s feet. That is a self-evident truth. The curse pronounced in Eden because of his sin deprived man of his inheritance over the lower creation. Instead of them being subject to him, man is in many respects subject to them. Thorns and briars, wild beasts, destructive storms, in the midst of which man has been helpless, also that great enemy death, all testify that man has lost the original dominion (Romans 8:20).

**2:9** But there is something else that we do see. **We see Jesus.** Here is the word *“see”* used in both its senses, physical sight and mental comprehension. The apostles, who had been eye-witnesses of our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection, could speak of them as seen by their natural sight. The disciples from then to the present day who did not see Jesus as He hung on the cross, nor after His resurrection when He manifested Himself to the disciples, on one occasion to over five hundred brethren at once (1 Corinthians 15:4-8), can still say that we ‘see Jesus’ when we comprehend the things said about Him by these eye-witnesses.

We do not see all things put under man, but we do see that Jesus has taken certain steps in the matter of the dominion. We see very clearly the three things mentioned by the apostle concerning Jesus: (1) *“made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death”*; (2) *“crowned with glory and honour”*; (3) *“taste death for every man”*.

Very evidently a comparison is being made between Jesus and Adam. And the fact that the Lord is described in the exact terms applied in the psalm to Adam assures us that when our Lord left heaven to become a man, He became a perfect man such as Adam was before he sinned. Jesus took this position as a man, lower than the angels, for a specific purpose, namely, *“for the suffering of death”*, *“that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”* (2:9; Philippians 2:5-8).

Hence all the theories which speak of Christ as now having a human or fleshly body in heaven are incorrect. With this perfect body He could, and did, become the ransom, the exact corresponding price for Adam. And since He was a man like Adam before Eve was created or the race generated, Jesus was also able, when paying the ransom price for Adam, to pay the ransom price for Eve, and for all the race which has proceeded from Adam and Eve.

The glory and honour with which Jesus was crowned refer to the same kind of glory and honour that Adam possessed when created and set over the lower creation, namely, the dignity and honour of person and position. As a perfect man Jesus was not under condemnation to death, as was humanity in general. As a perfect man He had a right to life and earthly dominion. But all this physical perfection and earthly honour He gave up, in order that He, by the grace of God, should *"taste death for every man"*.

Note the expression, *"for every man"*. Jesus died for all. He gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:4-6; Matthew 20:28; Hosea 13:14). This passage in Hebrews is a very clear statement of the doctrine of the ransom.

### **Perfect through Sufferings**

**2:10** The first words of verse 10 are similar to Romans 11:36, where the reference undoubtedly is to God as the great first cause, therefore the one to plan the bringing of many sons to glory, and to arrange the prior preparation of their 'captain', or rather, their Prince, leader, or forerunner, the figure here used not being a military one. Compare with Acts 3:15, where the same Greek word is rendered *"Prince"*, and Hebrews 6:20, where He is called our forerunner. He leads, and we follow. If Christ is leader of these *"sons"*, Moses is no longer leader (John 3:14,15; 12:32).

As Jesus was constitutionally perfect, without sin of any description, even in thought, in what respect was He made perfect? The answer is found in Hebrews 5:8, *"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered"*.

Our Lord did not need to unlearn disobedience, for He was never disobedient. But in His pre-human existence His obedience to the Father had been exercised in a congenial environment, with the sympathy and co-operation of God and of the holy angels, besides which He was then in a position of power and authority. When He came to earth He was *"a little lower than the angels,"* and the environment was contrary. He suffered much *"contradiction of sinners against himself"*, and Satan made a special effort to mislead Him, and to turn others against Him, while Jews and Gentiles joined in crucifying Him (Hebrews 12:3; 2 Corinthians 13:4; Acts 4:27,28). Obedience in this evil environment was made a test of His faith and loyalty, and He learned obedience in a new setting, as it were. For this reason He is able to sympathise with His people who are also surrounded by tempters, though without His perfect ability to resist the temptations.

**2:11** God, who is Himself holy, is here spoken of as *"he that sanctifieth"*. Sanctify means to set apart to a holy purpose. Christ Jesus, the Prince of their salvation, was so set apart. And it is God's purpose that all the other sons shall also be set apart. But our setting apart is done by the Son, for He is our leader. He is empowered to give *"eternal salvation to all them that obey Him"* (Hebrews 5:9). Hence a one-ness exists between God and the sanctified, the truth being the sanctifying power, the Holy Spirit co-operating (John 17:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). All being of one God, and united in one sanctification, Jesus Christ is not ashamed to call them *"brethren"*.

**2:12** This gives the inspired application of Psalm 22:22, indicating that prophecy had already foretold this kinship of the sanctified.

**2:13** Psalm 18:2 and Isaiah 8:18 are here shown to have been prophecies of Christ. The *"children"* God gave to His only-begotten Son are these *"brethren"* by adoption.

### **Victory Through Death**

**2:14** These *"children"* are taken from among men, not from among the angels. It was human life that had been forfeited in Eden, and it was human life that Christ came to save. Here is again stated the truth that He became a *"partaker of flesh and blood"*, a veritable human being (though perfect), in order that He might redeem human beings. And as death was the punishment inflicted upon the race for sin, so Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3).

He did not die for any sin of His own, but for the purpose of ransoming the dead, and thus destroying the power of the devil, Satan, who at the beginning had led Eve astray and has been continually active in decoying her descendants (Genesis 3:1-6; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 John 3:8).

Satan has the power of death in that all his influence is used to lead men into sin, and thus he brings them the more quickly into the grave, for sin is conducive to both moral and physical shipwreck.

Do we believe in a personal devil? Most decidedly. There is no other way of rightly understanding our Lord's words in John 8:44. This is not to say that we believe in the popular caricature with hoofs and horns consigning the hopeless masses of humanity to endless flames. The scriptures portray no such individual. But Satan, as a fallen angel, is referred to in scripture, and we are "*not ignorant of his devices*" (2 Corinthians 2:11; 4:4; 11:14; Ephesians 2:2; Romans 16:20).

Because the Revised Version and other modern translations read "*bring to nought*" instead of "*destroy*" in 2:14, some have assumed that the devil will not be destroyed, but only restrained. But such a reasoning is too much; for in 1 Corinthians 15:26 the same Greek word is used, "*The last enemy that shall be destroyed [RV 'abolished'] is death*".

Does that mean that death is only to be restrained? No, of course not. It is impossible to conceive of death as continuing, because other scriptures show that death is to be "*swallowed up in victory*", or victoriously (1 Corinthians 15:54). Christ has the keys of hell and of death, and will call forth the dead (Revelation 1:18; 20:13), and death and hell are then said to be cast into the lake of fire, symbol of absolute destruction (Revelation 20:14).

Similarly, the abolishing or bringing to nought of the devil means that he will be "*swallowed up victoriously*" by the Lord Jesus, in other words, destroyed, as a human being is when engulfed in the sea, and as were the rebellious Korah and his followers destroyed when swallowed up by the earth, with this difference, that the destruction that overtook Korah and that occurs when someone is drowned is the Adamic death, whereas the destruction which is to overtake the devil will be the second death, symbolised by the "*fire*" which our Lord said was "*reserved for the devil and his angels*". To bring Satan "*to nought*" is, therefore, only another way of saying 'destroy' him' (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:14,15).

**2:15** The bondage of death was over all the race. Verse 15 speaks of those who "*through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*". This can apply only to the Jews, for the Gentile nations with their idolatries and their belief that the spirit never dies did not fear death but often welcomed it as a happy release.

The Jews were in a state of bondage through fear of death by reason of their Law, which condemned every one of them. Cursed was every Jew who broke the Law, and that curse meant death (Romans 7:8-11,24; Galatians 3:10). So it was stated in the Law, obedience would bring life, and disobedience death (Deuteronomy 30:18-20).

Christ came to deliver the Jews from this bondage and curse, being made a curse for them, by being crucified on the tree (Galatians 3:13).

**2:16** Whether this be read as in the text or in the margin, both are true. (1) Christ took not the nature of angels in order to give the ransom. That would have been a nature too high, as that of one of the brute creation would have been too low. As it was man that was to be redeemed, He became a man (1 Corinthians 15:21). Moreover, in order to deliver the Jews it was necessary for Him to be of the seed of Abraham, and of those who on coming out of Egypt were put under the Law. (2) It is also true that Jesus did not lay hold of angels in choosing his brethren, but of the seed of Abraham, as in the margin. But we believe the first interpretation to be the intended one.

#### **Merciful and Faithful**

**2:17** In these respects, being made a partaker of flesh and blood, of the seed of Abraham, he was in all things "*made like unto his brethren*". He was born under the Law, as they were, and it was incumbent upon Him to keep it. He lived in Palestine under the same conditions as they did. He saw their daily struggles with sin and death. Hence in the High Priestly office which He now holds He is able to be "*merciful and faithful*" toward all, His priestly office having been given Him that He might "*make reconciliation for the sins of the people*", another reference to the need of purification from sin, which in succeeding chapters it is shown could not be accomplished effectively under the Law Covenant. Here our Lord's preparation for the leadership and priesthood is shown, by which He can "*succour*" sinners bent under their burden and hastening down to death.

**2:18** Our Lord suffered, "*being tempted*". Not that He ever yielded to temptation. But being tried and disciplined under the same adverse circumstances as His brethren, He is able to feel for them, and to succour or deliver them from their temptations, not only their temptations to sin, but also their trials and tests of faith and endurance. He has 'feeling' for us. Let us abide in Him as our refuge, our deliverer, and our hope (4:15,16).



## Chapter 3

### MOSES AND CHRIST

Still keeping in mind the principles set out in chapter 1 for the study of the book of Hebrews, noting the contrasts as well as the similarities between the Old or Law Covenant, under which the Jews laboured, and the New Covenant, under which Christians receive their blessings, let us proceed with the study of chapter 3.

**3:1** *“Wherefore”* connects this with the previous chapter. For the reasons just mentioned, the brethren are exhorted to consider certain other important things. But let us note first that, in view of what is said in chapter 2 concerning the sanctified believers, whom Christ Jesus, the chief or leader, is not ashamed to call *“brethren”*, the apostle now addresses these as *“holy”* brethren. They are not ‘holy’ in the sense of being absolutely pure and sinless, but in that they are undergoing the process of being set apart from the world and self and Satan, to God (Acts 26:18; 1 John 2:15,16; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). *“Them that are being sanctified”* is the literal rendering of the last clause of Hebrews 10:14.

*“Partakers of the heavenly calling”* is another privilege of these holy or sanctified brethren. It is heavenly both by origin, since the call comes from God, and by prospect, since these brethren are invited to become joint heirs with Christ, to be with and like Him, and see Him as He is (John 14:3; Philippians 3:14; 2 Timothy 2:11,12; Romans 8:16,17; 1 John 3:2). Let us, as brethren, strive to realise, among ourselves, the ideal of oneness and fellowship and co-operation set before us in this high calling. But, above all, let us *“consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus”*.

The apostle Paul has important truths to tell about Him, which are of great concern to us. The word ‘apostle’ means one that is sent, particularly one sent on a special mission, as a delegate, or an ambassador. All the brethren are in a sense ‘sent’ by the Lord, commissioned as messengers and ambassadors to carry the glad tidings (2 Corinthians 5:20), but ‘the twelve’ chosen by our Lord during His earthly ministry (barring Judas who betrayed Him) were given special authority, Paul being substituted for the betrayer by a special call when on his way to Damascus (John 15:16; Matthew 19:28; Acts 9). These twelve apostles are distinguished from other ‘sent’ ones, by the title, *“the twelve apostles of the Lamb”* (Revelation 21:14). These twelve were given special authority in and over the Church, and that authority has been recognised throughout the age by the true believers (Matthew 19:28; Galatians 1:1; 2:7,8; Titus 1:1-3). But our Lord Jesus is pre-eminently the apostle, or sent one, sent by the Father on a special mission to earth, and now resurrected to continue His apostle-ship (John 8:42; 11:36; 1 John 4:9).

Christ Jesus is also High Priest, not high priest of the order of Aaron, for He was not born of the tribe of Levi (Hebrews 7:14). He is High Priest of *“our profession”*, or, more literally, our ‘confession’, not looking on the priesthood as a superior sort of business profession, as medicine or the law, nor yet in the way Roman Catholics use the word ‘professed’ in connection with their monastic orders. The Greek word is defined by Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance as meaning ‘acknowledgment’, and is derived from a verb meaning ‘to assent, that is, to covenant, or acknowledge’. Our confession is an acknowledgment of certain scriptural facts concerning the sacrifice of Christ Jesus, and we are acknowledged by Him, as stated in 2:11-13. Those whom He acknowledges and who acknowledge Him have Him not only for leader, but also for High Priest. They are united in one confession, understanding, or covenant, the New Covenant. The meanings of the names, Christ and Jesus, are significant. Christ means Anointed, and Jesus means Saviour. In all these offices His ‘brethren’ must acknowledge and honour Him.

#### God’s House

**3:2** As apostle and High Priest, Christ Jesus was faithful to Him that appointed Him, or *“made Him”* High Priest (margin). Here the scriptures go back before the period when Moses was leader and Aaron high priest, to the time when Moses alone was called and appointed, both offices being united in him. It was only afterward that Moses’ duties were divided, he retaining the leadership, and the priestly office being given to Aaron (Exodus 3:2-18; 4:1,10,13-17,27,28,31; 28:1).

The tabernacle, when finished, was dedicated by Moses (Exodus 40; Hebrews 9:21). The installation into office of Aaron and his sons was performed by him, thus continuing Moses in pre-eminence (Exodus 29; Leviticus chapters 8 and 9). Our Lord was the antitype of both Moses and Aaron (Acts 3:22,23; Hebrews 9:7,11). Moses was a “*captain of salvation*” to Israel. Christ is “*captain of salvation*” to “*many sons*” (2:10). In Hebrews 9 He is compared and contrasted with Aaron as well as Moses, while in our present chapter similarities and dissimilarities with Moses are dealt with in his dual capacity of leader and original high priest of the children of Israel.

God, who originally designated Moses as both leader and high priest, has now appointed His Son both leader and High Priest, and the Son is faithful in all things where-unto He has been appointed. In this respect He is like Moses, or, rather, Moses was a true type of Him, for Moses also was faithful.

### **The Meaning of “House”**

The word “*house*” is used in scripture with four significances: (1) a building of wood, stone, brick, or other such material, a place to live in, literal or figurative; (2) a family or tribe; (3) an institution or organisation; (4) a state or condition.

The first meaning taken literally is self-evident throughout scripture as well as in everyday speech. Taken figuratively, house or building as ‘a place to live in’, is used of the Church as a whole in Ephesians 2:20-22, the Church being described as the dwelling-place of God through the Holy Spirit. In the same sense it is used of the individuals composing the Church, the body of each member being regarded as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:13,18,19). The apostle admonishes, “*Be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5:18).

The second meaning, a family or tribe, occurs in such terms as “*house of Jacob*”, “*house of Israel*” and “*house of David*”, the ‘house’ taking its name from one or another progenitor of the family or tribe (Genesis 46:27; 49:22; Numbers 20:29; 1 Samuel 20:16; Luke 2:4). Gospel Age believers are called the “*house*” or “*household*” or “*family*” of God (1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 2:19; Galatians 6:10,16). Sons by adoption are received into God’s family (Galatians 4:5,6; 2 Corinthians 6:18).

This is also the meaning in 1 Peter 2:5,9, where the Church is spoken of as “*a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices*”, clearly a reference to the church as antitype of the priestly tribe or “*house of Aaron*”, the church at the same time (verses 4,7) being spoken of as the building or edifice in which these spiritual sacrifices are offered, each member being also figuratively represented as one of the “*living stones*” in the building of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the chief corner-stone.

The third meaning of “*house*”, an institution or organisation, is in common use to-day, as ‘House of Correction’, ‘House of Representatives’ and ‘Business House’. These modern usages are but adaptations of ancient and Biblical forms of speech. Our Lord spoke of the Church as such an institution or organisation, using the figure of a building or house, when He said, “*Upon this rock I will build my Church* [His by purchase, Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Revelation 5:9,10]; *and the gates of hell [‘hades’] shall not prevail against it*” (Matthew 16:18). The “*rock*” upon which He would build the Church was Peter’s confession, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*”.

A literal building could not be built on such a rock, but an organisation could, that confession being the basis upon which the organisation would grow, or, as our Lord said, be built. This confession is required from everyone who believes and is called to become a member in that Church organisation. Men have built great religious institutions on that confession or in imitation of it, or with some other substituted which they claim to be as good or better, but the only true Church organisation is that which our Lord founded on the confession of His being the anointed Son of God. For He immediately proceeded to appoint Peter as the one who should open the Kingdom of heaven.

Later on He set the eleven and the apostle Paul as foundation members and teachers in this Church (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 9:15; Galatians 1:1; Revelation 21:14). Peter used the ‘keys’ on the Day of Pentecost when he preached repentance to Israel, and subsequently when he spoke words to the Gentile Cornelius and his household, admitting them to the fellowship of the gospel (Acts 2:38-41; Acts 10:34-48).

When the apostle wrote to Timothy, *“that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God”*, he used *“house”* in this figurative sense of an institution or organisation, for he had just concluded instructions on the qualifications of bishops and deacons, whom it was one of Timothy’s duties to appoint in the several churches visited by him as Paul’s representative (1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Corinthians 4:17).

The fourth meaning of *“house”* occurs in 2 Corinthians 5:1-6, the fleshly body being called the earthly ‘tent’, or ‘tabernacle’, while the spiritual body to be given the saints in the resurrection is the heavenly ‘house’.

In view of these definitions, in what sense is the word *“house”* used in Hebrews 3:2-6? We should say in the sense of (2) and (3).

### **One House, Many Mansions**

God as the ruler of the universe inhabits eternity; heaven is His throne, and earth is His footstool. He is the high and lofty one who holds all things in the hollow of His hand, that is, He controls all things (Isaiah 57:15; 40:12-18,22-26). When we read that *“Moses was faithful in all his house”* (3:2), it is manifest this great house was not meant, but some lesser house, some family or some institution on earth which He called His house, and over which He placed Moses. This *“house”* was, of course, the house of Israel, for it was they whom Moses led out of Egypt and for forty years served as their Law-giver, leader, and judge.

God took the house of Israel to be His house, acknowledging them as His people, *“You only have I known of all the families of the earth”* (Amos 3:2). *“Let my people go”*, He said to Pharaoh (Exodus 9:1). *“My servant Moses, ... who is faithful in all mine house”* (Numbers 12:7). He also called himself their Father (Jeremiah 31:9). Now, Moses did not set himself over this *“house”*. God appointed him, gave him miracle-working powers, besides wisdom and strength to bear the burden of the great *“household”* over which he was placed. Notwithstanding one or two mistakes, *“Moses was faithful in all his house”*, as here quoted by the apostle from the Old Testament, his mistakes only showing that, great man though he was, and the meekest of men, he was human, and hence liable to err.

But so far as his leadership and service of the people of the house of Israel were concerned, he was not like the false prophets and dreamers of dreams. So God made of Moses, the loyal and faithful servant, whose patience and long-suffering and gentleness are still the admiration of all who know his history, a type of His Son, who at a later time would also be long-suffering, patient, and *“faithful”*, (Exodus 11:3; Numbers 12:3; Deuteronomy 34:10).

The mistake of the Hebrews was in thinking that God could not have another and different *“house”*. They were ignorant of the fact, later on enunciated by our Lord, that *“In my Father’s house are many mansions: ... I go to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2). The apostle Paul speaks of *“the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named”* (Ephesians 3:14,15). The ‘mansion’ or ‘place’, or dwelling the Lord went to prepare for His disciples was in heaven, while the ‘mansion’ or ‘house’ which Moses ruled over was on earth.

God has intelligent creatures on different planes of being, some angelic, some human, some called to be divine, besides the animal creation, and possibly others we know not of. All these are in God’s ‘house’, but in different ‘mansions’, lesser houses, or apartments. Whether in heaven or on earth, the whole family is God’s, though different leaders have been appointed by Him to serve at different times, Moses having been placed over that portion of His great ‘house’ called the *“house of Israel”*.

For sixteen centuries the name of Moses was revered as God’s great Law-giver, the Law given at Sinai being called by his name (Luke 24:44; Luke 16:31). When God wished to show the Israelites how hopeless was their condition after repeated rebellions against Him, He referred to Moses as one who pleaded successfully for them (Exodus 32:10,31,32; Psalm 106:32). Yet all this greatness of Moses shows how much greater is the apostle and High Priest and captain of our confession, who is now set forth as the leader and High Priest of God’s *“house”*.

**3:3** And now a contrast. Moses was faithful; Christ is faithful. But Christ’s faithfulness was in connection with a higher position than that occupied by Moses, since He was the one who *“builded the house”* over which Moses was set. This is an unmistakable reference to our Lord Jesus Christ as a living being in the time of Moses, for only a sentient being can be said to perform a work requiring intelligence. (See also John 8:58; Philippians 2:6; John 17:5). Two

things are set forth in the scriptures as having been done by Moses, namely, giving Israel a Law, and leading them as a covenant people. But, honourable as was his office, Moses was only the human instrument. The scriptural claim that the Law was given from heaven is not fiction, as infidels and higher critics assert (Hebrew 12:18-21).

As already shown in 1:10-12 (see comment, page 26), Jesus in His pre-human existence was God's agent in founding the Hebrew establishment over which Moses was placed, and, as *"the angel of his [God's] presence"*, He guided Moses, and through Moses the people, through the wilderness (Exodus 24:20-23; Isaiah 63:9). Consequently Christ had more honour than Moses. When selecting a leader and High Priest for the New Covenant people, God took not Moses or any other of the earthly house, but one already higher than Moses.

So, as in chapter 1, the epistle shows that Christ was made higher than angels, here it declares that from the beginning He had been higher than the highest human being known to the Jews, namely, Moses whom they venerated, and from whose Law they were loath to be freed.

This argument should have been effective with sincere Jews. The cry of the persecutors, *"that Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us"* (Acts 6:14), should have carried no weight, for in giving a New Covenant our Lord just fulfilled what had already been prophesied of in the Law, namely, that another than Moses should arise, whom the people should hear, the New Covenant being specifically mentioned as a better arrangement than the Law (Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:5-9; 9:1-7; Jeremiah 31:29-34; and many more). With the new leader and High Priest came the New Covenant and the new law to be written on mind and heart.

**3:4** In verses 2 and 3 *"house"* obviously refers to an institution, and not to a structure of literal stone or wood. Whether a house be of one sort or another, someone is responsible for it. Neither institutions nor material houses are founded or grow of themselves. And often behind the building contractor stands the owner. So God was behind both Moses and Christ, *"He that built all things is God"*.

#### **Moses a Servant**

**3:5** Here is declared the real objective served by Moses when he gave and administered the Law he received at Sinai, *"for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after"*. In this service Moses performed the part of a servant, doing the work, but not understanding its full import. His 'testimony' was in the 'types and shadows' as well as in prophetic utterances. His was neither the most important nor the final effort on behalf of God toward all mankind (Hebrews 10:1-9; Luke 24:44; Acts 3:22,23; 7:37; Romans 8:3; Ephesians 2:13-18; Colossians 2:14,15).

Commentators are divided as to whether *"his"* (verses 2 and 5) refers to Moses or to God. Was it Moses' 'house', or God's 'house'? We believe the Israelitish 'house' is appropriately referred to by both names. We have seen that God recognised Israel as His 'house', and also that Moses was set over that 'house'. The house, therefore, would as properly be called Moses' house as the Law was called Moses' Law. As a servant Moses did not own the 'house', yet it was his to preside over and to direct as mediator and judge under God, for they had been baptised into him in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:1,2). Language is used in the same way to-day. A presiding magistrate does not own the court over which he presides; he is there by appointment; nevertheless, cases are said to be tried in 'his' court. At the same time the court is recognised as belonging to the state or municipality which created it (Luke 2:22).

#### **Christ as a Son**

**3:6** It should be noted that the word 'own' is not found in the original. The Revised Version and other versions read, *"Christ as a Son over his house"*.

In a household a Son occupies a very different position from that of a servant. During his minority he is under authority, and differs little so far as the requirement of respect and obedience is concerned. But when he becomes a man, he is recognised as the heir, is taken into his father's confidence, and is given a place of authority over the servants (Galatians 4:1-7).

Christ, as God's Son, came in the fullness of the time to do a work in God's house, the Jewish people, and to establish a new 'house', of which He himself should be the head. As a Son, Christ Jesus is placed over a house of sons, as already mentioned in 2:10. Though the word 'house' is not used in chapter 2, the thought is there, God's Son set over these other sons, and *"not ashamed to call them brethren"*.

Christ is referred to in the parable in Matthew 21:33-44 as a son sent to receive the account of the stewards of the Jewish 'house'. They would not have him to reign over them. Hence they were rejected from their stewardship, and our Lord formed a new 'house' composed of a 'remnant' of faithful Jews, to whom were afterward gathered believing Gentiles (Romans 11:5-7, 21-24; Acts 13:26,38,46-48).

#### **"Whose House are We"**

The Church as God's house, institution, or organisation is called, in 1 Timothy 3:15, *"the pillar and ground of the truth"*. *"God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth"* (2 Thessalonians 2:13). If they suffer with Christ, they are accepted as heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:14-17; 2 Timothy 2:11,12).

We are also Christ's 'house'. Just as Moses was the head of the Jewish house, and therefore that organisation could be appropriately called his 'house', so Christ is the head of the 'house' which is the Church, the members of which are individually baptised into Him on confession of faith, and own Him as Lord and master (Romans 6:3-5; 14:9). *"Upon this rock,"* He said, *"I will build my church"* (Matthew 16:18). *"Christ is the head of the church ... that he might sanctify and cleanse it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church"* (Ephesians 5:23,26,27).

And now a contrast. The members of Moses' house were such by natural birth. They were born Hebrews, and continued to be Hebrews till the day of their death. Not so the 'house' of the Son, *"whose house are we"*. With us there is a birth, a 'new birth', which admits us to the house. But making a beginning as a member is no guarantee of continuance in the 'house'. An important condition is attached, *"If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end"*.

Verse 14 reverts to the same thought. Our confidence and rejoicing are in Christ Himself, the head of our 'house'. To lose confidence or assurance in Him would mean to drift away, to lose our place in his house, as we are told in Hebrews 10:38, *"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him"* (Hebrews 10:26-31,38,39; 6:4-8). The seed that falls on stony ground, by the wayside, or among thorns ultimately amounts to nothing (Matthew 13:1-8,18-23). We must not only hold fast the hope of eternal life in Him but also the rejoicing of the hope. Friends and brethren, let us take this to heart, and hold fast firmly unto the end, the end of our lives, until our race is finished (Hebrews 12:1).

In this third chapter the great apostle is instituting a comparison between Christ and Moses as heads of separate institutions, with the objective of showing that Christ is superior to Moses and Christ's house superior to Moses' house. These arguments are adduced, and these comparisons and contrasts made, to convince the Hebrews that they should now be joined to Christ. *"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead"* (Romans 7:4). In 2 Corinthians 3:6-18 Christ and Moses are shown as representative of two distinct covenants.

#### **To-day if Ye will Hear**

**3:7-11** *"Wherefore"*. Another argument is now to be entered upon, enlarging upon the necessity of holding fast to the end, illustrated by an experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness.

A quotation is made from Psalm 95:7-11, and if anyone doubts that the psalms were inspired, the apostle's assertion, *"as the Holy Spirit saith"*, though David was the penman, should suffice to convince that the psalms were more than beautiful poems and songs. In this psalm the Holy Spirit indicated a very definite promise.

When is the *"To-day"* spoken of? The Israelites when they left Egypt had a promise of rest in Canaan, but in the wilderness they hardened their hearts and provoked God by their unbelief and disobedience. So the older generation were not allowed to enter in, except for Caleb and Joshua.

But hundreds of years later the Holy Spirit spoke through David of another day, saying, *"To-day if ye will hear his voice"*. The 'to-day' of David was the Jewish Age, but the Jews as a whole did not heed the exhortation. They became so perverse and idolatrous that God sent them away to Babylon, till they should reform, and brought a new generation back after 70 years' captivity. They had no rest in Babylon, and when they returned to their own land it was as a subject people (Psalm 137:1-4; Ezra; Nehemiah).

**3:12** And now the apostle applies the psalm to the Christians, showing that the rest spoken of had not, up to that time, had its fulfilment. *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”* Unbelief is at the bottom when a brother departs from the living God, in other words, does not hold fast the confidence, and this unbelief is due to an *“evil heart”*.

As such are addressed as *“brethren”*, the implication is that forgiven and accepted members of Christ’s ‘house’ can allow evil to spring up again in their hearts. This would occur through not living near to God, and through permitting their consciences to become defiled, not seeking the forgiveness That God is always willing to grant to the true penitent. The natural consequence is departure from the living God into a state of hardness and unbelief. Such, like the Israelites in the wilderness, often blame God for all their troubles in life, whereas the trouble is in themselves. If they will return unto God, even now He will forgive and heal them.

**3:13** One way to avoid this back-sliding, hardness, and unbelief is here set forth, *“But exhort one another daily”*. It is not always wise to be personal in these exhortations, nor to mix in the private affairs of other brethren. There are no doubt times when an erring brother needs very plain speech, and special steps must be taken to restore such an one (Galatians 6:1,2). As a rule, however, exhortation by quotation of scripture, talking over hopes and prospects and experiences of the Christian life, and the setting of a good example of spirituality and consistency are the best means of helping one another.

#### **The Deceitfulness of Sin**

*“While it is called To-day.”* Here the *“To-day”* is shown to be the present age, during which the *“brethren”* are being sanctified. It is a long *“To-day”*, but each hour of the lengthy period must be lived with the determination to *“hold fast the confidence”*. The reason, *“lest any of you be hardened”*. Prevention is better than cure. As the heart and conscience are cleansed and softened when Christ is first accepted, beware lest they be again hardened. And what does he suggest will harden the heart of even a truly consecrated believer? He says, *“through the deceitfulness of sin”*.

Sin is deceitful. The children of Israel always thought their grievances sufficient excuse for their provoking conduct. Sin endeavours to make the wrong word or action appear right, and if the *“brethren”* allow themselves to be drawn away into sin, particularly if they stubbornly persist in the wrong way, the only result to be expected is a hardening and deadening of the conscience. May we all who read these inspired words of scripture resolve to exhort one another more patiently and lovingly than ever before. We do not want it said of us, as of the Galatians, *“Who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?”* (Galatians 3:1; 1:6).

**3:14** The apostle returns again to the very big *“if.”* To become *“hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”* (verse 13) is not the way to be made *“partakers of Christ”*. This most desirable objective can be attained only IF the beginning of our confidence be held steadfast unto the end. To make sure the confidence, or assurance, is of the right sort, an assurance of faith, it must continue through life of the same kind as was that experienced in the first hours or days of conversion, when Christ was accepted with all the heart, mind, and strength, and it was resolved to serve Him only. True, all make slips, every one of the brethren is imperfect and liable to err, but where the heart retains its loyalty to and affection for the Saviour who did so much for us, we shall not be slow to seek forgiveness for every lapse, and strive anew to love and serve him better.

*“Partakers of Christ.”* To partake means ‘to have a part in, or share’, or ‘to take a part in, participate’. As the subject is Christ’s house, and how we may retain our position in that ‘house’ (verse 6), the same thought is evidently intended here. Christ, as the head of His own house, has blessings, favours and rewards to extend, and these are granted on condition that we retain our membership therein.

Verse 1 mentions one of these favours, *“partakers of the heavenly calling”*. Other scriptures mention other blessings of which those are partakers who hold fast their confidence and hope: *“partakers of the divine nature”* (or disposition) (2 Peter 1:4); *“partakers of his holiness”* (Hebrews 12:10); *“partakers of the Holy Spirit”* (Hebrews 6:4); *“partakers of the benefit”* (1 Timothy 6:2); *“partakers of his promise in Christ”* (Ephesians 3:6); *“a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed”* (1 Peter 5:1). A portion of all these things comes to each one of the ‘brethren’. And the longer we *“hold fast”* the greater becomes our enjoyment of these blessings.

Note verse 6, *“Hold fast ... the rejoicing of the hope”*. The same joy which came to us when first we realised our sins forgiven and our acceptance as children of God should continue with us throughout life, and will do so **if** we do not permit the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and other ‘thorns’ to choke it. Whatever the trials and disappointments, let us strive to keep this joy in our hearts (Colossians 1:11; Romans 5:11).

### As in the Provocation

**3:15** Not holding fast, not retaining joy and faith, means falling into unbelief and sin. And, if we look back at the Israelites in the wilderness, we see that such conduct provokes God. He is loving, kind, and forbearing, but He can be provoked by such conduct as the murmuring, complaining and backsliding which characterised the mass of Israel.

**3:16** *“For some, when they had heard, did provoke.”* Moses gave many warnings, and God showed many miracles, with a view to developing in the people a god-fearing and consistent character, to produce a people different from the nations round about, whom God could take as His peculiar people, a people for a purpose. With much of their weakness and back-sliding God was very patient.

What is emphasised in this verse is that after the people had *“heard”*, been instructed, they nevertheless hardened their hearts, and were rebellious, not only against Moses and Aaron, but also against God (Numbers 14:1-3). Ten times within eighteen months of leaving Egypt they tempted, or tried God by acts of special rebellion.

### The Ten Murmurings

- 1. Place:** On the borders of the Red Sea (Ex 14:10-31)
  - (a) Cause: Pursuit by Pharaoh; the Red Sea an impassable barrier (Ex 14:10)
  - (b) Complaint: Taken from Egypt to die in the wilderness (Ex 14:11,12)
  - (c) God's answer: Stand still, and see the salvation of God (Ex 14:13-18)
  - (d) God's action: The people delivered through the Red Sea (Ex 14:19-30)
  - (e) Result: The people fear God; they believe God, and His servant Moses (Ex 14:31)
- 2 Place:** At Marah (Ex 15:23-27)
  - (a) Cause: The waters were bitter (Ex 15:23)
  - (b) Complaint: *“What shall we drink?”* (Ex 15:24)
  - (c) God's answer: He showed Moses a tree with which to make the waters sweet (Ex 15:25)
  - (d) God's action: Took advantage of occasion to promise them freedom from the diseases of Egypt if they would diligently hearken to God (Ex 15:26)
  - (e) Result: The people satisfied for the time being, and presently came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees (Ex 15:27)
- 3. Place:** The wilderness of Sin (Ex 16:1-35)
  - (a) Cause: Rationing of food (Ex 16:2,3)
  - (b) Complaint: Taken from the fleshpots and abundant bread of Egypt to die of hunger (Ex 16:3)
  - (c) God's answer: Promise of flesh and bread to the full (Ex 16:4-12)
  - (d) God's action: Provides quails in evening and manna in morning (Ex 16:13-21)  
Institutes the Sabbath by regulating supply of manna (Ex 16:22-31)
  - (e) Results: Fed on manna for forty years.  
Drilled in keeping of Sabbath.  
A pot of manna preserved in the ark (Ex 16:32-35; Heb 9:4)
- 4. Place:** In Rephidim; called Massah, and Meribah (Ex 17:1-16)
  - a) Cause: No water to drink (Ex 17:1)
  - (b) Complaint: Taken from Egypt to be killed with thirst;  
*“Is the LORD among us, or not?”* (Ex 17:3,7)  
Moses first remonstrates, and says they are tempting God (Ex 17:2)
  - (c) God's answer: Instructs Moses to smite the rock in Horeb (Ex 17:4-6)
  - (d) God's action: An abundance of water bursts from the rock, (Ex 17:6)  
the first direct punishment sent for their persistent murmuring, possibly because of Moses' warning that they were tempting God, that is, severely trying the patience of God.

- (e) Results: A remarkable type of Christ furnished for our learning (1 Cor 10:4)  
First armed opposition to their progress through the wilderness.  
The children of Israel learn another lesson of God's power  
in providing water, and saving them from the Amalekites.
- 5. Place:** At the foot of Sinai (Ex 32:1-35)
- (a) Cause: Moses' prolonged absence in the Mount.
- (b) Complaint: "As for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him." (Ex 32:1)  
Aaron remonstrates, but makes the golden calf (Ex 32: 2-6)
- (c) God's answer: Proposes to destroy the people,  
and make of Moses a great nation (Ex 32:7-10)  
Moses pleads for the people,  
and they are spared for the time being.
- (d) God's action: Through Moses, the destruction of the idol;  
a call for all on God's side to come forward;  
destruction of 3,000 by the sword of the Levites (Ex 32:19-29)
- (e) Results: First command to Israelites to slay their brethren for sin;  
the remainder are preserved at the plea of Moses; (Ex 32:30-35)  
Other transgressors are plagued;  
at the plea of Moses God's favour returns, with promise  
of special help for Moses in governing the people (Ex 33:1-16)
- 6. Place:** In camp at Sinai, just after the consecration of Aaron and his sons,  
And the first offerings made for the people (Lev 10:1-7)
- (a) Cause: Restrictions in tabernacle service (Ex 10:1)
- (b) Complaint: Nadab and Abihu act out their protest by offering "*strange fire*" (Ex 10:1)
- (c) God's answer: Insists on respect for His arrangements (Ex 10:3)
- (d) God's action: They are instantly killed by fire from the altar (Ex 10:2)
- (e) Result: First instantaneous visitation of death on transgressors;  
the people taught not to mourn for wicked persons  
when God inflicts deserved chastisement upon them.  
Being of the priestly family, Nadab and Abihu were particularly culpable.
- 7. Place:** At Taberah (Num 11:1-3)
- (a) Cause: Indulgence of a complaining disposition (Ex 11:1)
- (b) Complaint: Against anything and everything.
- (c) God's answer: Expressed weariness at their constant discontent.
- (d) God's action: Sent "*the fire of the LORD*" to burn among them.
- (e) Result: Many consumed, until they cry to Moses, and he prays to God,  
and the fire is quenched. A cleansing accomplished to preserve  
the remainder of the nation from contamination.
- 8. Place:** At Kibroth-hattaavah in the wilderness (Num 11:4-35)
- (a) Cause: The presence of a "*mixed multitude*" which had  
accompanied the Israelites from Egypt;  
possibly Egyptian servants and others attracted  
by the prospect of adventure with the spoil-laden Israelites'  
departure from Egypt (Ex 11:4; 12:38)
- (b) Complaint: Lust for the flesh pots, leeks and onions, and other  
tasty things of Egypt; tired of the daily manna.  
"*Who shall give us flesh to eat?*"  
"*Why came we forth out of Egypt?*" (Ex 11:4-9,20)
- (c) God's answer: Promises Moses help in bearing the burden of "*all this people*"  
Will more than gratify the mixed multitude's desire for flesh (Ex 11:10-23)
- (d) God's action: The rain of quails; the plague that destroyed  
those who greedily ate them (Ex 11: 31-33)
- (e) Result: A weeding out of the "*mixed multitude*" whose presence  
was detrimental to the children of Israel (Ex 11:34)



- 9. Place:** At Hazeroth in the wilderness (Num 12:1-15)
- (a) Cause: Moses' marriage to a Cushite woman (Ex 12:1)
  - (b) Complaint by Miriam and Aaron:  
Felt themselves justified in criticising Moses:  
*"Hath the LORD indeed spoken by Moses?  
hath he not spoken also by us?"* (Ex 12:2)
  - (c) God's answer: Moses was meek, but God took up his cause.  
Showed the difference between His communications  
with Moses, face to face,  
and the sending of dreams and visions to others (Ex 12:3-8)
  - (d) God's action: Afflicts Miriam with leprosy,  
an indirect punishment upon Aaron.  
Both Moses and Aaron cry to God for mercy,  
and she is healed  
after being seven days shut out of the camp.
  - (e) Results: An example of human weakness;  
Miriam and Aaron presuming on their near relationship to Moses.  
Their punishment was not so much for their interest in Moses' welfare,  
but for their presumptuous speech concerning their use  
as mouthpieces by God. A lesson in humility to all concerned,  
and to all who read the scripture account.
- 10. Place:** At Jordan (Num 14:1-39)
- (a) Cause: The evil report of the spies, except Caleb and Joshua (Ex 13:17-33)
  - (b) Complaint: Would to God they had died in Egypt or in the wilderness,  
rather than be a prey to the giants of Canaan.  
Let us make a Captain, and return to Egypt.  
Wish to stone Caleb and Joshua (Ex 14:2-10)
  - (c) God's answer: Provoked to the verge of destroying the people;  
Moses' plea (Ex 14:11-19)
  - (d) God's action: Relents to the extent of not destroying all in one fiery blast.  
The evil spies die by a plague; the remainder of that generation  
(except Caleb and Joshua) are condemned to wander nearly  
39 years more, and finally to die in the wilderness (Ex 14:21-39)
  - (e) Result: A generation brought into Canaan that could not remember  
the flesh pots of Egypt, that had been disciplined for forty years  
under carefully chosen leaders, and would therefore  
seem a fit people to inhabit the land of Canaan  
in place of the debased Canaanites to be destroyed.

Ten serious murmurings in about eighteen months (Numbers 14:22). The constant complaints were called *"tempting the LORD"*; that is, trying Him to the point of arousing His wrath and calling down punishment upon themselves. God cannot be tempted to do wrong, neither does He tempt any man to sin, but He does try or test His people with a view to strengthening their character through a developed power to resist sin (James 1:2,3,12,13). Men 'try' God when they presume on His patience and goodness. Yet He treated the first three murmurings of the Israelites with leniency. Only with the fourth complaint did He send punishment for the murmuring, and that indirectly through the Amalekites, from whom He delivered them. Thereafter the Law was given, and thenceforth punishment for sin was prompt and drastic.

Some did provoke, but not all. The young children were not held guilty, since they could not understand the meaning of their elders' wrongdoing (Numbers 14:22-35).

**3:17** *"But with whom was he grieved?"* With those who had sinned, and the evidence of the fact that they had grieved him was their carcasses, which fell in the wilderness. Some of the ten specially provoking sins were followed by immediate punishment of the offenders, in the endeavour to save the remainder of the nation from contamination. But that was not the only reason for these summary dealings. The other reason is given in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12, *"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples"* and warnings to us. They are *"written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world [ages] are come"*.

**3:18** The heinousness of unbelief, after having experienced the wonderful deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh, and endless blessings in the wilderness, is here emphasised. The lesson is for us, Christ's 'brethren', members of His 'house', that we be not similarly ungrateful, and provocative of God's wrath.

Again the apostle mentions the "*rest*" into which the children of Israel were not allowed to enter, and the statement suggests that there is a rest which the Christian will not be allowed to enter if he conduct himself in a similarly provocative manner.

**3:19** "*So we see they could not enter in because of unbelief.*" Neither shall we enter into our promised inheritance, if we permit the same spirit of murmuring, hardness, and unbelief to take possession of us.

## Chapter 4

### THE REST THAT REMAINS

From chapter 3 we learned that many Israelites fell in the wilderness because of unbelief, disobedience, and hardness of heart, hence did not enter into the rest of Canaan, which lay at the end of the forty years' wandering. And the apostle exhorted the brethren (verse 12) to take heed lest a similar evil heart of unbelief be found in them.

**4:1** *"Let us therefore fear."* If we carried a thousand pounds or dollars in our pocket, we would fear to lose them. If we are going on a journey, we fear to miss train or boat. If a valuable prize be set before us, we fear lest we should say or do something to jeopardise our success in obtaining it. This is a wholesome kind of fear. It is a recognition of the fact that everything of value must be striven for according to 'the rules of the game' (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). If one would receive or retain, one must also give, of time, thought, effort, means.

*"A promise being left"*, that is, the promise of Psalm 95:7-11, which in chapter 3 was shown to be subsequent to the rest in Canaan, since the psalm was written centuries after the children of Israel had taken possession of the promised land. Hence the argument of chapter 3, that the *"rest"* referred to in the psalms applied to an experience of Hebrews of apostolic days. They were the inheritors of the promises made to the fathers; to them *pertained "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises"* (Acts 13:26; 26:6,7; Romans 9:4). Seeing that this promise of a rest has come down to us, let us *fear "lest any of you should seem to come short of it"*.

**4:2** The responsibility is ours; in modern popular phrase it is 'up to us' to enter into this rest. Why? Can we not shirk it? Can we not say we do not want to be bothered? No, we cannot ignore the proposition any more than could the Israelites in the wilderness, and for the same reason, namely, *"For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them"*. Clearly, knowledge brings responsibility. Gospel, good news, that is, of a rest. As a people the Hebrews were under a special covenant with God, and whatever the Law said, it said to all who were under the Law, without exception (Romans 3:19). The same principle applied to the prophets and the psalms, God's supplementary messages to the Israelites. Hence the Jews of Paul's day were bound by the exhortations of the psalms as well as by the commands of Moses and the teachings of the prophets.

The word, or promise of rest, did not profit the Hebrews who fell in the wilderness, *"not being mixed with faith in them that heard it"*. And here the significant comparison is repeated. The word or promise of rest will not profit us if it be not mixed with faith.

**4:3** Here the apostle sets forth the great truth that *"we which have believed do enter into rest"*. And here is also a contrast: not those who confined their faith to an acceptance of the Law, the prophets, and the psalms on the old Hebrew basis and as natural inheritors because they were the children of the original twelve tribes, but *"we which have believed"* in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son over the house of which we are privileged to be members (Hebrews 3:6).

Then he quotes that portion of the psalm which contains the big *"if"*. *"If they shall enter into my rest"*, thus emphasising again the fact that with the Christian the entering into God's rest is dependent on conditions, emphasising also God's wrath against us Christians if after all the light and opportunity enjoyed we should despise God as the Israelites in the wilderness despised Him (Hebrews 3:6,14; 1 Corinthians 10:5-12).

#### The Nature of God's Rest

Verse 3 informs us that the works from which God rested were those *"finished from the foundation of the world"*, referring exclusively to the creation recorded in Genesis, and points out that, although God's rest began so long ago, He was still in David's day, and now in the apostle's day, seeking from among men those who would believe.

**4:4** The apostle cites Genesis 2:2, where Moses related that God *"rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made"* (compare with Exodus 20:11). Some Christians, who have failed to note that God's rest here referred to relates wholly to His creative work, have gone so far as to say that He has been doing nothing since, in connection with the human race, and that He will continue to do nothing until the end of the Millennium.

This idea, however, lacks scriptural support. It is true that God has used Christ as His servant in the execution of His plan for the salvation of men, but that no more intimates that God is idle than does the fact that all His creative work, as recorded in Genesis, was done by Christ as His agent, as stated in John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:16,17. The question of God working or resting does not depend on whether He actually performs the task Himself or delegates it to another.

The point emphasised in Hebrews 4:3, and supported by Genesis 2:2,3 and Exodus 20:11, is that those works were *“finished”* (Hebrews 4:3). Having finished those works, God rested from them. Those works were not to be undone and done over; they were not to be further extended; they were finished.

**4:5** This is another reference to the psalm by way of showing that both it and Genesis agree that God has a *“rest”*, that *“they”* (whoever they be) are spoken of as entering into it, and that there is an *“if”* in connection therewith.

**4:6** God having determined that some should enter into His rest, it was not possible for Him to permit that determination to be frustrated by the failure of any class of people to whom His invitation might be sent. In other words, seeing that those to whom His *“rest”* was first preached in the wilderness did not enter therein, there must be others who would do so.

#### **While It is called Today**

**4:7** The apostle now comes back to the *“To-day”* touched on in 3:7 and 13. The invitation to *“rest”* was not a general one for all time, but a limited one restricted to a certain period called *“To-day”*. The ‘to-day’ of the children of Israel was at first the time in the wilderness, when they were warned again and again not to harden their hearts against God. But *“after so long a time”* (verse 7) as intervened between the wilderness and David, God again speaks of ‘today’, and of a rest to be sought after. Obviously that statement and promise shifted the ‘today’ to a later period.

**4:8** For if Joshua (see margin) had given the absolute rest in Canaan, God would not afterward, through David, again have spoken of ‘to-day’, manifestly meaning ‘another day’ than the forty years in the wilderness (Hebrews 3:9; Acts 7:42). Joshua did give a remnant the Canaan rest, and wrote that there had not failed ought of all God’s good promises to them (Joshua 21:43-45).

But, after all, Canaan was not a complete or satisfying rest, either physically or otherwise, because there were battles to be fought and the land to be cleared and cultivated. And as for mental and spiritual rest, the nation did not enjoy that because they had been put under a Law of works. *“This do, and thou shalt live”* (Luke 10:28; Leviticus 18:5). The Law was a burden of hard labour, as Paul afterwards showed in his letter to the Romans (Romans 7:7-24).

#### **The Sabbath an Imperfect Rest**

**4:9** There still remained, therefore, a rest for the people of God. This statement effectually disposes of the seventh-day Sabbath as the ideal rest for God’s people. For many centuries the Jews had that weekly rest, and some of them at least were conscientious in their efforts to keep it. Yet David, at the height of his glory, with the widest extent of dominion up to then known to Israel, and with the Law as well kept as probably at any other period of Jewish history, while the Sabbath was the delight of the faithful, at that very time the Holy Spirit caused David to tell of another rest, called by God *“my rest”*.

The seventh-day Sabbath was a work. It was a ceremony a formal method of giving so many hours out of a week to the performance of specified duties and certain discontinuances of duties. It was a rest from weekly toil, but it was, on the other hand, a work as every other commandment of the Law was a work. The whole Law being described in the New Testament as *“dead works”* because no Jew (excepting, of course, the Lord Jesus) had ever been able to keep any of the Law’s commands in such a manner as to achieve righteousness and gain eternal life (Romans 9:31-33; 10:3-5; 3:19,20; Galatians 2:16; Hebrews 6:1; 9:14).

#### **“Come unto Me” - To-day**

Our Lord called the attention of the people to the absence of true rest under the Law when He said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28-30). This is the rest, the true and satisfying rest. How significant these words, spoken just after describing John the Baptist as the greatest of the prophets, the last of the Old Covenant messengers. John could not give rest; the Lord could.

And that brings us to another 'to-day'. Of this 'today' Jesus said to the Jews, "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad*" (John 8:56). Jesus had been anointed by the Spirit to teach "*the acceptable [or, propitious] year [that is, time] of the LORD*", the time when God was able and willing to be gracious and forgiving, because His Son would make the satisfactory offering for sin "*once for all*", never to be repeated. Here is a 'to-day' more remarkable than any of those which preceded it. It is the 'to-day' of the New Covenant. And now God says distinctly and emphatically, "*To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts*" (Isaiah 61:1-3; Acts 13:38-49; 17:30,31).

**4:10** The only way to enter into God's rest is to cease from our own works. When God rested after creation He ceased His creative work. It was finished. Similarly, if we would enter into that rest, we must cease from our works. The comparison is not between the nature of God's works and of our works. In that respect there is rather a contrast, for God's creative works were good and perfect, while we do no creative work, and such work as unsanctified men do attempt is largely evil, as we read, "*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these .....*" (Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 3:9-18; Colossians 3:5-9). We cannot by our works recommend ourselves to God. "*All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*", said Isaiah to Israel (Isaiah 64:6).

The comparison is between God's rest from His own work and our rest from our own works, specially bearing in mind that this epistle was written to Christians of Hebrew birth, who knew by experience what it was to try to do the works of the Law and fail in the attempt (Galatians 3:10,11; Romans 7:10-13).

To cease from his own works would mean to the Hebrew to forsake the Law. To cease trying to keep it. To get himself transferred from Moses to Christ. To become dead to the Law by the body of Christ. To recognise that the Law was nailed to His cross, and that therefore the believing Jew might be relieved from the curse upon him as a breaker of that Law (Galatians 2:15,16; Colossians 2:14; Romans 7:4). The blood of Christ cleansed the conscience from these dead works (Hebrews 9:14).

The Gentile believer must also 'cease from his own works'. Not having been placed under the Law Covenant given at Sinai to the Israelites, the Gentile, save those few who became Jewish proselytes, has not been under obligation to keep that Law in whole or in part. Yet 'his own works' are numerous, and must be ceased from. A list of these 'works' is found in Romans 1:18-32; 1 Peter 4:2-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). How often we hear it said, 'I am as good as so-and-so' and 'I am as fit to appear in the presence of God as the next one'. Such an one has not entered into 'rest'; he cannot until he acknowledges that he needs the Saviour to take away the burden of sin. He must cease from his own works as completely as God ceased from His when creation was finished. He must say, I am 'finished' with the old life. I want to live a new and better life.

This ceasing from self-righteousness is described in Romans 6:11 as "*dead unto sin*", sin being personified as the great taskmaster who has brought all mankind into bondage. When one is 'reckoned dead' to sin and alive to righteousness, through faith in Christ Jesus, he is ready to enjoy the true Sabbath rest. The word 'sabbath' means 'rest' (see 4:9, margin). This rest is the rest of faith, the peace of mind that comes from believing and receiving the forgiveness of sins (Romans 15:13; 5:1).

This rest and peace in the realisation of sins forgiven and of reconciliation with God through Christ was prophetically referred to by David, and quoted by the apostle, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD will not impute sin*" (Psalm 32:1,2; Romans 4:7,8). "*Blessed*" contains the thought of 'happy', and yet it means more than that. It means consciously rejoicing in the favour of God, and also, in this age, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, while having the love of God shed abroad in the heart (Romans 5:2-5).

The period called 'to-day' therefore covers the entire time set apart in God's plan for the operation of the New Covenant, the forgiveness of sins, and justification by faith. During this Gospel or High Calling Age God calls upon each one who hears the gospel to repent and believe, and each one who believes is exhorted to "*fear*" lest the privileges of this restful state in Christ be lost through the deceitfulness of sin and consequent hardening of the heart.

The New Covenant 'to-day' will extend right through the Kingdom Age. Then the masses of humanity who have not previously heard the glad tidings will be placed under obligation to believe on and obey the King of kings and Lord of lords, 'to-day'. Then the penalty for wilful sin will be the second death, as it is now for those enlightened ones

(mentioned in chapters 6 and 10 of Hebrews) who despise God and His New Covenant. Unbelief will be the root cause of perversity in the Kingdom Age, as it was in the wilderness of Sinai, and as it is now in our present 'to-day' (Revelation 21:8).

Unbelief is distinct from disbelief. The latter may arise from prejudice, ignorance and indifference. Unbelief is that attitude exemplified in the wilderness, where God's power was undeniably demonstrated in miracles on their behalf, and yet they rebelled against Him.

**4:11** And now the apostle develops the subject still further. Though having said that *"we which have believed do enter into rest"* (verse 3), and that *"he that is entered into his [God's] rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his"* (verse 10), he now adds, *"Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest"*. This shows that the rest of faith that comes to us when we cease from our own works is not a rest of idleness. It is (or should be) a complete cessation of those doings associated with the *"old man"* which has been *"put off"*. The rest of faith brings peace of mind, tranquillity of spirit, and trust in God, but it also brings its own activities. It brings, as here expressed, *"labour to enter into that rest"*, that is, to enter fully into all its privileges and enjoyments. This *"labour"* involves fighting the good fight of faith, striving for the mastery, running the race for the prize, overcoming the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 Timothy 6:11,12; 2 Timothy 2:3-5; Hebrews 12:1; 1 John 5:4; 2:15-17). And is in line with Philippians 2:12, *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"*

The necessity for all this *"labour"* is, *"lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief"*. Our standing is by faith; at the same time we must manifest our faith by our works, otherwise we demonstrate that our faith is dead (Romans 11:20; James 2:17-26). And we must ever have before us the possibility of *"falling away"*, as did Israel in the wilderness, if we do not *"labour"* to keep ourselves in the love of God and efficient in good works (Jude 20,21; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

These good works are not for the purpose of recommending ourselves to God apart from Christ, as were the *"dead works"* of the Law, but are necessary for our development in Christian character, our rooting and grounding in righteousness and holiness (2 Peter 1:2-11; Hebrews 13:21).

The implication thus is that our present rest is not absolute. Resting on the finished work of Christ gives peace and reconciliation with God, but so long as we are in the flesh there will be trials and testing, and consequently *"labour"* to preserve our faith and to persevere in obedience. As expressed in Hebrews 3: 6 and 14, we must *"hold fast"*, *"hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end"*. The complete and most desirable rest will be that into which we enter when that *"end"* is reached, and we enter into the glory, honour, and immortality, and other perfect conditions of the Kingdom.

This fully satisfactory rest is referred to in Revelation 14:13, a precious promise that after the return of the Lord the saints who remain on earth will not sleep in the grave for a long period as was the case with the apostles and other faithful of previous times, because at the moment of death they shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye into the Lord's likeness (1 Corinthians 15:50-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). *"Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them"*, or, literally, *"follow with them"*.

Thus is indicated how the laborious part of our present warfare will cease, while good works in God's service will continue throughout our new heavenly life. That will be to us a complete and satisfying rest, for then all our work will be perfect and we shall not be under constant necessity to watch lest we fall into unbelief or disobedience.

### **The Quick and Powerful Word**

**4:12,13** *"For"* joins this verse to the preceding one. We must *"labour"* for, or because, *"the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword"*; for, or because, it is *"a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"*; for, or because, *"all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do"*.

The very fact that God reads the heart, and that we are under constant instruction from His word, should keep us alert and constantly labouring to improve in character and disposition. We cannot deceive God by mere outward pretensions. Our efforts must be genuine and sincere, from the heart.

The *"dividing asunder of soul and spirit"* shows how the commands and exhortations of scripture distinguish between our natural inclinations as fallen human beings and our 'new mind' or disposition, which we received when we accepted Christ, and were *"sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise"*.

This new mind is *"the earnest of our inheritance"* (Ephesians 1:13,14; 1 Corinthians 2:12,16; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Now as obedient children we must seek to fashion ourselves according to the Spirit, in the meantime submitting patiently to the disciplinary training through which our loving heavenly Father puts His children (Hebrews 12:5-15).

The Revised Version has *"living and active"* instead of *"quick and powerful"*. God's word imparts life and activity to us, waking us out of lethargy and sloth, and stimulating us to make our calling and election sure. A sword or sharp knife can divide the marrow from the bone, though it be tightly packed and difficult to remove. So God's word, entering our hearts, cuts out the old habits and thoughts. Verse 12 speaks of the word or scriptures as doing this. Verse 13 speaks of God personally taking an interest in this work of discernment and purification.

We may take comfort from the knowledge of God's supervision, while at the same time we realise that He deals with us in no mystical or bewildering manner, but by the plain and straightforward commands of the written scriptures, which are open for us all to read and model our conduct by.

### **Our Great High Priest**

**4:14** This thought of God's searching eye and the dissecting operations of the divine word, which, when appreciated by us, stimulates us to *"labour"* that we may enter fully into His rest, leads the apostle at once to remind us of our great High Priest, concerning whose high office he opened chapter 3. All this about the children of Israel in the wilderness and our own danger of falling into unbelief and disobedience, the punishment for which we could not hope to escape because the holy and just God can read the heart, would be in itself somewhat discouraging, especially to any who feel deeply their own weaknesses, shortcomings and faults.

But the apostle is able to give us just the encouragement we need, *"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession"*, or confession, as in 3:1. That we have such a High Priest is a strong incentive to *"hold fast"*, to *"hang on"*, to *"endure to the end"*.

**4:15** *"For"*, again a connective to show that what follows is a good and sufficient reason for holding fast. We not only have in Jesus Christ the High Priest and apostle of our confession, but also the one who came to earth and gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. The one who loved us so much that He lay down His life for us is worthy of our trust and confidence, especially when we remember that *"he ever liveth to make intercession for us"*, and that He was *"raised again for our justification"* (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 4:25). This High Priest is just such a friend as we need, because He can be touched with feeling for our infirmities. How comes it that He can be so touched? Because He spent a number of years on earth, and knows by personal contact with men what they are going through (Matthew 8:1-17; 9:35,36).

### **Tempted, Yet Without Sin**

But more than that: He *"was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"*. This shows that it is not necessary to sin in order to have sympathy with sinners. A man need not become a drunkard in order to sympathise with the man who falls under the temptation. The Lord is compassionate toward those who through weakness yield to temptation, but the particular point the apostle makes here is that the Lord has feeling for those who *"hold fast their confession"*, who *"labour to enter into that rest"*, who are giving heed to the sharp piercing and sundering of the living and active Word of God, and who have a keen realisation that their minds and hearts are open before God. It is necessary to notice here a distinction between feeling for these and sympathy for those who fall, like the Israelites in the wilderness, or like perverse reprobates in this age, through unbelief. The latter forfeit the Lord's sympathy because they abuse it, while the former hold His love and sympathy because they evidence their sincerity by doing their best to serve and obey Him.

Our Lord's feeling for us is largely based on the fact that He *"was in all points tempted like as we are"*. To be tempted does not mean to sin. James says, a man *"is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust [or, 'desire'] and enticed"*. In this case the reference seems to be to a man who yields to temptation, who allows himself to be *"drawn away"* and *"enticed"*.

To be tempted does not necessarily convey this meaning. The temptation may be more in the nature of a trial or test of endurance, as in James 1:12, *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried [or, "when he hath been approved"; RV], he shall receive the crown of life, which the LORD hath promised to them that love him"*. It is this latter kind of temptation that we understand is referred to in Hebrews 4:15, in connection with our Lord. Many efforts were made by scribes and Pharisees, by the devil, and even by His own disciples to work upon Him in such a way as to arouse in Him thoughts and feelings averse to the will

of God which He had come to do, but they were entirely without success. He was not drawn away by any desires of His flesh or by any enticements set before Him. We shall see more on this subject when studying chapter 5.

Suffice it now to say that when the apostle here states that Jesus was “*tempted in all points like as we are*” he referred not to inherent tendencies to sin which we as a fallen race inherit from our forefathers (and which He did not have), but to those trials and tests of endurance which come to us while we “*labour to enter into that rest*” previously spoken of.

Our Lord endured all His trials and tests “*without sin*”. Such an attainment is impossible for us in the absolute sense. Yet we should develop in endurance. Caleb and Joshua were in the midst of the people who in the wilderness severely tempted God ten times in a flagrant manner, and were continually grumbling and complaining. Yet these two men took no part in the murmuring. They were tempted in the sense of being tried and tested, but not in the sense of being led away by the example and incitements around them. They were not perfect men, they had their faults and failings, but at heart they were genuine men of faith, and held their own in the midst of a whole nation of rebels (Numbers 14:6-10). Ought not we, with our knowledge of God and His gracious purposes, with His Word to guide us, and with our great High Priest to intercede for us, be able to do as well as Caleb and Joshua?

Our Lord Jesus was tried by the quick and powerful word of God. He came into the world to do the will of God, and on every side He found opposition, intolerance, and hatred. In these respects He was tempted, or tried, like as we are, for it is in our endeavours to do God’s will that we meet the greatest opposition. Thus we have feeling for our Lord, and can understand how He has feeling for us.

**4:16** “*Let us therefore.*” The considerations of verses 14 and 15 are good reasons for making a practice of verse 16. In this verse is a mixture of boldness and humility. We should come boldly to the throne of grace for help, because our Lord understands us and is willing to help. On the other hand, it must be with a humble mind, because we must apply for mercy. Our attainments are not what they should be; we make many slips and blunders, and need to ask constantly for forgiveness.

The other objective sought, in applying at the throne of grace, is to “*obtain help in time of need*”. Help is needed when one has partly or wholly yielded to temptation, but the idea intended here seems rather to be help before temptation has been yielded to. “*Grace to help*” suggests strength supplied to resist evil, to maintain the confidence and rejoicing of the hope (3:6,14), to keep on believing (4:3), and to persevere in the labour required to enter fully into His rest (4:11). The mercy and the grace are there for the asking, and strength will be given for each day and hour.

The “*throne of grace*” is a reference to the mercy seat which covered the ark in the Most Holy. There the blood of the sacrificial offerings was sprinkled, and there peace was made between God and the people of Israel, through the ministrations of the high priest appointed for the purpose. There was made the yearly purification of sins, cleansing away the accumulated defilements of the preceding year, and giving the people a fresh start for the new year with the realisation of God’s smile and blessing.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is, under the New Covenant arrangement, both sacrificial offering and mercy seat as well as High Priest. He said, “*No man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6). As the “*one Mediator between God and men*”, he stands between God and every member of the human family who desires reconciliation and forgiveness, those who come into the Church now, and others who will believe in the Kingdom Age (2 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Timothy 2:4-6). The same thought is expressed in Ephesians 2:18, “*for through him we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit unto the Father*”. In Romans 3:25 He is called, literally, “*the propitiatory*”, which means mercy seat, or place of propitiation.

Our boldness, then, arises not from pride or self assurance, but from faith, and because we see in Jesus our High Priest and propitiatory, a sympathetic and loving, as well as all-powerful, helper. In this connection it is worthy of note that the original of the word ‘advocate’ used in 1 John 2:1 means ‘intercessor’, ‘consoler’, or ‘helper’ (see Revised Version margin, and Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance). Young’s Analytical Concordance defines it as meaning ‘one called alongside (to help)’.

Our Lord Jesus is our Mediator, our Intercessor, Advocate, and helper, as well as the propitiation or satisfactory offering for our sins (1 John 2:2). Let us therefore come boldly unto the Father by Him, “*that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*”. (Compare with Hebrews 10:18-23.)



## Chapter 5

### THE SON MADE HIGH PRIEST

Chapter 4 concluded with a reference to Jesus as our High Priest, to His feeling for our infirmities, and to the boldness with which we may now come to the throne of grace for mercy and help.

**5:1** *“For”*; again we have the connective. The close of a chapter is not always the close of the apostle’s argument. Each of the chapters so far studied, with the exception, of course, of the first, began with a connective, *“Therefore”*, *“Wherefore”*, *“Let us therefore”*, and now chapter 5, *“For every high priest taken from among men”*.

A comparison is now to be instituted between Jesus the Son of God as our High Priest (4:14) and those who occupied the office of high priest under the Levitical Law. The Jewish high priest was taken *“from among men”*, and *“ordained for men”*. The Revised Version has *“appointed”* instead of *“ordained”*, that being the meaning of ‘ordain’, although there has become attached to that word, by the various denominations of Christendom, a theological meaning, as applied to their ministers, deacons, and priests.

The ordination of the high priest according to the Mosaic Law was a different ceremonial altogether, and in Leviticus 8 this ceremonial setting apart of Aaron and his sons is described in detail. Yet we may say that Aaron’s appointment took place earlier, when God indicated him as His choice (Exodus 28:1; Numbers 18:1-7), and from this viewpoint Leviticus 8 would be the induction into office.

Aaron, then, was chosen out from men and appointed to serve for men, that is, on their behalf. Not in regard to such things as men might designate, but as God indicated, *“that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins”*. The nature of these sacrifices and the manner of their offering were prescribed by their God (Leviticus, chapters 1 to 7).

**5:2** But the particular point the apostle now calls to our attention is that on account of being taken from among men and appointed to make repeated offerings for their sins, the Levitical high priest would have learned compassion, and come to have deep feeling for ‘the *“ignorant”* and those *“out of the way”*. Also, the infirmities and weaknesses of his own flesh would assist the high priest to sympathise with the erring ones of priesthood, Levites, and nation.

*“Compassed with”* (Greek ‘perikeimai’) is defined by Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance as meaning ‘to lie all around, that is, enclose, encircle, hamper (literally or figuratively)’. Truly the Jewish high priest was surrounded, encompassed, and hampered by sin, sin in himself, sin in all the people, and sin represented in the Law as attaching to the very tabernacle in which he served. (Leviticus 16:18,19). Surely it would be a hard-hearted high priest indeed who, in these circumstances, could not sympathise with those for whom he offered.

**5:3** On account of these infirmities in himself, the Jewish high priest was necessarily obliged to make offerings for his own sins, as well as for those of the people. The Law prescribed a bullock as the proper offering for a sin committed by an anointed priest (Leviticus 4:3-12). The importance of the high priest’s position, and the responsibility he carried, are shown by the fact that the offering required of him to atone for an occasional sin was as valuable as that required on account of a sin committed by the entire congregation of the children of Israel (Leviticus 4:13-21).

These thoughts concerning the sympathetic disposition suitable for a high priest serving under the Law Covenant should enable us to realise that when God appointed a High Priest under the New Covenant, even His own Son, that appointee would also be of a sympathetic nature, having *“compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way”*. So the prophet foretold of our blessed Saviour, *“A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench”* (Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:18-20). The shortest verse of the Bible tells us how *“Jesus wept”* with the sorrowing family at Bethany (John 11:35).

#### A God-Appointed High Priest

**5:4** Another important thing to observe is that no high priest of Israel appointed himself to the office. On occasions when any but the duly accredited high priest attempted to perform any of the functions of that office, they were promptly disowned by God, and punished for their presumption (Leviticus 10:1-3; Numbers 16:1-35). Only one *“called of God, as was Aaron”*, could rightly claim the office of high priest or exercise any of its functions.

**5:5** So also Christ's title as High Priest was not self-assumed. In this respect there is a similarity between the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The same God who said unto Jesus, as quoted in 1:5, "*Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee*", also recorded His decision to appoint the Son to a High Priestly office.

**5:6** This record is found in Psalm 110:4, "*The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek*".

Christ was no rival of Aaron, no usurper; but, like Aaron, could rightly expect recognition because God had appointed Him to that high office.

#### **In the Days of His Flesh**

**5:7** The feeling for those with infirmity is no less characteristic of the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec than of the Levitical high priest, for in "*the days of his flesh*" He suffered. Here the apostle reverts to the thought with which chapter 4 closed, our Lord able to be touched with feeling for our infirmities because He had been among men, and was "*tried in all points like as*" His people are tried; yet differing from them in this, that He was without sin.

*"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared."*

A most significant statement is this: our Lord's life on earth is here differentiated from (1) the days before His flesh; that is, His life before He came to earth; and (2) the days after His flesh; that is, His life since His resurrection.

#### **Our Lord's Pre-Existence**

(1) Our Lord's existence as a sentient being before His birth at Bethlehem is plainly stated in several scriptures, and implied in others. For example, "*Before Abraham was, I am*" is a definite claim that Christ was a living, intelligent being before Abraham was born (John 8:57,58). We cannot consistently ascribe any less power to the predicate "*am*" in this case than to the predicate "*was*". Both are forms of the verb "*to be*". We cannot say that when Abraham 'was' he 'existed only in the mind of God', as some say was the case with Jesus.

On the contrary, the statement that Abraham "*was*" means that Abraham was a person, a being, an entity. He was alive, and he could work, run, talk and think. Now, unless we want to make nonsense out of our blessed Lord's statement, we must admit that when He said of Himself, "*Before Abraham was I am*", He meant that He personally existed as a thinking, active being before Abraham was a conscious being. Long before Abraham, long before Adam, our Lord existed; He was the first and only direct creation of God, and by Him all other persons and things were made (Revelation 3:14; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17).

Not only was our Lord the agent of the Father in creation, He was also the Archangel who supervised the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and their settlement in the promised land. The scripture speaks of Him in this pre-human life as "*Michael*" (Jude 9; Daniel 10:21; Isaiah 63:9). Other references to the Lord's existence before He became a man are found in Micah 5:2, last clause; John 3:13; 7:28,29; 8:42; 16:27,28; 17:5; Philippians 2:6,7; besides those contained in Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1.

According to Philippians 2:6, our Lord must have been an intelligent thinking being before His life on earth, else He could not have made a choice between aspiring to be equal with God and humbling Himself to a lower estate than He already occupied, namely, to the estate of manhood. Choice in this matter was as free and individual as that which characterised His decision, when a man, to die, and furthermore His readiness to die even the ignominious death of the cross, since such was His Father's will.

Moreover, Philippians 2:6 says that He was, before He came to earth, "*in the form of God*", or "*in God's form*", hence not a mere thought or intangible essence, but a being with a form comparable with God's. "*Made himself of no reputation*" (Philippians 2:7) also signifies living personality, for unless he were a person he could not 'make himself' anything. This form which He had in His pre-human estate (verse 6) is contrasted with the "*form of a servant*" (verse 7) which He took when He became a man, and "*was made in the likeness of men*".

The same clear distinction, between our Lord's position with the Father before He became a man and His estate as a man, is made in 2 Corinthians 8:9. With the Father He was "*rich*". When He came to earth He "*became poor*" for our sakes.

In His prayer to the Father shortly before His betrayal, Jesus asked that He might be glorified with the glory He had with God before the world was (John 17:5). Would any sane person ask to be 'glorified' by being made non-existent? Would our Lord, who was giving up His life for men, be rewarded by ceasing to exist and thus 'existing only in the mind of His Father'? Not only is such a view contrary to our Lord's expectations, it is also contrary to the promises made to Him before He became a man, and contradictory of plain scriptural proof that He was raised from death a living being, with mind and will, with "*all power in heaven and on earth, and far above angels*", as stated in various ways in Hebrews 1.

"*In the days of His flesh*" therefore refers to a time subsequent to the period in which He was the Archangel, with attributes and powers superior to those of humankind.

### **He was Made Flesh**

"*The days of his flesh*" is taken by many Christians to mean that Jesus, while on earth, inhabited and made use of a body of flesh which was not really Himself but more like a cloak, the real Jesus being the spirit within, and nothing more. According to this view, Jesus did not really die on the cross. He only appeared to die. Some theologians represent Him as a spirit hovering over the cross observing His body pierced and bleeding, and His mother and disciples sorrowing and weeping.

With all due respect to those who hold and teach this view, we must assert that it is unscriptural. The scriptural teaching is totally against the theory of dual personality introduced into the church by eastern philosophers centuries ago. And as if to give God's people an answer in advance to this tradition of men, the apostle John was inspired to write, "*And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). To be 'made' flesh is very different from merely inhabiting or controlling flesh. It means that He was made a fleshly or human being, and Hebrews 2:9 corroborates this by showing that He became a man of the same constitution as was Adam when created perfect and sinless.

Our Lord's death on the cross, then, was not make-believe, but real. As the same apostle declares, "*He died for our sins*" (1 Corinthians 15:3), and the prophet Isaiah had written that He made His soul an offering for sin, He "*poured out his soul unto death*" (Isaiah 53:10,12).

In the days of His flesh our Lord was a perfect man. Here is a contrast between Him and the imperfect and sinful high priest under the Law. Of Christ it is said, He "*did no sin*", "*He knew no sin*" (1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21). In order to be the ransom price for the race, it was necessary for Jesus to become a human being, but it was not necessary for Him to become an imperfect or sinful human being. In fact, had He become imperfect and sinful He could not have been a ransom or equivalent price for Adam who was to be redeemed. There were already in the world many imperfect and sinful human beings; it was unnecessary that Christ leave His glory with the Father from before the world was merely to become another sinful human being.

### **The Days After His Flesh**

(2) The days after His flesh. Nor is there scriptural support for the widely accepted theory that Jesus is now a man in heaven. To say that He has now a body of flesh is to deny the very passage we are studying, which contrasts "*the days of his flesh*" with His present high position at God's right hand and as High Priest after the order of, that is, with the rank of, Melchisedec. The "*days of his flesh*" are plainly limited by His death. In the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death. All these things were associated with the days of His flesh; they do not characterise His experience after His death and resurrection.

God was able to save His Son from dying, but that request was not made, for our blessed Lord came into the world for the express purpose of giving His blood an offering for sin, and He did not draw back from that resolve. In the garden of Gethsemane He prayed that if it were possible the "*cup*" might pass from Him, but immediately added, "*Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt*" (Matthew 26:39). By "*this cup*" He probably had special reference to the ignominy and shame attached to those closing days, the betrayal, the arrest as a felon, the false accusations, the execution as a criminal; all of which would be most painful to contemplate by His pure and sensitive soul. Neither did God save Him from dying. To have done so would have been to mutilate the divine plan at its most vital point.

We believe, therefore, that our Lord's prayer was that He might be saved or delivered out of death. Death is the great enemy, and our Lord knew it as such, having none of the heathen delusions about death as a 'friend' or a 'portal to a larger life'. Death was the penalty attached to disobedience, and could have no claim over our Lord, the holy one.

But the loss of life and consciousness, even though He knew it would be but temporary, would not be a pleasing prospect. He would dread that complete cessation of intercourse with His heavenly Father involved in death, as well as all the painful experience, both mental and physical, leading thereto. The promise made to Him, and which no doubt came to His mind in those dark hours, was, *"Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol"* (Psalm 16:10). So, plainly, it was out of 'sheol' that He expected deliverance. And His faith was strong that God would fulfil the promise, as the psalm indicates, *"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope"* (Psalm 16:9). This resting in hope was in the days of His flesh, after the strong crying and tears and the fresh commitment of Himself to the will of His Father.

### **Having Loosed the Pains of Death**

The Hebrew word 'sheol' means the grave, or the condition of death. The corresponding Greek word as may be seen in Acts 2:27, is 'hades'. Our Lord therefore experienced in the grave that condition of death which was the punishment pronounced in Eden on the race for whom He died. In that state He remained until the Father called Him forth on the third day. A passage which is sometimes taken to teach that there is conscious suffering in 'sheol' or 'hades', is Acts 2:24, *"Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it"*. But such a contention contradicts the scriptures which describe 'sheol' as a place of darkness and silence, of knowing nothing and doing nothing.

What Acts 2:24 means is this. Elsewhere Christ is spoken of as *"the firstborn from the dead"* (Colossians 1:18). Thus death is spoken of as a woman, and Christ as a child to be born. The Greek word rendered *"pains"* in Acts 2:24 means travail pains (see Variorum Footnote and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance). When the time comes for a child to be born nothing can hold it back. The *"pains"* which God *"loosed"*, or set in operation, were those 'labour' pains. It is all a figure or allegory, but a most striking one, as showing that death had no permanent hold on the Lord Jesus. At the right moment according to the divine purpose death was made to yield up the Lord. He was 'born' from the dead, *"the first that should rise from the dead"* (Acts 26:23).

*"And was heard in that he feared"*, literally, *"because of His piety"* or *"reverent submission"* God heard His prayer, that is, God took account of it. This is a way of saying that the Lord was in God's favour and confidence, having thus far faithfully carried out His mission. Isaiah 49: 8 (quoted in 2 Corinthians 6:2) also speaks of His having been 'heard'. Up to the last the Son was humble and obedient, as expressed in Philippians 2:8, *"obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"*.

### **Yet Learned He Obedience**

**5:8** If, as we understand the scriptures to say, the Son was perfect as a man, absolutely pure and sinless in thought, as well as in word and deed, how do we understand this scripture, that He *"learned"* obedience? In this way. In His pre-human life He had been faithful and obedient, for, as already stated, He was God's agent in creation, and subsequently performed various services in connection with mankind.

But in all this work He was in a favourable environment, with limitless power, and with numerous subordinates to carry out His commands. *"All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made"* (John 1:3). But when He came to earth, the environment was uncongenial. He came to do God's will, but found little help in the doing of it, even His disciples whom He loved, and who loved Him, being a source of trial to Him (Matthew 16:8,22,23; Luke 22:24).

Then the scribes and Pharisees were ever ready with false accusations and innuendos, Judas was ready to betray Him, and the Jewish multitudes, whom He fed with miraculously provided food and whose diseases he healed, were also ready to turn against Him.

What our Lord learned, therefore, was obedience in adverse circumstances. He did not need to unlearn disobedience, for He had not been disobedient. What He had not previously experienced, and therefore can be fitly spoken of as something *"learned"*, was perseverance in righteousness and in the doing of God's will in His new environment among sinful men.

These sinful men inflicted sufferings upon Him, and He learned to bear them meekly and patiently as a discipline which would fit Him for still further service in God's great purpose. Quite aside from the benefits accruing to Himself from the patient endurance of this ordeal of suffering is the benefit granted to us in having as our High Priest the one who so proved the beauty of humility and obedience in this evil world.

*"Though He were a Son"* He learned obedience. His near relationship to God did not relieve Him of this duty of submission and obedience to God's will. Absolute obedience to God is required of every individual in the universe. Without it there is disharmony, injury, trouble, and, worst of all, sin. Shall we not say that if God required, and the Son cheerfully rendered, obedience, it is fitting that He should require the same of us, and that we too should render it to the best of our ability with His help?

**5:9** *"And being made perfect"*, that is, perfect or complete, matured, in the manner above described, confirmed and established in obedience under adverse and trying conditions. A scholar who learns a lesson is said to be 'perfect' in it. In our Lord's case the only question involved was being made perfect in obedience, for He was already physically, mentally, and morally perfect, and this inherent perfection was demonstrated and confirmed by His successful endurance of all trials.

He *"became the author"*, that is, according to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, the 'causer' of *"eternal salvation unto all them that obey him"*. That those who would command obedience should first learn to obey is a principle recognised among men in the army, in the navy, and in other institutions where large bodies of men are employed. The smooth working of the whole machine depends on orders being carried out, and those who faithfully carry out the directions given them receive not only a development of character along the line of fidelity and perseverance, but also a thorough schooling in the practical part of the business with which they are associated, so that if elevated to one of the highest administrative or executive positions they have the advantage of a clearer insight into the thoughts, feelings, and needs of those employees who have succeeded them in the lower offices and a larger grasp of affairs generally than they could otherwise obtain. It is not for naught that millionaire captains of industry set their sons the lowliest tasks of the machine shop or the counting house, and let them work their way up step by step, before they are given responsible positions in the management.

Old Testament prophecies are numerous to the effect that the Messiah should be elevated to a position of power and authority; they also foretold His rejection and death. Hebrews 5: 8 and 9 help us to understand what in His earthly experience was of benefit to Him, and why He was worthy to receive the rewards promised. *"Worthy is the Lamb"* (Revelation 4:11; 5:12). Having rendered absolute obedience to the Father, He is now placed in a position where He has the right to command absolute obedience to Himself.

All men should carefully consider this statement. Eternal salvation can be obtained only through faith in and obedience to the Son. (See also Acts 4:10-12; John 3:16,35,36; 5:24; 6:33.) Faith and obedience are required now of those who are being called out to be *"a people for His name"*, and joint-heirs in the Kingdom.

Faith and obedience will also be the requirement in the Kingdom Age, of all the subjects of the Kingdom. Each individual must accept Christ as the one who died for him. That will be an act of faith regardless of whether the environment is difficult as in this age, or more helpful as it will be in that age. And in each case obedience must be from the heart and with gratitude for all the Lord has done and endured for us (1 John 3:18,23,24).

**5:10** *"Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec."* Repeating this scripture just here indicates an association between His priesthood and the eternal salvation which He will give to all them that obey Him. More particulars concerning the order of Melchisedec, and how it differs from the order of Aaron, will be seen when studying chapter 7.

**5:11** The Greek word rendered *"hard to be uttered"* is defined by Strong's Exhaustive Concordance as meaning 'difficult of explanation'. Paul had many things to say about the order of Melchisedec that were very important for the Hebrews to understand, in order that they might see its superiority to the order of Aaron. These things were deep spiritual truths, and we who read the epistle now acknowledge with the apostle Peter that Paul wrote things *"hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction"* (2 Peter 3:15,16).

But Peter says only that “*some*” things Paul wrote are hard to understand. Much that Paul wrote is not hard to understand, but plain and clear. Doubtless Peter had the epistle to the Hebrews in mind, for Peter’s two epistles were general letters, and so is Paul’s to the Hebrews, and Peter says “*even as our beloved brother Paul ... hath written unto you*”, showing that Paul wrote to the same “*strangers*” that Peter addressed.

But while granting that the “*deep things of God*” pertaining to the priesthood of our Lord after the order of Melchisedec are “*difficult of explanation*”, the difficulty which Paul stresses is not the abstruseness of his subject but the state of mind of those to whom he gives these explanations. To teach a child the simplest things is difficult if its mind is on its play or exercised over a prospective holiday. “*Seeing ye are dull of hearing*”, this dullness was the same kind as our Lord referred to when He quoted Isaiah to the multitude (Matthew 13:14,15). Their interest was in the traditions of men and in their worldly affairs, and if the mind is full of these things the ears grow dull, the truth falls as it were on deaf ears. “*A disobedient and gainsaying people*” heeds not the Lord’s outstretched arms and pleading voice (Romans 10:21).

#### **‘Milk’ and ‘Meat’**

**5:12** That the difficulty was more in the Hebrews themselves than in the truths Paul desired to lay before them is also shown by this statement: “*For [or ‘because’] when for the time ye ought to be teachers*”. They were dull of hearing because, though they had known the gospel for a long time, they had not made proper progress in knowledge. No-one can teach what he has forgotten about music, no matter how thoroughly he may once have known it. It is the same with scripture knowledge. And what has been forgotten must be learned over again before further progress can be made. Imagine trying to explain ‘fractions’ to one who has forgotten the multiplication table and division.

How Paul must have longed for sympathetic listeners to the wonderful things he had to tell, who by reason of steady perseverance in searching the scriptures could follow him intelligently from point to point. But these Hebrews needed that one teach them again the first principles, or foundation truths, of the oracles, or word, of God.

Meat and milk, natural foods, well illustrate varieties of spiritual food. The newly-converted believer in Jesus is spoken of as “*born again*”, the new life having been begun by the operation of the living word of God, and the particular “*word of God*” referred to is the gospel which the apostles preached (1 Peter 1:23-25). As a newly-born Christian he is a babe, and the food best adapted to the nourishment of babes is milk, called in 1 Peter 2:2 “*the sincere milk of the word*”. Thus the same word which was the means of producing the ‘babe’ is now his proper nourishment. And the objective in feeding the spiritual babe is the same as with the natural infant, that he may “*grow thereby*”.

Therefore, unless the spiritual babe be regularly fed on the word of truth he will grow puny. Now what would happen if the natural babe, dwarfed for lack of milk, were fed on meat? He could neither chew it nor digest it. So, many of the Hebrews to whom Paul wrote were unfitted to receive the “*strong meat*” concerning the priesthood after the order of Melchisedec, because they had failed to grow; they were still in the babyhood stage. The fact that they needed teaching again on the “*first principles of the oracles [or word] of God*” proved them to be babes, the “*first principles*” being “*milk*”. What these “*first principles*” are will appear in chapter 6.

**5:13** “*For everyone that useth milk is unskilful [margin, Greek ‘hath no experience’] in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe.*” This is a self-evident truth. Babes can do nothing for others, nor even for themselves. They require constant attention, and feeding suitable to their age. So the infantile Christian is unskilful and inexperienced in the scriptures, and needs to be fed by the older brethren on the first principles. And as he grows toward spiritual manhood he will be ready for stronger food (Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Peter 3:17,18).

The necessity of putting away evil thoughts and practices in order to appreciate the milk of the word and grow thereby is well brought out by the Revised Version rendering of 1 Peter 2:1,2, “*Putting away therefore all wickedness [margin, ‘malice’], and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking, as new born babes, long for the spiritual [Greek, ‘reasonable’] milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation*”. Thus the spiritual babes, even though inexperienced, must have intelligence and discernment enough to see that indulgence in malice and hypocrisy and other evil works of the flesh is incompatible with growth unto salvation.

**5:14** Strong spiritual meat belongs to those who are perfect, that is, mature, who have been learning and growing. Those who have their senses exercised by use will be able to follow the apostle's arguments. The value of an alert and trained mind is here indicated to be that its possessor may discern between good and evil; hence, in doctrinal matters, between the true and the false; between what is genuinely "*strong meat*", such as the apostle was now ready to set before them, and the false teachings being given out in those days by Judaizing teachers who insisted that the Law must still be kept, in part if not in whole.

And one of the chief values of the epistle to the Hebrews to this day is the clearness and distinctness with which it draws the line between the old Levitical order of the Law Covenant and the new order of the New Covenant, ratified by the precious blood of Christ, who is its High Priest. More on this in chapter 7.

## Chapter 6

### THE PROMISE AND THE OATH

The first principles spoken of in chapter 5 are now about to be enumerated. Thus the brethren who had failed to develop, and still required “milk”, were given a helpful list of the things they should re-learn, in order that they might appreciate the “strong meat” the apostle was ready to present to them.

**6:1** Again we have the chapter opened with a connective to show that its contents are a continuation of the preceding chapter, “*Therefore leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection*”. The “doctrine of Christ” is thus identified with “the oracles of God” (5:2). The doctrine of Christ is what the oracles or word of God reveals. The marginal reading is of different wording, but does not alter the sense, for the idea is the “principles”, or foundation truths, taught the believers by the apostles, as Paul remarks in 1 Corinthians 3:11, “*According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation. ... For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*”.

Doctrine means teaching. The doctrine of Christ is the teaching of Christ, that which He gave out himself and authorised His disciples to give out.

#### Going on to Maturity

The exhortation to leave the first principles has been misused, as though the apostle meant to advise the brethren to abandon the first principles and now learn something different.

On the contrary, many scriptures exhort the believers to hold fast that which they had received at the first (2 Timothy 1:13; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 10:23; 1 Timothy 4:6,12-16; 6:14,20).

Children who go from the multiplication table to fractions do not throw away the multiplication table. As they advance in their studies they have more use than ever for it, but they ‘leave’ the multiplication table in the sense that they do not need to be continually re-learning it. Having thoroughly learned it, they go on to higher studies, continually making use of what they know of the lower studies or first principles.

Going on to “perfection”, is the same word as in 5:14 translated “full age”. The perfection referred to is not sinlessness, as some Christians imagine, who think that by some means or other they have become perfect in the sense of sinless. Rather the thought is of maturity, as a child develops to manhood, or as a pupil is said to be ‘perfect’ when his reading, or spelling, or other lesson has been well learned, or when one passes an examination successfully, or graduates from a college.

The Christian life is a growth, or progression, in which all truth learned becomes a part of one, just as natural food is digested and serves to build up the constitution. If we have accepted error in mistake for one or another of the “first principles” we must indeed reject it as soon as we find it to be an error, but the truth, no matter how simple or elemental, must be tenaciously held on to for all time.

The second clause of verse 1 also throws light on what the apostle means by leaving the first principles. He says, “*not laying again the foundation*”. Here he makes use of a figure of speech, the foundation of a building. The builder leaves the foundation to go on with the superstructure of his edifice. He does not repeatedly tear out the foundation to lay it over again. But, having ‘well and truly’ laid it, he makes use of it as the necessary support of the remainder of the structure.

So the first principles of the gospel are a necessary foundation and support of the other truths of the doctrine of Christ, and must not be torn out or cast away, else the whole building will fall. “*Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid*”, without Christ the rock all building is vain (Matthew 7:24,25; John 15:5).

#### Repentance from Dead Works

Six foundation principles are named, two of them in verse 1. The first, “*repentance from dead works*”, is a direct reference to the inability of the Jew to do perfect works. In 9:14 these “dead works” are again referred to, and in such a way as to show that the efforts of the Jews to keep the Law were unsuccessful. Their works were “dead” because by them they incurred the penalty of the Law, which was death.



Men cannot obtain everlasting life by their own works, whether they be Jews striving under the Mosaic Law, or Gentiles striving as best they can under whatever laws they choose to make for themselves (Romans 3:9-19). Repentance from dead works is one of the first steps to be taken by the sinner who desires to come unto God through Christ and receive forgiveness of sins.

### **Faith toward God**

The second principle, or foundation truth, mentioned is "*faith toward God*". That is obvious, and is plainly stated in Hebrews 11:6. We must believe that God is before we can progress to further knowledge. Faith toward God implies faith also in Christ, since God sent His well-beloved Son to be our Redeemer and Lord, and since it is through His Mediator-ship alone that we may approach God (Romans 4:24,25; 5:1; 1 Timothy 2:5; John 6:29; 14:1,6).

### **The Doctrine of Baptisms**

**6:2** The third principle or foundation truth mentioned is "*the doctrine of baptisms*", not two or more different doctrines and one baptism, but one doctrine (that is, one teaching) concerning more than one baptism.

How does this harmonise with Ephesians 4:5, "*One Lord, one faith, one baptism*"? The latter text refers to the baptism identified with the Christian faith exclusively, with which the Gentiles as well as the Jews are concerned. Whereas in Hebrews 6:2 "*baptisms*" includes both the baptism which Christ enjoined and the apostles administered, as described in John 4:1,2; Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12, and baptism as administered by John the Baptist, whose mission was to do a reformatory work among the Jews, and Jews only.

"*Baptisms*" has also to do with both the outward form of immersion in water and the spiritual significance of the act. As the forerunner of Christ, John preached repentance from their back-slidden, covenant-breaking condition, and water baptism was the outward form or testimony of this repentance and conversion and re-consecration to do the will of God. Baptism for the remission of sins was wholly confined to this work among the Jewish people. This accounts for John's surprise when the Lord came to him at Jordan to be baptised, for he knew Jesus was in no need of such repentance and reform as were appropriate to all other members of that nation. In our Lord's case, baptism became a public identification of himself with John's work of reformation, and in that respect "*fulfilled all righteousness*" but its signification for himself was death and burial into the will of God, an appropriate step on reaching manhood and beginning His ministry (Matthew 3:15; John 5:30; 4:34; 8:29; Hebrews 10:7).

There had been baptisms or ablutions under the Law, and it was necessary that these Hebrew Christians have a right view of them all; to recognise that all the ceremonial washings under the Law were now superseded. These "*divers washings*" are referred to in 9:10 as having been imposed only until "*the time of reformation*".

That time of reform having arrived, baptism into Jesus Christ was the proper step, as expounded in Romans 6: 3-5; 1 Peter 3:21, and as contrasted with the baptism into Moses, in which the whole nation participated at the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1,2).

### **Laying on of Hands**

The doctrine of the "*laying on of hands*" was taught to the early Church by the direct action of the apostles. In two circumstances the apostles laid their hands upon others: first, to impart gifts; and, second, to set apart brethren for special service.

First: as converts were made, the Holy Spirit was given. In the first instance, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles and other believers without the intervention of any human agency.

Again, when the gospel was sent to the Gentiles by the preaching of Peter, while he yet spoke, "*the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word*", to the evident astonishment of Peter, who up till then seems not to have realised that it was part of God's purpose to receive the Gentiles on the same terms as the Jews (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44). This direct manifestation was necessary to enlighten Peter and the other apostles and disciples, inasmuch as the Jews had been trained to regard the Gentiles as outside the pale, as indeed they were when the Jews were under the Law. Now they had an ocular demonstration that the Holy Spirit would be given to Gentile as well as to Jewish converts (Acts 10:47; 15:1-11).

These are the only two instances recorded of the pouring out of the Spirit without the laying on of the hands of an apostle. When the Samaritans accepted Christ under the preaching of Philip, there was no such outpouring, although they had been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. But when Peter and John travelled from Jerusalem and laid hands upon them, immediately the Spirit was given (Acts 8:14-17).

In all these instances the proof that the Spirit was given was in the ability conferred to speak with tongues and to heal the sick. A list of these miraculous gifts is found in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31.

The objective in confining to the apostles this ability to confer gifts by the laying on of hands appears to have been to give the apostles a special position of authority in the Church. This is stated in Hebrews 2:3,4. And the laying on of hands for this purpose (of conferring gifts of the Spirit) seems to have passed away with the apostles, when the necessity for establishing them as authorised teachers over the Church no longer existed, for at their decease the church was firmly grounded. And when those who had received miraculous gifts at the hands of the apostles passed away, these spectacular demonstrations ceased.

The Holy Spirit as the divine influence was more than a miracle-working power as exhibited in speaking with tongues and healings. It was, as described by our Lord (John 14:26; 16:13), a holy, divine power exercised in the minds of the believers, recalling to their memories the truths they had heard, and enabling them to foresee "*things to come*". It was also a purifying power in the life, for the "*fruit of the spirit*" is produced in the character (Galatians 5:22,23; Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 3:3).

These operations of the Holy Spirit have continued in the Church throughout the age, and are manifest to-day in the minds and hearts of all true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. No laying on of hands is prescribed as necessary for the reception of the Holy Spirit for these purposes, and while no doubt the LORD personally recognises and blesses with "*the earnest of the Spirit*" each and every believer as he becomes such, yet much of the Spirit comes to us through the scriptures, the divine word being the expression of the divine mind. As the word of God is believed and acted upon, the Spirit or mind of God enters our minds, and we are sanctified thereby (John 17:17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

### **Setting Apart Evangelists and Teachers**

Second: the laying on of hands was employed to set apart certain believers (1) for special service in the Church, or (2) to serve as evangelists to carry the gospel to those who had not previously heard it. Timothy was thus set apart when the apostle Paul desired him to accompany him on his missionary journeys (1 Timothy 4:14). Timothy and Titus subsequently visited various Churches, to "*set*" them in "*order*", and to "*ordain elders in every city*" (1 Timothy 3:1-15; Titus 1:5).

And 1 Timothy 5:22 seems to indicate that in doing this Timothy (and therefore in all probability Titus also) laid hands on the prospective office bearers. This laying on of hands was not to be done "*suddenly*", without consideration of the qualifications of the candidate, since by endorsing an unfit person Timothy would make himself to some degree at least responsible for that man's sins. The terms "*elders*", "*bishops*" and "*deacons*" are used to describe these special servants of the Church (1 Timothy 3:2,12; Titus 1:5), while Ephesians 4:11-16 speaks of the Lord himself giving apostles, prophets (that is, public expounders), evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the edification of the Church.

The apostles laid hands on the seven brethren whom they appointed to administer the funds for the relief of widows and others in the community described in Acts 6, but this communistic arrangement was of short duration, for soon thereafter the brethren were scattered by persecution (Acts 6:1-8; 7:1-4). The Lord's will was not that the Church should gather in settlements, as the early disciples in their first love and zeal imagined, but rather that family life should continue, and that both individual believers and families as such should be witnesses in the districts in which they resided, and be free to change their residence when persecution or the interests of the Lord's cause rendered a change of abode desirable. In all epistles strong advice is given on family relations and duties, and no reference whatever is made that could possibly be construed as endorsing communistic life.

By including the doctrine of the "*laying on of hands*" among the first principles, the apostle gives us to understand that he desired the Hebrews addressed to continue their respect for these arrangements; also that these arrangements were such as were readily comprehensible, since they were included in the "*milk*" for "*babes*".

### **The Resurrection of the Dead**

The resurrection is another fundamental doctrine, or first principle. Had the apostle been a believer in the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul, now largely adopted by Christendom, this would have been the place to mention it as a cardinal truth. To the contrary,

he speaks of the dead as dead, and of a resurrection of those dead. Resurrection means to live **again**. The word is meaningless if it be thought that the dead are not really dead, but 'more alive than ever', as many of us were taught in all sincerity by mistaken teachers.

An interesting and profitable hour may be spent looking up and comparing the many scripture references to the resurrection. That our Lord calls himself "*the Resurrection and the Life*" is a plain intimation that there is no life after death except as given by Him in the resurrection (John 11:25.) This too is a doctrine suitable for babes in Christ, although now as in the apostle's day there are many who should be matured and well-informed who do not understand it, and, sad to say, few are anxious to be taught it.

### **Eternal Judgment**

How many Christians of to-day have digested this portion of "*milk*"? To those whose minds have not been exercised by reason of use, this doctrine is very like a tough piece of "*meat*". Yet the apostle mentions it as one of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ with which every believer should be familiar.

The word 'aioniou', here translated "*eternal*" may mean without beginning and without end; but it does not invariably have that meaning. In the present case it is limited as to its beginning by the fact that man, who is the subject of judgment, is not eternal, having been created at a very definite period of the world's history, namely, in the sixth creative day (Genesis 1:26-31). The beginning of the eternal judgment is further limited by the fact that God "*hath committed all judgment unto the Son*", who was not installed in the office of Judge or Ruler over all men until after His resurrection (John 5:21-23; Acts 5:31; Ephesians 1:20-22). The "*eternal*" feature of the judgment is also limited at its beginning, in certain of its operations, by 1 Corinthians 6: 2,3, which speaks of the judgment of the world and of angels as a work in which the saints shall have a part; consequently, that portion of the judgment will not take place until the saints are prepared for the office. In the meantime, the saints themselves are undergoing a judgment, as stated in 1 Peter 4: 7-19; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10.

At its latter end the "*eternal*" feature of the judgment is limited by 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, which states that at the end of a certain period Christ, who is the Judge, will deliver up the Kingdom to God, thus indicating that the judgment is at an end, having finished its allotted task.

The word translated eternal has in it the thought of continuance, the duration of the period being determined by other factors, such as those above mentioned. An eternal judgment would therefore be one that continues as long as is necessary to accomplish its purpose. The Greek word here involved may be correctly translated "*age-lasting*". This would be harmonious with those scriptures which indicate that God has set apart an age following our Lord's second advent, in which Christ will rule over and judge mankind in a very special way for their good.

In the Old Testament the title of judge was applied to rulers raised up to deliver Israel from their enemies and preserve them in safety in their own land (Judges 2:14-18). When, therefore, we read of "*judgment*" and of our Lord Jesus Christ as "*judge*", we must think of a deliverance and a deliverer rather than of a modern court with a judge on the bench hearing civil or criminal 'cases'.

Yet Christ's judgment is not limited to the time following His second advent, for He has occupied the office of Deliverer and Judge since His own resurrection nearly 2000 years ago, and is now exercising His authority in the Church and over the affairs of men in accordance with God's great plan of the ages, whereby Christ's ruler-ship extends over both the Gospel and the Kingdom Ages (Colossians 1:13; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16; 20:4; Daniel 7:13,14,26,27; Acts 5:31; Ephesians 1:10).

The only way in which "*eternal judgment*" may be considered as unlimited by time is that God, who is the Author of all life and the One from whom all law and equity issue, is eternal, without beginning and without end. Consequently every judgment, whether a ruler-ship or a passing of a judicial sentence, must be in accord with His eternal principles of righteousness, or it will not endure. And of all ruler-ships and judicial decisions, those of Christ alone will stand, for they express, as no others could do, the divine approval of right and disapproval of wrong.

God's standard of righteousness, justice and truth has not altered, and Christ's judgment, being in harmony therewith, partakes of its eternal unchangeableness. Our Lord's decisions are just and unalterable, whether they be in regard to the Church now being chosen out to be

His joint-heirs, to the great systems of evil which He contends against and will destroy with the brightness of His presence, or to the world of mankind in general to be ruled over and judged by Him in the Kingdom Age.

Looked at in this way, the doctrine of *"eternal judgment"* is a very solemn one, and should recall us to our senses if we are in anywise prone to wander and forget as did the Hebrews to whom Paul wrote. No carelessness or indifference or going back to the babyhood stage of Christian knowledge or experience will enable us to elude the eye of our Judge or escape the punishment He will mete out to *"wicked and slothful servants"*. We must all answer for our deeds. Therefore let us now, in this age, while the opportunity is open, go on to that perfection and maturity the apostle sets before us as our proper aim in life (Hebrews 4: 12,13; Matthew 24:42-51; 25:1-30; 2 Corinthians 5:9,10; 1 John 3:7; 5:17; Revelation 3:18,19; 1 Corinthians 10:6-12; Hebrews 2:1-3).

**6:3** *"And this will we do, if God permit."* Paul has a way of fetching us up with a sharp turn, and then patting us on the back and saying, 'There, there, of course you will do better. I must point out your faults plainly, but I do not mean to say I have lost all confidence and trust in you'. And how generously he includes himself in this faultiness, *"this will we do"*, as though he also required the admonition, and is now resolved to reform.

### **The Possible and the Impossible**

Does the apostle, when he says, *"If God permit"*, mean to question God's willingness that we go on to maturity? Of course not. For the whole exhortation is a pointing out of the will of God in respect of our spiritual development. It is just his way of reminding us that in this, as in all other things, we are dependent upon God. If we have lost ground in faith and knowledge, time is required to catch up again, and we must also have facilities for re-learning what we have forgotten. For these things, time and facilities, we are dependent upon God, for He could deprive us of our lives, or so order them as to prevent us putting into practice our desire to reform.

Besides this, it is possible to reach a stage in perversity from which the LORD will not permit return, as Paul goes on to explain in verses 4 to 8. Let us therefore reform, re-learn truths forgotten, and go on to perfection while God's favour and love are still available to aid us.

**6:4** Now he gives the reason why we should not try God's patience to the extreme. Our Lord said that *"with God all things are possible"* (Matthew 19:26), but here we are told of something that is impossible for God to do. As far as men are concerned, they cannot assist a camel through the eye of a needle. It is equally difficult for a rich man to get himself into the Kingdom of God. Both are, in fact, impossible with men. *"Who then can be saved?"* asked the disciples.

Our Lord's reply does not necessarily cover the possibility of God enabling a camel to go through a needle's eye. The Jews were fond of proverbs and 'sayings', and no more striking method of describing the impossible can be imagined than that saying concerning the camel and the needle's eye. To fishermen constantly mending their nets it would immediately appeal.

But in His reply that *"all things are possible with God"*, we understand our Lord referred to God's ability to help a rich man into the Kingdom if the rich man would seek God's aid. The method is not described, and might differ with different individuals, but in any case the result would be the overcoming of the selfish, covetous, and miserly habits often characteristic of the rich. The attitude of the rich young man, who called forth this reply, was that of unwillingness to dispose of his wealth for the good of his fellow men. Hence, though he endeavoured to keep, and to a large extent succeeded in keeping, the ten commandments, yet he could not in that state of mind 'enter the Kingdom'. In other words, he refused to become a follower of the meek and lowly Messiah. And while he continued in that state of mind, the Lord recognised the futility of further efforts to enlist his sympathy in gospel work, which is almost wholly a service of self-denial, benevolence, and love.

Another occurrence of the statement that nothing is impossible with God is Luke 1:37, and is limited to the particular matters related in the context. The Revised Version renders it, *"For no word from God shall be void of power"*. (Compare with Isaiah 55:10,11; 7:14; and 9: 6.)

Two things are definitely stated in scripture to be 'impossible' with God, besides that mentioned in Hebrews 6:4 at present under consideration. One is that God cannot lie, and the other is that He cannot deny Himself. When He made a promise to Abraham it was not a lie. Nor did He lie when He confirmed that promise with an oath (Hebrews 6:17,18).

God cannot lie because to do so would be inconsistent with His character of holiness. An honest man cannot steal, not because he cannot stretch out his hand to take something that does not belong to him, but because his principles and his established character forbid his doing so. For the same reason God *"cannot deny himself"* (2 Timothy 2:13). His character is one of faithfulness. Having promised to give salvation to the faithful he cannot alter his plan and refuse to give it, because some who profess the faith afterward prove false to Him. His faithfulness will consist, not in giving life and glory to these unfaithful ones, but in seeking out others who will be faithful over-comers, whoever they may be, and wherever found (2 Timothy 2:10-14; John 4:23,24; Philippians 3:3).

Similarly in regard to Hebrews 6:1-4. Having provided that his children, who are begotten and born as a result of the operation of the word of truth, and who have also attained some growth as a result of partaking of the *"sincere milk of the word"*, shall go on unto perfection or maturity, a state of spiritual development in which *"strong meat"* may be received and digested, God cannot now turn about and say He will accept the back-sliders notwithstanding their dullness of hearing and hardness of heart. Having made certain arrangements and promises, it is not now possible for God to do other than adhere to those arrangements and promises, even though by so doing these unfaithful ones lose the position to which they were called by the gospel. The responsibility for their loss will be their own, not God's.

Another reason why a certain line of action in this matter is impossible on God's part is given in verses 6 to 8, which will be examined in their place; which show that repentance on the part of the reprobate becomes impossible if he continue long and persistently in an evil course.

#### **If Such shall Fall Away**

*"Those who were once enlightened"*, those on whom the light of the cross shone, who have heard the gospel with sufficient clearness to enable them to accept it, who are called out of darkness into His marvellous light (John 8:12; 12:35,36; Acts 13:47; 1 Peter 2:9).

*"Have tasted of the heavenly gift."* Jesus is God's superb and supreme gift to men (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 9:15; 1 John 4:9-14). He was given as a manifestation of God's love, as the ransom-price for mankind and propitiation for our sins, as our Lord and example, our Mediator, Advocate, High Priest and Judge, as well as our elder brother, consoler and peace-bringer. If we have tasted of Jesus in all these capacities, we have been blessed indeed, and must recognise a responsibility to be faithful to Him who has done so much for us.

*"Were made partakers of the Holy Spirit."* Since the Holy Spirit is given to all sincere believers, this statement proves that those under consideration in this passage are really and truly believers, and not mere professors or hypocrites (1 Corinthians 2:10-16; Romans 8:7-9). The LORD does not bestow His Spirit on mere professors and hypocrites. Such are everywhere described as in darkness and under the dominion of Satan, their real master (2 Timothy 2:26; Matthew 23:15,33; John 9:39-41; Jude 8-19).

**6:5** *"And have tasted the good word of God."* The word *"taste"* here means more than a mere nibble as one might sample butter or cheese. One must have more than a nibble of gospel truth to progress through all the stages described in verse 4. From the latter part of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6 one may gather that this 'tasting' refers to regular feeding on the milk and meat of the word, with the result of having arrived (or having had ample time and opportunity to arrive) at 'full age' or maturity.

The final description, *"and the powers of the age to come"*, probably refers to two of the developments of God's plan which will be operative in the Kingdom Age, when the Kingdom is fully established in the earth by the Lord at His second coming or presence: namely (1) the forgiveness of sins, and (2) the resurrection. *"World to come"* should read *"age to come"*. That is the age subsequent to the present one, in which Paul was living when he wrote the epistle, and during which the Church is being called out to be a people of God (1 Peter 2:3-10).

In the Kingdom Age men will be resurrected, brought up out of their graves to live again. The power of God to be exercised then in that great work, and which has already been exercised in the raising of His well-beloved Son from death, is now being exercised to resurrect or raise up those who believe out of the death-state of trespasses and sins (Ephesians 1:17-20; 2:1-5; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 3:1.) With their sins forgiven, and themselves wholly devoted to Christ, they begin a new life, a life of faith and holiness (Romans 6:4), and the mighty power of God works in them in another way also, even to quicken their mortal bodies in His service (Romans 8:11.) All these things, realised and experienced by us now, bring a responsibility not to be lightly evaded or shirked.

## Crucifying Christ Afresh

**6:6** Consequently if such fall away they have fallen from a wonderfully high position of favour, enlightenment, and privilege, and the seriousness of their fall is so great that Paul hopes none of the Hebrews addressed will go so far in their perversity. To *"fall away"* evidently means to depart from, repudiate, the doctrines (teachings) received, and that necessarily implies losing the position of a forgiven, Spirit-endowed and mature believer, for if the doctrines be lost or denied the life will correspondingly deteriorate. It is *"impossible ... to renew them again unto repentance"*. This is the statement of a positive fact; the inspired utterance of an inspired apostle of the Lamb. We cannot doubt its truth; we may not deny it, however regretful we may feel at the thought that any who had once been God's accepted children should fall away into that mental condition in which repentance is impossible.

There are among Christians those who think that the elect may 'back-slide', grow cold and indifferent, but cannot be lost. This scripture expressly contradicts that assumption. Other scriptures show plainly that in an unregenerate, unconverted state, before ever having believed at all, the first step toward salvation of those who hear the word is to repent and turn to the Lord (Luke 15:7; Matthew 9:11-13; Acts 10:43).

During our probation as members of the Church repeated repenting for mistakes and errors are the order of the day with every one who has a high ideal of what a Christian should be, for his own imperfections will be manifest when comparing himself with the perfect example set by our blessed Lord. Consequently, for anyone to get into that condition of mind where repentance is impossible would indicate a hardness of heart, a stubbornness and perversity quite beyond that exhibited by those who have not known the Lord. This is not a case of impulsive wilfulness, but of what has become an ingrained habit of boastfulness and pride.

Comparing verse 6 with verse 3, we may gather that God does not 'permit' such to go on to perfection, but withdraws from them, and so leaves them in the darkness of their own imaginings. That this is God's attitude toward wilful transgressors is stated in positive terms in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12;

*"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned [that is, 'condemned'] who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."*

God is not the author of these delusions. Satan is the god of this world, and there are many agencies for the dissemination of error and delusion. So that when God no longer approves of these perverse ones, and withdraws His providential care, they fall an easy prey to these widely prevalent delusions. And the reason God thus resigns them to their own way is that after having known the right way they prefer, *"had pleasure in"*, unrighteousness.

Returning to Hebrews 6:6 we find the root reason for God's changed attitude towards His formerly accepted children. It is their flouting of the Saviour whom they once acknowledged as having died for them, and through whom they had received the forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation with God. Their falling away after having openly taken the name of Jesus naturally brings reproach upon the name of Christ, for all who see them will be inclined to blame Christianity, and to think that all Christians are hypocrites. By preferring their own evil course these reprobates say, in effect, that Christ need not have died, since they find that they did not need Him, and do not need Him now, to wash away their sins. This is tantamount to crucifying the Son of God afresh.

In the case of the Hebrews this statement, *"seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh"*, would have peculiar significance, because when Christ was crucified on the cross the Jews were the guilty betrayers, and took upon themselves responsibility for His death, saying, *"His blood be on us, and on our children"* (Matthew 27:25). Such Jews as subsequently believed would therefore first of all repudiate the action of their nation and disclaim any sympathy with the spirit of envy and hate that culminated at Golgotha (Acts 2:36-40; 3:13-19).

For such repentant and contrite Jews to turn away from the Lord after having for a period professed all this sorrow and change of life would be in fact a crucifying of Him again, this time *"to themselves"*, that is, now without the consent of the Sanhedrin, and of Pontius Pilate, and now not under the stress of great popular excitement, but as it were in cold blood, deliberately, for themselves.

Also in Hebrews 10:26-31 the heinousness of the offence of those who *“sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth”*, consists in the fact that by their actions they tread under foot the Son of God, whom they once acknowledged as Lord and themselves as under His feet. Now they reverse the position, and no longer honour Him as Head (Colossians 2:18,19).

**6:7** Here is given an illustration from nature to make clear exactly what is the trouble with these reprobates. For the earth, having no mind or will, is yet in a sense grateful for the rain, and responds to the blessing of moisture by bringing forth herbs. And because of this response to the rain and the care, the earth which brings forth good fruit receives the blessing of God. So any Christian who desires to continue to receive the blessing of God must respond to God's goodness by a grateful heart and by bringing forth the proper fruit in the life.

**6:8** But earth which brings forth thorns and briers is rejected. The owner of such a field has no pleasure in it, and presently has a *“burning off”* to get rid of these pests. So God regards those who, after all the enlightenment and advantages described in verses 4 and 5, fall away and bring forth the thorns and briers of an evil life. They are fit only for destruction. *“Whose end is to be burned”* refers to the natural thorns and briers: fire accomplishes their destruction, and consequently is a fitting symbol of the destruction of the wilfully wicked.

**6:9** The apostle could be straightforward and decisive in his criticisms of the brethren, but he always tempered his rebukes with the hope that the brethren would see their faults and correct them. And his hope for the Hebrew brethren was that none of them, though still babes when they ought to have been men, had gone so far wrong as to fall away in the extreme manner described in verses 4 to 6.

They still had some good points that he could refer to, and he was persuaded that they would attend to those matters of development and growth in character. The *“things that accompany salvation”* would be the fruit of the Spirit developed in their lives, and also the truly humble attitude of mind and desire to learn of Christ which should characterise the sincere believers, however faulty and slow they may have been (Galatians 5: 22-26; 2 Peter 1:3-11; 1 Peter 2:19-23).

**6:10** *“For God is not unrighteous”* reminds us of 2 Timothy. 2:13. Whatever may be the faults and failings, the ingratitude and forgetfulness, the lethargy and selfishness of His children, God does not fall into the same, nor does He retaliate in kind. God's wonderful character of love is exhibited in His longsuffering and patience, and if there is anything good at all to be found in His children He will find it, and bear with them. To overlook or forget such good fruit as they did bring forth would be unrighteous on God's part, and He is not guilty of either (2 Peter 3:9). So Paul, who has the spirit of God and of Jesus his Master, looks about and finds one or two specific things he can mention in which these Hebrews still showed their love for the brethren. They had *“ministered to the saints”*, and were still doing so.

**6:11** What was needed now was that they wake up and show the same diligence in these other directions, and see that they develop into men capable of receiving *“strong meat”*. The *“full assurance of hope unto the end”* is a refrain from chapter 3, verses 6 and 14.

**6:12** The apostle further desired that they *“be not slothful”*. That was their trouble more than wilfulness. They were slothful, lazy, not particularly caring whether they grew in knowledge or not. Millions of professing Christians are in that slothful state to-day. They take a keen and intelligent interest in many worldly affairs, but seem to have forgotten that if they would be true children of God with *“full assurance”* they must give time and thought to spiritual truth and to spiritual growth. They must not permit themselves to be choked with thorns (Matthew 13:7,22). Rather they should be followers of those *“who through faith and patience inherit the promises”* (1 Corinthians 11:1; James 5:10).

**6:13** Abraham is cited as an example of faith and patience worthy of imitation. And God's goodness to Abraham was evidenced in that He gave the double assurance of promise and oath.

**6:14** This portion of the promise to Abraham is quoted from Genesis 22:15-18, after Abraham had offered up Isaac on the altar, *“from whence also he received him in a figure”* (Hebrews 11:19). The original promise was made while he was still in his own country and among his own kin, and was conditioned on his leaving them and journeying to the land which God would show him. And so Abram *“went out, not knowing whither he went”* (Hebrews 11:8). After waiting twenty-five years for the son of promise, and passing through many other trials and tests, the promise was finally confirmed by the oath.

**6:15** *“And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”* Abraham obtained the promise in a double sense.

(1) He obtained the promise itself in that these trials and tests were necessary before the oath was given. Had Abraham proven to be unfaithful, the promise would have been forfeited. God was not bound to bless Abram and his seed. He could have chosen some other instrument at any time. But God’s choice of Abram was made at least partly on account of Abraham’s character as a believer in the true God while he was still in the land of Chaldea.

(2) He *“obtained the promise”* in the sense of the thing promised, but only in so far as it pertained to his personal blessing, the gift of the son of promise, and some multiplication of his seed before his eyes. We have the assurance of Stephen (Acts 7:2-5) that he did not actually obtain title to the land, since all his life he remained a nomad, roaming up and down the country and sharing it with other nomadic tribes (Genesis 14:1-16).

Besides this, he had in a dream or vision been told that his descendants would be evilly entreated for four hundred years, and that only at the end of that long period would they return again to the land of promise. Consequently the complete fulfilment of the promise is still in the future, when Abraham will be raised from death and given the inheritance in the faith of which he died.

Thus the inviolability of God’s promise and oath has been partly proven in Abraham’s heir Isaac and other descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand by the seashore, and in Jesus Christ the great Seed through whom the blessing promised should come (Genesis 17:2-8,15-17,21; 21:1-5; Joshua 21:43-45; Hebrews 11:12; Galatians 3:16), and will be fully proven in the resurrection era when Abraham comes forth to his personal inheritance and all the families of the earth (the dead being raised) are blessed with the exact knowledge of the truth concerning Jesus as Mediator and Lord (John 1:9; 5:27-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:11-13; Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54).

**6:16** *“For men verily swear by the greater”*, but as there is none greater than God He swore by himself (verse 13), *“By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD”* (Genesis 22:16). By men, in their transactions with one another, an oath in affirmation is accepted as the end of all strife. Here the apostle states a general and well known fact, with the implication that whatever God has sworn to by an oath should likewise be accepted by us as final and irrevocable.

**6:17** God swore with an oath for no reason connected with Himself. Without the oath the promise was as sure of fulfilment as with the oath. The reason for the oath was to manifest His willingness to adopt a method in common use among men, if by so doing some good purpose might be served. That good purpose is explained in verse 17 to be to show to the heirs of the promise the *“immutability [or unchangeableness] of his counsel”*.

The heirs of the promise were in the first instance the fleshly descendants of Abraham, and in the second instance those who, by becoming Christ’s disciples and manifesting the faith of Abraham, were counted for Abraham’s seed, since Christ is the one Seed of Abraham in whom all promises centred. *“If ye be Christ’s [possessive case, if ye belong to Christ by faith], then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”* (Galatians 3:29; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

**6:18** The intended effect of the two immutable or unchangeable things, first the promise and then the oath, in neither of which God could lie, since His character is unimpeachable, reached beyond Abraham and his fleshly descendants to us who have a separate and distinct hope set before us.

The apostle’s meaning is not that Abraham’s hope and our hope are the same, for, though he looked and we look for *“a city [government] which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”*, yet our positions in that city are clearly defined in scripture as differing in honour and in scope, his position being that of a prince or ruler in the administration of the Kingdom on earth, while ours is to be that of kings and priests directly associated with Christ in heaven (Hebrews 11:10,16; Psalm 45:16; Luke 13:28; Revelation 1:6; 20:6).

We see in this passage, therefore, both a similarity and a contrast. A similarity between Abraham and the Church in that each had a definite promise given, and each must endure with patience. A contrast in that while the promise to him was an earthly reward, the promise to us is a heavenly reward, as verse 19 goes on to explain.



**6:19** Our hope is like an anchor firmly held enabling the ship in safety to ride out the storm. Our anchor is *“sure and steadfast”* because it enters into that within the veil, that is, our faith and hope lay hold of the reconciliation effected at the mercy seat, our mercy seat being Christ Jesus. Our anchor must hold here if we would inherit the promises given to the Church, because the offering of the perfect sacrifice by Jesus for our sins is the basis of our acceptance, and He is our Mediator, our Advocate, and our Intercessor in the presence of God. Hebrews 10:19-22 expresses the same thought. We enter into the holiest by faith, using the new and living way, or the way of life new made, which our Lord opened up by His sacrifice and has made available, to those who believe, by his ministrations as High Priest.

**6:20** But our hope is more than that of entering in by-faith in the finished work of Christ, for here Jesus is called our forerunner, the one who has entered before us, and therefore we shall follow Him there, *“that where I am, there ye may be also”*, was His promise (John 14:3). Abraham was called the father of the faithful, and his faith and patient endurance are well worthy our imitation, but he is not our forerunner. Jesus alone entered heaven itself, the antitype of the *“holiest”* in the tabernacle and temple, and through Him alone the promise is made sure to us who have fled to Him for refuge from sin and death.

Another similarity and another contrast are brought to our attention by the concluding statement of verse 20, *“made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec”*. We are reminded of chapter 5, verses 6 and 10. In fact, the apostle now resumes his discourse concerning the High Priesthood after the order of Melchisedec which he had interrupted to comment on the dullness of hearing of the Hebrew brethren.

The similarity now to be noticed is that the oath which God swore to Abraham was not His only oath. That our Lord should be High Priest after the order of Melchisedec had also been sworn to by an oath (Hebrews 7:21). Both these oaths were attached to covenants of promise; both are guarantees of blessing, and both give assurance to faith. But the contrast is great in that Abraham, while an example to us of faith and patience, could not accomplish our salvation, or bring about the blessing of all the families of the earth as declared in the covenant God made with him. Our Lord Jesus, on the other hand, is able to accomplish our salvation, and not ours only, for Abraham himself is dependent upon Christ for his future life; in fact, the blessing of all the families of the earth is the prerogative of Christ as the High Priest of the New Covenant. Chapter 7 enlarges upon this theme.

## Chapter 7

### CHRIST AND MELCHISEDEC

Having brought us along by gradual stages, the apostle is now ready to give us the pith of the matter, the essence of the strong meat. After repeating (6:20) the statement of 5:6 that our Lord was made High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, he now proceeds to explain who Melchisedec was, and shows the superiority of the order of Melchisedec over the order of Aaron, all of which has deep significance for us as Christians, but was particularly necessary for Hebrew Christians to understand in order that they might no longer give allegiance to the Law Covenant and the Levitical priesthood as they were bound to do while that Law and that priesthood had the divine sanction, before being nailed to the cross.

**7:1-3** Again the chapter begins with a connective, “*For*”. The apostle’s argument is a long one, covering several chapters. “*For this Melchisedec ... abideth a priest continually*”. All between “*Melchisedec*” and “*abideth*” is explanatory of Melchisedec’s name, titles, and office, and reviews the account in Genesis 14 of his blessing of the patriarch Abraham. The comparison evidently is between Christ, “*a priest forever*”, and Melchisedec, “*a priest continually*”. The contrast between these and the Levitical priests, who did not continue forever, develops towards the end of the chapter.

Salem (Hebrew Shalam) was, according to some commentators, an early name of the city afterward known as Jerusalem. Others understand from Hebrews 7:2 that it was not the name of a place but the title of an office, its signification being peace. Since Melchisedec was “*priest of the most high God*”, his office would be to secure and promote peace between God and those for whom he ministered, and on whose behalf he offered sacrifices to God. The psalmist (76:2) uses the term, but it is not possible to determine whether he employs it as a poetic abbreviation, in its figurative sense of peace, or as identifying Jerusalem with the Salem of Melchisedec.

Another meaning attached to the word Salem, or Shalam, was perfection or completeness. Paul interpreted it as “*righteousness*.” Melchisedec’s title as king of Salem therefore made him a fitting type of Christ, who is called by both names, “*The LORD our righteousness*” “*Prince of Peace*” (Jeremiah 23:5,6; Isaiah 9:6).

A very commonly believed theory that there were no worshippers of the true God in Abraham’s time except himself and his family is disproved by the statement that Melchisedec was priest of the most high God. Therefore at that early stage in the settlement of Canaan there existed people who were worshippers of the one true God, and with whom God had communion through a duly recognised high priest. Abraham was only one of a number who recognised Melchisedec by paying tithes.

Verse 3 has led some to suppose that Melchisedec was more than human, perhaps an angel. But the idea is that no father, or mother, or descent (margin, Greek ‘pedigree’) is recorded. Neither his birth, “*beginning of days*”, nor his death, “*end of life*”, is noted by the historian. The account in Genesis 14 takes note only of the fact that he existed in the plenitude of his power when Abraham met him. Verse 6 throws further light on verse 3 by the statement that Melchisedec’s genealogy was not “*counted*” from Levi, the tribe to which the Law Covenant priesthood belonged. The genealogies of the Levitical priests were most carefully preserved in order to ensure proper succession. No such provision is recorded of the Melchisedec order. This is a difference or contrast between the two priesthoods necessary to be observed (Numbers 3:1-3,10,32,38; 4:19,20; 1 Chronicles 6:3-15; 24:1-19; Ezra 2:36-39).

That much stress was laid on the keeping of genealogical records was shown at the time of the return from Babylon, when certain priests who could not show their register were debarred from the priesthood until a high priest authorised to make use of the Urim and Thummim could ascertain their line of descent (Ezra 2:61-63; Nehemiah 7:63-65). The Urim and Thummim was the name given to the high priest’s breastplate, or to something attached to it, used in the Most Holy to receive communications from God (Exodus 28:15-30).

It is thought that though Moses was privileged to hear a voice speaking from between the cherubim, yet in general the answers were received by the illumination of the different letters of the names of the twelve tribes written on the twelve precious stones of the breastplate, for this reason called “*the breastplate of judgment*”. God’s particularity in regard

to the priestly genealogy is shown by the fact that He required the Urim and Thummim to be invoked to determine whether those who claimed to be priests were entitled to recognition as such. At a later period Ezra, whose genealogy was undoubted, visited the Jews settled at Jerusalem, and was received as one with authority from God (Ezra 7:1-6,10; 9:1; 10:1-5).

The description, "*but made like unto the Son of God*", throws light on the proper way to regard a type. A type is not a standard to which the antitype must conform. To the contrary, the antitype is the standard to which the type is made to conform for the purpose of illustration. Melchisedec had no genealogy to recommend him as a Levitical priest. No lineage is recorded that could link him with any other people or priesthood. He stands out, a unique figure, separate and distinct from all other notable personages and tribes of ancient history. In all these things he was a type, in order that when Christ came the contrast between Christ and Aaron might be emphasised by reference to Melchisedec.

It has been asserted in some quarters that Melchisedec is not a type because Christ is said to belong to the order of Melchisedec; therefore that both are on the same plane. But when it is remembered that Melchisedec's was a priesthood exercised on earth along Old Testament lines of sacrifice, it is manifest that he can be no higher than a type of Christ's office in heaven on New Covenant lines, based on the offering of His own blood for our sins.

It may be asked if Melchisedec were a type in any other respects than those mentioned by the apostle whose point is that he united in himself both offices of king and priest, thus foreshadowing Christ, who is King as well as High Priest. It has been thought that possibly there was something typical in the bread and wine which Melchisedec placed before Abram in connection with the blessing and the payment of tithes. To this we reply that, in the absence of New Testament reference to this detail, we are not justified in considering it anything more than part of the blessing, or an exhibition of hospitality, since bread and wine were, in ancient times, the usual form of refreshment.

Under the Jewish Law, when a tithe was brought to the tabernacle or temple courts, the offerer was instructed to eat a portion thereof. This was considered as eating "*before the LORD*", and as His guest (Deuteronomy 12:17,18; 14:22-26). It may be that there was some such idea in the setting of bread and wine before Abram. But, as said before, in the absence of apostolic teaching that there was more significance in the act than the giving of a blessing and eating "*before the LORD*", it seems best to leave it at that.

#### **Abram Blessed by Melchisedec**

**7:4** Here the question as to whether Melchisedec was a human being is settled by describing him as a great man to whom Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.

**7:5** Under the Levitical Law the priests were authorised to take tithes from the members of the other eleven tribes. Inasmuch as they were all equally descendants of Abraham, this conferred a special dignity on the Levitical tribe.

**7:6,7** But Melchisedec occupied a still higher office than they, inasmuch as he took tithes from Abraham himself, and though Abraham was great by reason of the promises given, yet Melchisedec was greater still because he conferred the blessing on Abraham. That the less is blessed of the greater or better, is beyond dispute.

**7:8** "*And here*", that is, under the Law, men that die receive tithes, that is, the Levitical priesthood was composed of men who served for a time and then died (compare verse. 23), "*but there*", that is, under the Melchisedec arrangement, the witness is that Melchisedec lived; there is no witness or testimony or record of his death. The "*witness*" referred to is the statement of Genesis 14 that Melchisedec lived in Abraham's day, and fulfilled certain functions as a priest.

**7:9,10** Under the Law the Levites received tithes, but as Levi, the head of that tribe, was a descendant of Abraham, and since Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec, it may be said that Levi paid tithes to Melchisedec, literally, "*through Abraham*" (see Variorum footnote). So then if Melchisedec was greater than Abram whom he blessed, he was also greater than Levi. For, though Levi was at the time unborn, yet all the potentialities of his birth were in Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 17:4,16), to whom God had made the promise of a multitudinous posterity, in which the whole Levitical priesthood were included. The introduction of verse 9, "*And as I may go say*", shows that Paul was explaining the genealogical physical presence of Levi in Abraham at the time he paid tithes, just as in another connection he states that the whole race of mankind was in Adam, and that in Adam all have sinned, since all descended from him (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15: 21,22).

**7:11** The perfection here referred to is not the perfection of the people under the law, but rather the status of the law itself as a completely satisfactory arrangement. This is sound reasoning, “*Now if*” (RV) the Levitical priesthood were the best arrangement possible, what need would there be for a different high priest after a different order? And if in the psalms Christ was spoken of as High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, what need was there to say in plain words that He would not be of the order of Aaron? (See various authorities cited in Variorum footnote.) The very fact that a high priest was promised “*after the order of Melchisedec*” implied that the new high priest would not be of the order of Aaron.

Verse 11 affords an excellent answer to the claims of Seventh Day Adventists that “*the Law*” was not limited to the descendants of Jacob, and that the fourth commandment is for all time. Here is the positive statement that the Hebrews received the Law under the Levitical priesthood. The Levitical priesthood did not begin until after the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt, and Moses and Aaron were the members of that tribe and priesthood by whose hands the Law was given. Hence the whole Law, the ten commandments (including the fourth) as well as the portions written in the books, had its beginning in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 5:1-22).

Another evidence that the Law had its beginning in the wilderness is found in Galatians 3:17, “*the covenant that was confirmed before of God, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect*”. Here the law is definitely stated to have had its beginning centuries after Abraham’s day.

Another evidence is found in the wording of the fourth commandment. The compulsory rest is given as a reminder of Israel’s slavery in Egypt, as a sign or token of their deliverance to be God’s peculiar people; also as a memorial of creative rest (Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Exodus 20:8-11; 31:13-17). Stephen, in his last speech and denunciation of the Jews, related that Moses “*received the lively oracles to give unto us*”, and stressed the importance of Moses’ utterance concerning a greater prophet than himself who should arise, and whom they should hear and obey (Acts 7:37,38).

#### **Change of Priesthood Involves a Change of Law**

**7:12** If the Law Covenant was limited at its beginning by the fact that the priesthood under which it was given only came into existence after the deliverance from Egypt, more than 400 years after Abraham was blessed by Melchisedec. It is also true that the Law Covenant was not to endure forever, since a promise was made of a new and different order of priesthood.

The use of the words “*forever*” and “*perpetual*” in connection with the Sinaitic Law is sometimes thought to prove that it was for all time (Leviticus 6:18; 16:34; Exodus 31:16). The answer to this is that the Hebrew ‘*olam*’, rendered “*forever*” and “*perpetual*” does not contain within itself the thought of absolutely unending, as is usually the case with our English word ‘*forever*’, though even in English we often say, ‘*My boy is forever getting into mischief*’, when we do not mean absolutely without interruption or end, but merely frequently, or during the boyhood period of life.

As far as the Jews were concerned the Laws were ‘*forever*’ in that the people were given no option to discard them at any time near or remote. The Laws were absolutely binding upon them. But God had reserved to Himself the right to abolish the Law when its inadequacy to give life or bring in righteousness had been sufficiently demonstrated (Malachi 2:11-13,17; 3:7; 4:1). The Lord Jesus’ offering of a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice had been foretold (Psalm 40:6-8), thus early indicating God’s provision for a change from the Law Covenant with its sacrifices.

The Levitical priesthood having been associated with a certain ritual involving the sacrifice of animals, the recognition by God of another kind of sacrifice which the Levitical priesthood had not been authorised to present, namely, the sacrifice of the man Christ Jesus as an atonement for sin, proved that the priesthood must have been changed. And if the sacrifices for sin and the priesthood were changed, then necessarily the Law binding upon the people must have been changed also, particularly that portion of the Law relating to the duties of the priests, the tribe from which they were called and their terms of office.

And so the ‘*olam*’ priesthood of Exodus 29:9 is declared in Hebrews 7:12 to have come to an end, and been supplanted by a priesthood after the order of Melchisedec.

**7:13** The Lord Jesus, to whom Paul had said the promise of Psalm 110:4 was made, was not of the tribe of Levi, but of another tribe, which had no representative in the priesthood.

**7:14** Our Lord was born of the tribe of Judah, and Moses had founded no priesthood in that tribe (Matthew 2:1,5,6; Acts 13:22,23; Revelation 5:5).

**7:15** Two things are evident, so easily seen that they need only to be mentioned: first, that Christ sprang from Judah; and, second, that there was promised a priest after the similitude of Melchisedec. The word "*similitude*" here used suggests that Melchisedec was a type. And if this new high priest were of that similitude, He could not at the same time be after the similitude of Aaron in all particulars, since he has shown that Melchisedec and Aaron were unlike.

**7:16** He now (verses 16-28) mentions what in particular distinguished the two priesthoods. The Mosaic Law was made "*after the law of a carnal commandment*". The word "*carnal*" means simply 'fleshly'. It has taken on an evil meaning, no doubt because in Romans 8 the carnal or fleshly is contrasted with the spiritual, and the carnal mind is said to be at enmity with God (Romans 8:5-8; 1 Corinthians 3:3). In these cases the flesh stands for the depraved tastes of fallen human nature.

The Law given to the Jews was not carnal in itself, for Paul says "*the law is holy, and just, and good*" (Romans 7:12.) It was adapted to the purpose it was intended to serve. But it was a fleshly or carnal commandment in that its instruments and provisions were wholly of the flesh, fleshly high priests, ordinances pertaining to fleshly relations and acts, and attainments of fleshly virtues, as mentioned in 9:13, "*sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh*". Being carnal or fleshly, administered by fleshly, dying priests, and having to do with a nation of flesh condemned to death and continually passing into the grave, the Law could be only of a temporary kind.

### **The Power of an Endless Life**

Contrasted with this is the priesthood after the order of Melchisedec, "*made after the power of an endless life*", as expressed in the promise;

**7:17** "*For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*" With an endless life the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec can accomplish more than could the priests under the Law. But even the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, our Lord Jesus, could have accomplished little under the Law Covenant (Luke 5:36-39).

**7:18** For Him to operate to advantage there must be a new law, and so there is a '*disannulling*' of the commandment or law that preceded the promise of the new High Priest after the order of Melchisedec. It is disannulled, or cancelled, because of "*the weakness and unprofitableness thereof*". Romans 8:3 explains that the Law was "*weak through the flesh*". That is, the Law was beyond the capacity of fallen beings to fulfil; it did not meet their needs (Romans 7:7-24).

**7:19** "*For the law made nothing perfect.*" It did not purge the conscience, nor enable those under it to perform perfect works (Hebrews 9:14; James 2:10,11). Nor did the Law make anything perfect in the sense of complete or finished. It was unsatisfactory in every respect. Another agency was required to make things complete and satisfactory. As he says, "*and a bringing in thereupon of a better hope*".

The High Priest of the New Covenant after the order of Melchisedec is the "*better hope*" referred to. Bringing in this High Priest does make perfect by providing a complete and satisfactory arrangement, and it does also make complete and satisfactory to God those who come to Him through this new High Priest (Hebrews 10:14), "*By the which [by this new High Priest, this new hope, and this new arrangement or covenant] we draw nigh unto God*" (Hebrews 7:19).

The suggested marginal reading, that the Law was the bringing in of a better hope, fits none of the facts. Galatians 3:24 speaks of the Law as a pedagogue, or servant, to lead them to Christ. It served a useful purpose in keeping the Jews together as a nation, by whom the scriptures were preserved, so that a people was ready and waiting for the Messiah, but their general condition was that of prisoners in a pit wherein is no water (Zechariah 9:11; John 4:14; 7:37; Isaiah 55:1). What gave the Jews hope were the prophecies and promises, quite apart from the Law, for they found the latter to be an instrument of despair and death (Romans 7). Hence the apostle meant to convey that the bringing in of the High Priest of the New Covenant does make possible the perfecting of those for whom He serves. The Revised Version is superior to the KJV in verses 18 and 19.

### **The Oath and the Surety**

**7:20-22** Another superiority of the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec over the high priests of the Levitical order is that the latter were made without an oath. God did not swear to an oath each time one Levitical priest succeeded another, nor even when that priesthood was first instituted.

Paul had spoken of the appointment of Christ as the High Priest of the New Covenant after the order of Melchisedec. Now he caps the climax by showing that so important was this new priesthood that God swore to it with an oath, thus placing the Melchisedec priesthood more nearly on a level with the promise to Abraham, sworn to by an oath, than with the Mosaic or Levitical arrangement where an oath was deemed unnecessary.

Now comes the first mention of a new testament, more exactly translated covenant, in connection with the new High Priest. This proves that the Law mentioned in verse 12 as having been "*changed*" was the Law Covenant as a whole. The Levitical priesthood was linked up with the Old or Law Covenant, and a change in one necessarily involved a change in the other.

Hence the clincher of the apostle's argument (verse 22), that Jesus as the High Priest of a greater order than that of Aaron is necessarily associated with a greater and better Covenant than the Law Covenant. Chapter 8 explains what that greater and better Covenant is, namely, the New Covenant.

Jesus was "*made a surety*". By His death our Lord Jesus paid the price of our sins, and His blood sealed, or put the proper signature on, the New Covenant (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20). But by His resurrection and investiture as High Priest of the New Covenant He became the surety of that New Covenant. A 'surety' is a bondsman, one pledged to see that certain agreed-upon arrangements or contracts are carried out. Therefore as High Priest our Lord is now pledged to carry out the provisions of the New Covenant.

Some Bible students think that the covenant of which Jesus is surety is the Abrahamic covenant. But such a view is contradicted by the apostle, for in chapter 8 he immediately associates Jesus as High Priest with the New Covenant. A little thought will show that the Abrahamic covenant cannot possibly be meant here. There was no priesthood attached to the Abrahamic covenant. Though Abraham, as the head of his family, offered sacrifices to God, according to the manner of the time, and to that extent served as priest on behalf of his family and household (Genesis 12:8; 18:19), yet that priestly service was unconnected with the promise of Genesis 12:1-3, the offering of sacrifices having been his privilege while yet in Mesopotamia, before ever he was called of God to go over into Canaan.

The Abrahamic promise contains no mention of priesthood, the forgiveness of sins, or reconciliation with God. It was merely an instrument guaranteeing that the Seed (through whom the promise of blessing of all the families of the earth should be made effective) would come of his line. And so Christ did come, through Isaac, Jacob, David, and finally the virgin of the tribe of Judah. Jesus Christ was the Seed by whom the promise of a blessing should be fulfilled.

And it requires no deep searching to see that the New Covenant is vastly superior to the Abrahamic Covenant, as it is also superior to the Law Covenant, in this respect: that it provides for man's need of cleansing from sin and deliverance from death, our New Covenant High Priest being surety that every provision contained in the New Covenant of mercy and blessing shall be carried out.

### **Many High Priests Versus One High Priest**

**7:23** Another distinction between the Melchisedec priesthood and the Levitical priesthood is that under the Law Covenant there were many priests, since death intervened in every case to remove even the longest-lived occupant of the office. There was a fairly regular succession of high priests, totalling scores in all, from Aaron to Caiaphas (Luke 3:2; Joshua 21:13-19; 1 Chronicles 24:1-19; Nehemiah 7:39-42).

**7 24** But the High Priest of the New Covenant, Christ Jesus, "*continueth ever*". He is immortal, invisible, established in the heavens at the Father's right hand. Hence His priestly office is uninterrupted by death, and there is no necessity to pass the office on to a successor. Like the Melchisedec of Genesis 14, our Lord Jesus Christ is sole occupant of the office, and there is no danger that any of His work will lapse through divided services or the termination of His life.

**7:25** *“Wherefore [for this reason] he is able also to save them to the uttermost [or, evermore] that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”.* In this we have a statement of the two functions associated with the office of the New Covenant High Priest: (1) as Mediator by whom approach is made to God, and through whom the favour of God is maintained; (2) as Comforter and Intercessor on behalf of repentant sinners.

As members of a sinful race under condemnation, none of us may approach God directly. We have always to *“come unto God by Him”*, whether in our first coming or in any subsequent coming. And the advantage we have in our High Priest is that He ever lives to perform this service of reconciliation and blessing. When we first come to God through Christ we receive the forgiveness of sins, but as we are still in the imperfect flesh we cannot do perfect works, and constantly need His intercession as Mediator and High Priest concerning all subsequent transgressions (1 John 1:7-10; 2:1, 2).

The fact of the sin offering having been made is the basis of reconciliation with God. But that fact alone is not sufficient to effect the reconciliation in the case of the individual sinner. Nor is the reconciliation a mechanical affair, like a machine automatically recording acceptance and forgiveness, as some would have us believe who discountenance all thought of intimately personal relations with Christ our High Priest.

Our present text gives us to understand that Jesus our High Priest is interested in each one personally and individually who desires to approach God through Him. This personal interest was manifested by the Levitical high priests, as the ordinances of the Law show. Our Lord Jesus is not less sympathetic nor less able to know and deal personally with each one of the billions of earth for whom He died.

We may not with our finite minds and other human limitations be able to comprehend how He can remember every individual member of the race and give to each His personal attention, but we have the assurance of the scriptures that He does do so, just as a shepherd knows every sheep in his flock, though there be hundreds and all look much alike (Leviticus chapters 13 and 14; Hebrews 5:2; John 10:3,14).

**7:26** *“For such an high priest became us”*, or is suitable to us, meets our needs. Our Lord Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners while on earth (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22,23), but the reference here is to His position now as High Priest of the New Covenant, ever living, and *“made higher than the heavens”*.

Our Lord Jesus entered heaven itself as a place, and is seated at the right hand of God; not seated in the sense of idly doing nothing, but in the sense of occupying a position of power and authority, as on a throne (Revelation 3:21). No earthly king sits daily and hourly in the regal chair literally. To occupy the throne means that he exercises the functions of a sovereign. So our Lord Jesus is not literally confined to some particular piece of heavenly furniture, but with freedom of movement exercises the functions of King as well as of High Priest.

Our Lord is also *“higher than the heavens”* in that He is superior to all other creatures in heaven or under heaven, as already set forth in chapter 1 of this book; also in Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:15-18; 3:1; 1 Timothy 6:14-16. All *“angels and authorities and powers”* were made subject to Him when God raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand (1 Peter 3:22).

### **Many Offerings Versus One Offering**

**7:27** Two more important contrasts between our Lord as High Priest of the New Covenant and the Levitical high priests are now defined: first, in regard to the repeated offerings required under the Law; and second, concerning the Levitical high priest's need to offer for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people; that is, the Israelites.

In verse 25 Jesus Christ the New Covenant High Priest is described as able to save forever them that come unto God by Him. No distinction is made of nation, rank, or gender, of priests, Levites, or common people, as was made under the Law Covenant. In great detail the Law laid down sin and trespass offerings on a graduated scale of value to be offered according to the rank and wealth of the offerer (Leviticus, chapters 1 to 5). Under the New Covenant, these distinctions are ignored. All for whom He serves are placed on the one level, as sinners requiring to come unto God by Him, to be interceded for by Him.

The Levitical high priest offered up daily sacrifices. Each day was opened and closed by the whole burnt offering of a lamb, special days by two or more lambs. These were followed by the thousands of offerings brought by the people, not only sin and trespass offerings, but also thank and vow offerings. From morning till night the high priest was busy, with the assistance of under-priests and Levites, performing the service of God in tabernacle or temple. We may also take 'daily' to mean continually: from one end of the year to the other (Exodus 29:38).

Contrasted with these many offerings is the one offering under the High Priest of the New Covenant.

#### **For His Own Sins and for the People's**

When Aaron and his sons were consecrated for the service, offerings were made for their sins. Before they were ready to make atonement for the sins of the nation, their own sins had to be atoned for (Leviticus 8:9). On the eighth day further sacrifices were made for them, and then the congregation was called to draw near (Leviticus 9:1-7). Aaron then made an offering of a calf for himself, and of the goat the people had brought as a sin offering (Leviticus 9:8-15). Later, burnt offerings and peace offerings were made, and the pieces waved, and, finally, Moses and Aaron lifted up their hands and blessed the people.

This same distinction between priests and people and the sacrifices offered for each separately was observed after the return from the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 6:20).

But it was on the Day of Atonement that the distinction between priesthood and people was most clearly defined, as described in Leviticus 16. Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 16:2; Hebrews 9:7), was the high priest enjoined to enter the Most Holy with the blood of atonement to be sprinkled on the mercy seat.

The first offering (of a bullock) is described as "*for himself*", that is, on his behalf, and the words immediately following, "*and make an atonement for himself and for his house*", indicate that the under-priests and Levites were included, the whole Levitical tribe being thus separated from the people in general by a sacrifice offered specially for them (Leviticus 16:6). The one bullock sufficed for the whole tribe. Since the priests and Levites were set over the people as God's special representatives, this arrangement was probably made in order to preserve their standing and separateness.

Afterward the offering of a goat "*for the people*" (that is, on their behalf), and the sending away of the scape-goat, took place. The distinction between the high priest, his household, and the congregation is mentioned again in Leviticus 16:17).

Our authority for including under-priests and Levites as part of "*himself*" in Leviticus 16:6 is not only the wording of this text but also the statement of Numbers 18:6 that the Levites had been given to Aaron as a gift to assist at the services. Moreover, as the head of the tribe, Aaron might rightly be said to include in himself all of its members, just as the whole tribe was contained in Levi, and Levi was counted as in Abraham when he paid the tithes to Melchisedec. In Hebrews 7:27 the apostle omits reference to the Levitical priesthood as separate from the high priest. Following the example of Leviticus 16, he includes under-priests and Levites in the phrase "*his own*".

But in the offering of the High Priest of the New Covenant there is, as we suggest in the comment on verse 25, no such division between the Levitical tribe and the other eleven tribes of Israel. Our Lord Jesus Christ as High Priest of a new order and a New Covenant is not bound by the ritual of the Mosaic Law. Nor was He obliged, as was the high priest under the Law Covenant, to make first an offering for His individual sins.

**7:28** Under the Law the high priests were men having infirmity, and consequently an offering for themselves was appropriate and necessary. But "*the word of the oath, which was since the law*" establishes the Son as the High Priest of the New Covenant and in that office, as both King and High Priest, He is perfected, complete (marginal reading), all-sufficient for evermore.

Our blessed Lord as New Covenant High Priest made no offering for His own sins, for He had none. And that offering which He did make, of Himself "*once for all*" (Hebrews 10:10-12), also differed from the Levitical double offering of bullock and goat in that the one offering of His own flesh on the cross was the forever complete and satisfactory offering for the sins of the whole world. No longer is a distinction made between various classes and tribes as was done under the Law Covenant. Now, under the New Covenant, all men are invited to come to the one Mediator and Intercessor, who ever lives to cleanse their consciences and perfect in them the sanctifying work which sets them apart to the service of God.



### **“For This He Did Once”**

Since the New Covenant offering for sin, the man Christ Jesus, is one offering for all people for all time, and since the High Priest of the New Covenant, our Lord Jesus, in one act symbolically “*sprinkled*” His blood before the Father (Hebrews 1:3), are we justified in saying that the bullock and the goat of the Atonement Day sacrifices under the Law have, either or both, no antitype?

No: we are not justified in denying or interfering with the integrity of the type. The type must be explained in view of its fulfilment in the antitype. “*This he did once*” (Hebrews 7:27) we take to mean that the New Covenant High Priest did all that was involved in the double sacrifice of bullock and goat, and is therefore the antitype of both these as well as of all the other sin offerings under the Law.

This is brought out in 9:12 and 10:4, where the blood of bulls and of goats together is compared with the blood of Jesus. As the blood of bullock and goat made atonement for all Israel, including the high priest, so the blood of Christ made atonement for the sins of all people, but Himself personally, the New Covenant High Priest, is excluded, since He had no sin.

Christ’s blood of sacrifice is not divided, but is one complete whole, and efficacious for all men who draw near to God through Him, without respect of colour, nationality, station, wealth, or time.

### **A Priest on a Throne**

The ancient Melchisedec was distinguished from the Levitical high priests in that while the latter were priests only, the governing or kingly authority being vested in the heads of the tribes and afterward in their kings, Melchisedec was simultaneously both king and high priest.

When our Lord Jesus is described as High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, we see in Him a Priest who is also King, differing therefore in that respect from the Levitical high priests. Hence, in this particular, Aaron is not a type of Christ, but Melchisedec is. The respects in which Aaron is a type of Christ are brought out in chapter 9.

### **Under-Priests**

The Jewish high priest alone went into the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement. None of the under priests was suffered to enter with him. From 1 Peter 2:9 we learn that the Church of believers of the Gospel Age are “*a royal priesthood*”, hence under-priests. But they do not, like their High Priest, offer an atoning sacrifice. He alone shed His blood for sin, and when He cried on the cross, “*It is finished*”, the sacrifice was fully made.

There have been and are to be no additions to that sacrifice for sin. When He appeared in the Most Holy, even heaven itself, it was the blood of His own sacrificed human flesh that was accepted by the Father as cleansing away the sin from the anti-typical mercy seat, as stated in 1:3.

None of the under priests of the Mosaic regime was allowed to enter the Most Holy with the blood of the atoning sacrifice. The offering of the atonement day sacrifice was the duty of the high priest alone. The under priests remained without to receive the blessing after the high priest had sprinkled the blood and was ready to bless all the waiting ones, priests, Levites, and people. So in the antitype, the one offering of Jesus Christ is the only sin offering.

The offerings made by the “*royal priesthood*” are not sin offerings, but the worship of the heart and consistent conduct in the life. They are defined by Peter as being “*spiritual sacrifices*”, and the purpose of their calling is explained to be to “*shew forth the praises [margin, virtues] of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*” (1 Peter 2:9). Paul describes the offerings of these under-priests as “*the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name*” (Hebrews 13:15).

As under-priests we were chosen by our High Priest after He himself had purchased our race by the payment of the ransom price, after He had ratified the New Covenant by the shedding of His precious blood, after He had been exalted to the right hand of the Father, and after He had by Himself “*made a purification of sins*” (Hebrews 1:3).

The purpose to have an under-priesthood was in the Father’s mind from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), but no individuals were permanently chosen for the position until after the High Priest had been installed in office. Not until the Lord had accomplished all this, was the Holy Spirit poured out upon the disciples waiting in the upper room (Acts 2). They were the first to come to God through Him for reconciliation, and on the same terms as are set before all other men, namely, the terms of the New Covenant, of which the Lord spoke at the last supper, and which Paul proceeds to dilate upon in chapter 8.

## Chapter 8

### THE NEW COVENANT

Having followed the apostle's reasoning through seven chapters, and having, we trust, discerned its drift and its true significance from point to point, we are prepared for the summing up of his argument.

**8:1** *"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum."* The Revised Version and many commentators prefer, *"In the things which we are saying [or, in my explanation], the chief point is this"*. The whole of chapter 8 is devoted to the emphasising of this chief point or sum total of his discourse, the most prominent features being:

- (a) Christ our High Priest, not Aaron, not Melchisedec;
- (b) In the heavens, not on earth as they were;
- (c) But after the order of Melchisedec, since Christ the High Priest occupies a throne, *"sat down [literal rendering] on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty [God the Father] in the heavens"*.

**8:2** Being a High Priest, our Lord must serve. The word 'minister' means 'servant'. He has also a *"tabernacle"*, and *"holy things"* (see margin). Therefore we have:

- (d) *Christ "a servant of holy things and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man"*. Of this *"tabernacle"* more explanation is given by Paul in chapters 9 and 10.

**8:3** That Christ is a servant is evident from the fact that *"every high priest is ordained [that is, appointed] to offer gifts and sacrifices"*. To be a true High Priest, to rightly deserve and wear the title, *"It is of necessity that this man [Christ Jesus] have somewhat also to offer"*. What Christ offered is explained in 9:12; 10:5-10. He offered His human body on the cross, and after His resurrection the blood of that offering was in an antitypical manner *"sprinkled"* before God, when He appeared in the presence of God (compare with 1:3). We therefore add the fifth prominent feature of the sum:

- (e) Christ was appointed as High Priest for the purpose of making an offering acceptable to God.

**8:4** Ancient manuscripts, including the oldest two (the Sinaitic and the Vatican), begin verse 4 with *"Nay if"*, more impressive than *"For if"*. If Christ as High Priest were on earth, he could not offer gifts [literally, 'the gifts'] under the Mosaic Law, because there were already high priests appointed for that purpose, of the tribe of Levi and family of Aaron. And they offered gifts as prescribed in the Law Covenant.

**8:5** These Levitical high priests served *"unto the example and shadow"*. Being but illustrations of something better to come, they were not the real thing. This is proven by God's admonition to Moses to make all things according to the pattern shown him in the mount, for that pattern pertained to the construction of the type, as Moses afterward erected it (Exodus 25:40; Numbers 8:4; Acts 7:44).

#### Jesus Now Mediator of the New Covenant

**8:6** *"But now hath he [our High Priest] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant."* A Variorum footnote explains this language to mean 'his ministry is as much more excellent as the covenant is better'. This gives us three more principal features to add to our list:

- (f) Christ's ministry, or service, is more excellent than was that of the Jewish high priest. The reasons why it is better are that -
- (g) He serves under a better covenant, and -
- (h) He is the Mediator of that better covenant. The very fact that Jesus is Mediator of this better covenant is proof that His office is different from Aaron's, for Aaron was not mediator of the Law Covenant. Moses occupied that office, and in chapter 9:19 the apostle has more to say about Moses, the mediator between God and Israel, as a type of Christ: when he sprinkled both the book of the Law and all the people.

The 9th principal feature of the *"sum"* concludes verse 6:

- (i) The *"better Covenant"* *"was established upon better promises."*

In the face of the very positive statements of verse 6, it is difficult to understand how any Christian can dispute the fact that our Lord is now serving in the capacity of Mediator of the New Covenant. The contrast is plain and distinct between the two ministries or services, the particular service referred to being that of offering a sacrifice (verse 3).

Not being able to offer under the ordinances of the Jewish Law, our Lord, if He offered at all, must do so according to some other arrangement (7:12), and here the apostle tells us what that other arrangement is, namely, a new covenant, a covenant as explicit and as real as the Law Covenant, but a much better one. And the reason it is better is because it is founded on better promises. Moreover, this better covenant was not some ancient covenant revamped, but an entirely new one, since Jesus is called its Mediator, and since the Mediator of a covenant is the one who inaugurates it by acting as intermediary between the parties to the covenant or agreement.

This is the first mention in the book of Hebrews of our Lord as Mediator of the New Covenant, but we have it on the authority of Paul's own words (verse 1) that this is one of the chief points he was aiming at in the lengthy explanations preceding. And though he does not use the word 'new' in verse 6, he makes it plain in verses 7 to 13 and 9:15 that it is the New Covenant he has in mind as the "*better covenant*".

Verse 6 does not say that our Lord's mediatorial work is deferred to a future date, but that it had already commenced. The whole of His service as High Priest was dependent upon a better covenant than the Law Covenant. It was only in accordance with the terms of the New Covenant that His service, the offering of Himself as the sacrifice for sin, could be of avail to the condemned Jew under the curse of the Law. As Hebrews 9:15 states, "*for this cause he is the mediator of the new covenant, that ... they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance*".

Furthermore, the tense of the verb in the last clause of 8:6, "*which was established*", indicates that the New Covenant was established before Paul wrote, the Greek literally being, "*hath been established*". The establishment of the New Covenant was already, when Paul wrote, an accomplished fact.

### **The First and the Second**

**8:7** "*For*", or because, connects verse 7 with verse 6. Verse 7 is the statement of a self-evident truth, "*if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second*". The fact that a second has been inaugurated, a "*place*" having been 'found' for it, is evidence that the first was faulty. If a thing is satisfactory all round, there is no need to seek a substitute or successor, but if an arrangement is found not to work well, those concerned will be on the lookout for a better one.

God, who knows the end from the beginning, had foreseen the unsatisfactoriness of the Law Covenant, and in His plan He had arranged for a second covenant to follow it, but the Jews took some centuries to realise the respects in which the Law Covenant fell short of their requirements, and even in our Lord's day, when He pointed out the advantages of the new arrangement, the scribes and Pharisees still contended that the old was better (Luke 5:36-39).

The terms "*first*" and "*second*" are applied to the Law and the New Covenant, respectively, in 10:9 as well as in 8:7. The "*second*" necessarily follows the "*first*", or it would not be the "*second*". This is proof that the "*better covenant*" of which Paul spoke was one which followed the Law, and not one which preceded it. The only covenant mentioned in scripture to follow the Law Covenant is the New Covenant. And of this New Covenant Jesus said His blood was the seal, "*This is my blood of the new testament [that is, 'covenant'], which is shed for many*" (Mark 14:24; compare with Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20).

### **Finding Fault with Them**

**8:8** According to this, "*finding fault with them*", the difficulty was not so much in the Law Covenant itself as in the people. They had solemnly agreed to keep the Law, but had not done so. This failure was due in many cases to rebelliousness or indifference, but not in every case. The most sincere Jew, with his best efforts, could not keep the Law, because the Law required perfection, and in their imperfect state they were unable to measure up to that. As Romans 8:3 says, the Law was "*weak through the flesh*".

God was continually finding fault with the children of Israel. Not that He desired to do so, or took pleasure in it. He would have preferred to see them more faithful in the performance of their side of the covenant, and not requiring reproof and chastisement. But from the very start the people proved to be stiff-necked, hard-hearted, and selfish, and in their

interest the Lord raised up prophets and leaders to persuade them to forsake their evil ways and adhere to their contract. And when persuasion and kindness proved to be inadequate, He used sterner measures as detailed in Leviticus 26 and other prophecies.

Malachi, one of the last of the prophets, is almost wholly devoted to fault-finding. John the Baptist's mission consisted largely in reproofs and reproaches, denunciations and threats, to arouse the people to a sense of their shortcomings and their need of Him who was to come after. And our Lord, from the beginning of His ministry to the end, found it necessary to rebuke the backsliders and covenant breakers, and to warn the sincere-hearted against the vain traditions and false philosophy of the leading teachers of the day.

The Israelites cannot say that they were insufficiently warned, pleaded with, and given fresh opportunities for improvement after chastisement for their faults. *"All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people"*, the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah (Romans 10:21; Isaiah 65:2).

Jeremiah pointed out their faults in great detail, but he was also used to record the briefest statement of God's complaint against them (Jeremiah 31:32), *"which my covenant they brake"*. All their wrongdoings, their idolatry, rebellion, iniquities, transgressions and sins of whatsoever sort, were comprehended in those five words. This brief statement of God's complaint was accompanied by the positive statement of His purpose to bring in a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). And it is this passage from Jeremiah (31:31-34) that Paul now quotes (Hebrews 8:8-12), and links with his argument concerning Christ as High Priest and Mediator of a better covenant than the Law. Our Lord's service as High Priest is in accordance with the terms and conditions of this *"second"* covenant (the New Covenant), and not in accordance with the *"first"* covenant (the Law Covenant), which Israel broke.

This should have been good news to the Jews, but their hearts were hardened and their eyes blinded, so that only a few pious ones had faith and hope stirred by this precious promise through Jeremiah.

#### **When did the Law become Old?**

**8:13** Since verses 8-12 should be examined in sequence, and verse 13 is a comment on the word *"new"* in verse 8, we take it out of its proper order for the purpose of clearness. *"In that he saith a new covenant, he hath made the first old."* This answers our question. It was the announcement of the New Covenant that made the first or Law Covenant old. Had no new covenant been in prospect, the Law Covenant would not have been thought of as less than everlasting, and the coming of Christ with a new covenant would have been a complete surprise. But the assertion that a new covenant would be brought in apprised the Jews in Jeremiah's day that the Law Covenant would be superseded, hence, from that time the Law Covenant was *"old."*

The word *"old"* means more than ancient or venerable, as we learn from verse 13, *"Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away"*. This is the statement of a truism, as applied to garments, fruit, vegetables, and other things with which we have to do in daily life. They *"perish in the using"* (Colossians 2:22). And as shoes and other articles show signs of wear, the owner is reminded of the necessity of replacing them with new ones.

The mere fact, then, that God promised a new covenant, thus making the first old, should have convinced the Jews, from Jeremiah's day onward, that the Law Covenant would ultimately be done away with, and they should have sought for the reasons for the change. Had they done so, they would have seen the absurdity of expecting God to continue fulfilling His side of the covenant when they were so careless and indifferent over performing their part of the agreement, and they would have been glad that God could and would devise a way by which their sins of daily occurrence, but particularly their sin of covenant-breaking, could be dealt with more advantageously to themselves than was possible under the Law. Instead of tenaciously clinging to the Law, and loading it with interpretations and 'traditions', they would have searched their scriptures for more about the New Covenant and the Mediator who would proclaim its inauguration. Thus the Messiah would have been associated in their minds with the forgiveness of sins as well as with the office of Prince.

To *"vanish away"*, if spoken of decayed fruit and vegetables, signifies a quick process, since they are largely composed of water, and when they are thrown on the ground ants and other creatures make short work of the solid portions. A garment will 'vanish' when the moths have their way for any length of time. Even an old house will 'vanish' through the effect of weather and the depredations of fuel seekers.

But the thought of decay or corruption is not necessarily implied in this verse. The Revised Version renders it, that which is "*becoming old and waxeth aged*". Many old articles do not vanish by decay but by being deliberately put into the fire or buried in the earth when their usefulness has passed. The Law Covenant was finally disposed of by being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). By that means it "*vanished*" as an agreement or understanding between God and the nation of Israel. It had served various purposes (Galatians 3:19-25; Romans 7:7-13), but its ineffectiveness had been increasingly manifest from Jeremiah's day onward.

To use another figure, it had been falling to pieces by reason of the Jew's failure to keep their part of the covenant, but it had been held together by God, who persisted in carrying out His side of the covenant. But finally God sent His Son with the New Covenant offer, and the Law Covenant was then, as already stated, finally disposed of by God, who had full authority to do so, nailing it to the cross of Calvary.

Any Christians who claim that the Law Covenant, or any portion of it, is still in operation are mistaken. Romans 7:1-6 states that the Law is dead, and hence the Jews who had been "*married*" to that Law were free to unite with Christ and the New Covenant.

To return now to verses 8-12, all but the first seven words of verse 8 are a quotation of the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the New Covenant.

### **Behold the Days Come**

Not noticing that this is a quotation from Jeremiah, and that Jeremiah wrote more than 600 years before Christ, some Bible students take these words to mean that the prophecy had not been fulfilled in any particular up to the time this epistle was written, and that the New Covenant therein spoken of will not come into operation until our Lord's second advent.

Such a claim has no support whatever in scripture, and is directly contradicted by the apostle in the book of Hebrews. For we must remember that he is now giving the "*main point*", the climax, the sum, or summing up, of his argument through seven chapters. And in verse 6 he states that the New Covenant is in force, that Jesus is its Mediator, and that His ministry as High Priest is as much more excellent than Aaron's as the New Covenant is better than the old, because the New Covenant was established upon better promises.

Paul then quotes Jeremiah to show that this New Covenant had been foretold in the prophets, and had come to pass exactly as foretold. "*Behold, the days come*", said Jeremiah. Those days came 600 years later, when Jesus was made Mediator of that New Covenant and began to bring about the reconciliation between God and those who would come to God through Him, and to these He gave the assurance of sins forgiven, as promised in the New Covenant (Matthew 9:2-8).

When the apostles quote a prophecy and apply it to their own time, or show that its fulfilment began in their day, true disciples of Christ will not seek to disparage their interpretation and relegate the fulfilment to a future date. As a matter of fact, the New Covenant covers two ages, the Gospel Age beginning at the first advent, and the Kingdom Age following the Gospel Age.

### **The Houses of Israel and Judah**

If that is so, why does the prophecy say, "*with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah*", as though the operation of the New Covenant were limited to these tribes alone? And if it applies now, where are the two houses, Israel and Judah, to be found?

These are good questions, and the scriptures furnish the answers.

The house of Israel, as it was originally constituted, was composed of the twelve sons of Jacob, afterward called Israel, and their wives and descendants. The twelve tribes formed one nation of Israel. Each of the tribes had its own head or prince for the oversight of local affairs, but over all was the same Law, and the same high priest served for all, God Himself being the Supreme Ruler and Director. In the days of Samuel the people clamoured for a king like those of the Gentile nations, and sorrowfully the Lord permitted the change, safeguarding them to the extent of choosing the ruler for them, first Saul, afterward David and his heirs.

It was not till the rebellion of Jeroboam that a distinction was made as between the house of Israel and the house of Judah, and this distinction was made necessary in order to distinguish between the confederacy of tribes formed by the rebels, with their false worship set up at Bethel and Dan, and those tribes which adhered to God, and maintained the true worship at Jerusalem. The former was composed of ten tribes, and because of their numbers retained

the title 'house of Israel' while the latter, composed only of Judah and Benjamin, a considerable number of priests and Levites, and a few from the other tribes, took on the title 'house of Judah', because Judah was the principal tribe. It was the royal tribe, and within its borders was the sacred temple.

At the time Jeremiah wrote, the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, which had endured for a considerable time, was no longer established in Samaria, the Assyrians having overthrown the kingdom and taken the people captive to Assyria, leaving the kingdom of Judah still established, though in a restricted area. And now Jeremiah was sent as a warning voice admonishing Judah to reform, for it had fallen into ways very much like those of the apostate Israel, idolatry and sin of all kinds.

And through Jeremiah the Lord expresses His intense dissatisfaction and His determination to punish the two-tribe kingdom as He had punished the ten-tribe kingdom: by bringing enemies against it who would destroy their cities and carry them into captivity (2 Kings 23:27; 17:18-23). And so it came to pass, Nebuchadnezzar being the instrument employed, and Babylon the place of bondage.

So, then, when we read in Jeremiah 31:31 that God purposed to make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, the application is to those two houses or kingdoms into which the original twelve-tribe kingdom had been divided. Had the Lord at that time used only the appellation house of Israel, meaning all the tribes, the Jews would have understood it in its limited sense of the ten-tribe kingdom, and excluding themselves. Had the Lord said 'house of Judah' only, that would have cut off hope from any descendants of the ten-tribe kingdom who might in later years repudiate the backsliding sins of their ancestors. But by saying "*house of Israel and house of Judah*", the Jews of Jeremiah's day and all subsequently would understand that the perversity of ancestors would deprive no descendant of Jacob of the blessing God proposed to extend in the New Covenant.

But because Jeremiah spoke of the New Covenant as being made with Israel and Judah, who were separated at the time Jeremiah wrote, it is not necessary to assume that they would continue as separate kingdoms up to the very inauguration of the New Covenant. The ten-tribe kingdom was not restored, consequently the term 'house of Israel' lost its meaning as applied to them, especially when they became absorbed by the Gentiles among whom they were settled by their captors (2 Kings 17:6; 18:9-12). Those who were not so absorbed were able, they and their descendants, when the passing years brought greater leniency towards them, to return and settle again in Palestine, but when so doing they came more or less under the jurisdiction of Judah, where the sovereignty adhered.

And the name 'house of Israel' came gradually to be applied to the house of Judah as being (as it were) the residuary legatee of all the arrangements and promises originally given to the Israelitish nation from Moses to David.

Its right to the name was also established by the fact that, on several occasions when reforms were instituted in Judah, the reformers extended their operations to Samaria and called upon all the people, both of the ten tribes and the two tribes, to return to and worship the true God in the prescribed manner at Jerusalem. The great Passovers celebrated by the good Kings Hezekiah and Josiah were occasions for such a uniting of all the godly of all the tribes (2 Chronicles 29:1 to 31:20; 2 Kings 23:1-25).

Examples in the Old Testament of the use of the name Israel for Judah and Benjamin (the two-tribes), with the Levites who dwelt among them, are found in Ezra 3:1 and Nehemiah 7:73. This was after the return from Babylon.

Ezekiel, who prophesied during the captivity, foretold this very thing (Ezekiel 37:15-19). True, some expositors place the fulfilment of this prophecy in the Kingdom Age, but that doubtless is through failure to notice how God brought the believing ones together again at Jerusalem after the return under the decree of Cyrus and during the centuries following. Not that they necessarily all resided in the territory restored by Cyrus. The one-ness of the twelve tribes was expressed by the one-ness of worship at Jerusalem, and by the acknowledgment of Yahweh as the true God.

To go up to Jerusalem three times a year, as required by the Law, kept an Israelite in good standing regardless of his dwelling place. Yet some descendants of the dispersed ten tribes did actually go back in order to be near the house of God. Anna the prophetess was of the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36). Several of the apostles were Galileans (Luke 5:1-11; 22:59). At the feasts worshippers came from all parts of the then known world, some of them from

Media, where some of the ten-tribe captives had been colonised (Acts 2:9-11). Our Lord said He was sent to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel, in which term He included Judah and Benjamin, where much of His preaching was done. On the Day of Pentecost Peter called all present "*Ye men of Israel*", thus including under the national name Israel all who had come to worship, including the Judeans (verse 14). On this point there can be no mistake, for Peter accused the "*men of Israel*" of crucifying the Lord "*by wicked hands*", yet the perpetrators of that crime were principally Judeans.

It is clear, then, that Ezekiel's prophecy that the ten-tribe and two-tribe kingdoms would become one was fulfilled in the period subsequent to the restoration of the Jews to their own land after the Babylonian captivity. And by bringing together to worship at Jerusalem all of faith from all the tribes in the centuries following, the LORD kept them in touch with Himself, and so had a people prepared to receive the Messiah, the greater David (Ezekiel 37:24), and ready to enter into the New Covenant when it would be opened to them by the preaching of the Lord and the apostles (Ezekiel 37:20-28).

In his letter to the Romans Paul uses the term "*Jew*" interchangeably with "*Israelite*". The Jews had much advantage, chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God, he says in Romans 3: 1 and 2, while in Romans 9:4 he says the covenants and promises of God pertained to the Israelites, whom he calls his kinsmen, he being of the tribe of Benjamin. In Romans 10:12 he says there is now no difference between Jew and Greek, using the term Jew to cover all Israelites, for further down (verses 19 to 21) prophecies concerning Israel are applied to these Jews.

Let us recognise fulfilments of prophecy which have taken place rather than ignore these fulfilments and become false teachers by applying them to the future. Particular care is necessary where so important a subject as the New Covenant is concerned.

#### **Because They Continued Not**

**8:9** The New Covenant differs from the covenant God made with the fathers when they were led out of Egypt. Now the reason is given why a New Covenant was required: "*because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the LORD*". As given in the KJV rendering of Jeremiah 31:32, from which Paul quotes, this sentence reads, "*which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD*", and the margin reads, "*should I have continued an husband unto them*". The Lord and the apostles often quoted from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the scriptures in use by the Greek-speaking Jews. So Paul in this case quotes. It is a question of the best rendering of the Hebrew. The LORD God frequently spoke of Himself as the husband of Israel, and of their covenant breaking as unfaithfulness. The two renderings harmonise if we consider them as respectively a query and a positive statement of the same proposition, namely, Israel had broken the covenant, therefore God asks them, shall He continue to fulfil the part of husband or, Israel has broken the covenant, therefore God is no longer bound to fulfil the part of husband; He "*regarded them not*"?

#### **After Those Days**

**8:10** Verses 10, 11 and 12 give the terms of the New Covenant. But, before considering them, we note that only the "*house of Israel*" is here mentioned. Thus Paul repeats what the prophecy itself indicated, that the two houses would be united into one before the prophecy was due to be fulfilled. As we have already shown, the Lord and the apostles spoke of Israel as one, and therefore we have this additional proof that the New Covenant came into operation in the apostles' day. And let us not forget that Paul is now quoting the terms of the New Covenant to show that Jesus is its Mediator and that the terms as specified exactly agree with the reconciling work He performs.

We are often asked, if the New Covenant came into operation in the apostles' day, why does Paul say "*after those days*"? And in reply we call attention to the fact that Paul is quoting a prophecy 600 years old, and that it is necessary to examine the prophecy carefully to see which days are referred to, and also to consider the New Testament application of the prophecy.

A difference of punctuation will be noticed between Jeremiah and Hebrews. Remembering that the ancient manuscripts contained no punctuation, that the division of sentences by commas and other marks is a modern convenience and not inspired, that the objective of punctuation is to bring out the sense, and that scholars are left to exercise their best judgment, we must choose that sense which is in closest harmony with other scriptures.

Punctuated as in Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16, the words "*after those days*" describe when the New Covenant will be made. Punctuated as in Jeremiah 31:33, the phrase "*After those days*" is part and parcel of the New Covenant terms. In either case we must find what "*days*" are referred to as being followed by the formal making of the New Covenant, the promulgation of its terms, and the execution of its promise to put the laws of God into the mind and write them on the heart.

The last clause of 8:9 supplies the information. Thus, "*after those days*" would mean after the days in which the Jews' breaking of their contract to keep the Law Covenant had become so continuous and flagrant that God gave them up as hopeless, and considered Himself as no longer bound to carry on His part of the Law Covenant agreement. His last effort by prophets to rouse them to a sense of their responsibility was made through John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 1:15-17), and finally He sent His Son. But as our Lord in the parable foreshadowed, that appeal, too, was in vain, and He added, "*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matthew 21:33-44). Just before His crucifixion He wept over Jerusalem, saying, "*Behold your house is left unto you desolate*" (Matthew 23:37,38).

That denunciation of the children of Israel marked their definite giving up by God as His chosen people under the Law Covenant. A few days later the blood of the New Covenant was shed on the cross, and shortly thereafter the way was opened by which the terms of that New Covenant might come into operation under the risen Christ as its Mediator. The first for whom He mediated were the waiting disciples at Jerusalem, upon whom He poured out the Holy Spirit in token of divine forgiveness and acceptance.

### **Laws in Mind and Heart**

Many contrasts may be noted between the Law Covenant and the New Covenant, and also some similarities. The laws given to Israel were written on tables of stone and in books, and they entered into a definite agreement or covenant to keep those laws. Not being able to keep them, the Law Covenant arrangement was unsatisfactory, both to God and to them. The laws of the New Covenant are explained in the scriptures, that we may learn what they are. But God agrees to do more than lay them before those who accept the Covenant. He says, "*I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in [or, 'on'] their hearts*".

If we can see that this work is going on now, and has been in process throughout the age, we shall have an additional reason for believing that the New Covenant has been in force since the Lord sealed it with His precious blood.

The Sermon on the Mount was our Lord's first enunciation of New Covenant principles. There He showed how God looked at the heart and how an indulged desire to do injury was regarded as though the offence had actually been committed. But if the New Covenant arrangement is severe on those who nurse evil thoughts, it is correspondingly gracious to those who love God and earnestly desire to do His will; for the sincere desire to do good, when accompanied by effort to the extent of knowledge and ability, is accepted even though action falls short of the desire (Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7; particularly 5:21-24,27,28,43-48; 6:6,18,21).

In order that the will of God may be done by His people, it is necessary that they have it thoroughly impressed on their minds; thoroughly understood, and so not readily forgotten. That is what is meant by putting the laws into their mind. Writing the laws on the heart does not, of course, mean inscribing letters on the physical organ. The heart stands for the affections, as the mind stands for the intellect and will. To have an intellectual comprehension of God's will is not enough. The affections must be set upon God, and the whole being devoted to the carrying out of His will so far as possible.

What laws are meant? Those who have followed these lessons will readily answer, not the laws given to Israel, for they are abolished. The laws now being written on the minds and hearts of God's people are those which Christ imposes as contrasted with those given by Moses, for as Moses was the mediator through whom those laws were given, so Christ is the Mediator through whom the laws which God now imposes are declared to us. "*God ... hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*". "*Hear ye him*" (Hebrews 1:1,2; Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 5:9; 12:24,25).

Some of Christ's commands are similar to laws given through Moses (Romans 12:9,10), though a deeper meaning is given in them, as in the sermon on the mount. Of these New Covenant laws the greatest and most comprehensive is love (1 Corinthians 13:1-8,13; Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Peter 1:4-11); in addition, there are innumerable admonitions, rebukes, and exhortations, as well as positive commands.



These are written on our minds and hearts by the Holy Spirit, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:3; the Holy Spirit being the power of God sent through the Son (Acts 2:33), and operating largely through His Word (John 17:17). As we study the scriptures and give heed to their instructions, the will of God becomes more familiar to us, and, as we are bound to make every effort to carry it out in daily life, His will becomes more and more a part of our constitutions. We see Jesus as in a glass or mirror, and are *“changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The precious promises are a stimulus to become *“partakers of the divine nature”*, or disposition; to put off the *“old man”* with his evil deeds, and to *“put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him”* (2 Peter 1:4-11; Colossians 3:9,10). *“And every man that hath this hope in him [of being made like the Lord in the resurrection], purifieth himself, even as he is pure”* (1 John 3:1-3).

Since Paul speaks of himself as the minister or servant of Christ used to write (as a pen) upon the hearts of the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 3:3), and as *“an able minister of the new covenant”* (2 Corinthians 3:6), we may take his words as proof that the New Covenant was then in operation, that writing being one of the specifications of the New Covenant. In the same chapter he contrasts the Law Covenant with the New Covenant, emphasising the more excellent glory of the latter as compared with the former. And in 2 Corinthians 4:1 he speaks of having himself received mercy, an important blessing under the New Covenant. This *“mercy”* we need down to the very end of our course (Jude 21). The *“mercies of God”* referred to in Romans 12:1 are the mercies received under the New Covenant.

### **Their God, My People**

Another part of the New Covenant (8:10) is, *“I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people”*. This is similar to the covenant between God and Israel in the wilderness. He took them to be His people, and they accepted Him as their God (Exodus 6:7; Deuteronomy 4:20; 2 Samuel 7:24; Jeremiah 13:11). Notwithstanding all their backsliding and sins, for which they were punished by crop failures, stock losses, plagues, and pestilences, one of the severest punishments being the seventy years' bondage to Babylon (Leviticus 26:14-43; Deuteronomy 28:15-68; Joel 1:3,4; Jeremiah 25:3-11), God still spoke of the Jews as His people (Ezekiel 14:11; 37:27).

But, as we have already seen, He finally turned from them as His people. Through the prophet He had foretold a change in this respect (Hosea 1:6,9,10; 2:23), but they did not comprehend it. Because they were Abraham's seed and God's chosen people by the Law, they thought they must always be retained as God's people (Amos 3:2; John 8:33-39).

The change in the personnel of God's people is explained in Romans 9:23-26,30, where the Gentile believers in Jesus are counted in as part of *“the people”*. This furnishes another proof that the New Covenant is now in operation, we Gentiles being called to form part of the people now being chosen out, as Peter also explains (1 Peter 2:10). We are also called *“fellow heirs of the same promises”* with the remnant of Israel, and this promise of the New Covenant is one of them (Ephesians 2:12; 3:6).

The principal work of the Gospel Age has been to *“take out a people for His name”*, from both Jew and Gentile, both of which were and are called on to forsake their old ways and come to Christ and the New Covenant (Acts 15:14). This *“people”*, made up of a remnant of believing Jews and of Gentiles called to take the places of Jews broken off through unbelief, is called *“the Israel of God”* (Romans 2:28,29; 11:7-27; Galatians 6:16).

In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, this promise of the New Covenant, *“I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people”*, is definitely applied to believers during the Gospel Age who forsake sin and evil associations, who separate themselves unto the LORD, thus openly accepting Him as their God. And 2 Corinthians 7:1 clinches it by saying these promises (of 2 Corinthians 6:16-18) belong to us, *“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves”*.

### **Who is My Neighbour?**

**8:11** When the children of Israel were God's people, the people of the nations outside were not considered their 'neighbours'. Our Lord's parable of the good Samaritan illustrated how the Jews did not extend neighbourliness to fellow beings outside their own nation (Luke 10:27-37). The RV has *“fellow-citizen”* instead of *“neighbour”*. A neighbour was a member of one of the tribes of Israel. The term *“brother”* was applied to near relations. Neither are the terms *“neighbour”* and *“brother”* under the New Covenant indiscriminately applied. They express relationships between those who have entered into the New Covenant, and who are therefore a separate class from those who have not entered into it.

Those who in this age accept Christ as their Saviour, and His blood as shed for their sins, are counted as coming under the New Covenant operation, and therefore it is not necessary for such to teach their fellow-believers, saying, "*know the Lord*". They must already know something about God in order to take the steps necessary to come into the Covenant relation with Him. Believers, 'neighbours' and 'fellow-citizens' under the New Covenant, may help one another in countless ways to "*grow in grace*", to develop "*the fruit of the spirit*", to "*put on the whole armour*", to "*add*" the various virtues of character, but personal knowledge of God is given by God Himself, who sends into our hearts "*the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*" (2 Peter 3:18; 1:2-11; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 6:10-18; Romans 8:14-17).

### **Knowing God**

For all that the Jews were counted God's people, they did not really know God, because some traits of His character had not been fully revealed to them. This New Covenant promise, that those who enter the New Covenant shall really know God, is a most wonderful one. The way was paved for its fulfilment when our Lord began His ministry. Everyone who reads the New Testament to any purpose must be aware of the prominence given in our Lord's teaching to descriptions of the character of God. Repeatedly He accused the leading teachers of the day of ignorance of God. And He asserted that no one could know God except those to whom the Son of God should reveal Him (Matthew 11:27).

If we wish to know God, therefore, we must come first to the Lord Jesus Christ, the one whom God has set forth to be is revealer, and who, as Mediator between God and men, is able not only to show the sincere inquirer the character of God, but also to act as go-between and bring about reconciliation with God so that other portions of the promise might be fulfilled to the reconciled one, and the deeper knowledge of God be obtained which is granted to those who enter into the New Covenant and acknowledge the LORD God as their God.

There is a difference in degree between the knowledge of God to which one must first come in order to believe on God, and that intimate knowledge of His character and plans given to those whom He accepts as His children. The elementary knowledge is described in Hebrews 11:6, "*he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*". Further steps in knowledge are taken when more is learned of God's character and of the rewards offered for faith, obedience, and service. We find "*deep things*" referred to in 1 Corinthians 2:5-16.

Our Lord said (John 17:3) that eternal life was dependent not only on knowing God, but also on knowing Jesus Christ whom He had sent. Knowing Jesus means more than being aware that He lived on earth nearly 2000 years ago. It means knowing Him in the offices He holds, as expressed in His numerous titles: Mediator; Advocate; Intercessor; Saviour; Deliverer; Lord; Anointed (Christ); King; High Priest.

We see then how much is implied in the simple words of the New Covenant, that those who come into it shall "*know God*". In the Sermon on the Mount, to which we have already referred as being the first setting forth by our Saviour of the principles of the New Covenant, He portrays God's character in a different light from that in which the Jews viewed it (Matthew 5:3-48). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew God as God Almighty. The Israelitish nation knew Him as Yahweh, the Covenant-keeping God.

Our Lord Jesus demonstrated more fully than had ever previously been done the mercy and love of God, our Father in Heaven (John 3:16; 14:9; 1 John 4:6-19; Matthew 6:9). Each day and hour the sincere worshipper and student of scripture comes to know God more intimately as a loving Father, and the more he comes to know of His wonderful plan of redemption, the more his heart overflows with love and joy and praise. For God's character is revealed by His longsuffering, patience, and love in the salvation of mankind from the consequences of their own acts.

### **For All Shall Know Me**

The words, "*from the least to the greatest of them*" indicate again that the deep knowledge is restricted to those who come into the New Covenant relationship (Jeremiah 31:34). The KJV omits "*of them*" from Hebrews 8:11, but the Revised Version retains them. The least to the greatest outside the New Covenant have no promises except such general ones as 1 Timothy 2:4; John 1:9, namely, of enlightenment, and these are not direct promises but rather statements of God's purpose. "*How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?*" (Romans 10:14). But "*the least to the greatest*", that is, each and every one, who enters into the New Covenant is entitled to all the blessings specified in the covenant, including knowledge of the character and purposes of God.

The advantages of personal knowledge of God are great. He is the Ruler of the universe. He has all power. All must ultimately bow to His will and conform to His requirements, or be deprived of life. The most reasonable thing to do is to acquire the needed information, to come to God through Christ the Mediator of the New Covenant, and so to inherit the promises and receive the benefits of God's favour now.

### **Mercy and Forgiveness**

**8:12** A reason is given why the preceding gracious stipulations of the New Covenant could be extended to 'the house of Israel', notwithstanding their rebellious and stiff-necked career. It is because God provided a way by which His mercy might find full scope, and their sins and iniquities be forgiven, and remembered no more. Again we say, any attentive reader of the New Testament can hardly fail to recognise that this gracious provision has already been made available, to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile (Rom.ans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:23,24), and that the New Covenant has been in operation since the first extension of forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God set forth as the Mediator of this covenant of mercy.

The grand theme of the gospel is that God found a way to forgive sins and remember them no more. Here is a contrast to the Law Covenant, where remembrance of sins was made yearly (Hebrews 10:3). Under the New Covenant there is no such annual review of sins, with the offering of fresh sacrifices, resulting in a fresh cleansing, as on the Jewish day of atonement. The one offering of Jesus Christ sufficed once for all. We give a few texts on the forgiveness of sins as an essential part of the gospel. The reader may find many more. (Matthew 4:17; 6:12,14,15; 9:2-6; 12:31,32; 26:28.) Not only was forgiveness by God emphasised, but also the need of His children forgiving one another (Matthew 6:14,15; 18:15-22; Mark 11:25; Ephesians 4:32). This necessity was illustrated by the parable of the debtor (Matthew 18:23-35).

Much more might be said on the subject of the forgiveness of sins, but as it comes up again in chapters 9 and 10, we leave it for the present.

One of the references above given (Matthew 12:31,32) mentions two ages in which God purposed to forgive sins when repented of, "*this age*" and "*the age to come*". This indicates that the New Covenant is the arrangement under which God will forgive sins in the Kingdom Age as well as in the present age, the exception in both ages being persistent wilful sin against light.

### **The New Covenant with Others than Israel**

The promise of a New Covenant, as given to Jeremiah, mentioned only the houses of Israel and Judah as participating. It did not, however, exclude others. The early disciples, who had been Jews, had all the Jewish prejudice against the Gentiles, and they did not readily admit that these New Covenant blessings were for any but themselves. To convince Peter, the LORD showed him a special vision, and considerable explanation had to be made by him and Paul to the other disciples, to prove that God desired them to carry the gospel to the Gentiles.

Other scriptures were brought forward to show that Christ was to be a light to the Gentiles as well as to Israel (Acts 10; 13:17,18). And the part of the gospel message that the Gentiles grasped with joy was that through Him they might receive that grand New Covenant blessing, the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 10:43; 13:38,48; 26:17,18).

### **The New Covenant in the Kingdom Age**

In the book of Hebrews the operations of the New Covenant in the Kingdom Age are not referred to because that age was beyond the scope of Paul's argument at that time. We may see, however, in Revelation 21:1-4, an intimation that in that age to come the New Covenant will be in force, for the opportunity to become the LORD's people and have the LORD for their God will then be set before all mankind (Revelation 21:5-7; 22:1,2, 17; 7: 9-17; Isaiah 25:6-9).

### **Israel and Judah Gathered to the Mount**

In his plea for his brethren according to the flesh (Romans chapters 9, 10 and 11), Paul knows no distinction between ten tribes and two tribes. To him all were Israelites, to whom pertained the promises and the covenants (Romans 9: 3,4). In writing to the Galatians he knows not ten tribes or two tribes, but "*Them that were under the law*" (Galatians 3:23; 4:5,21). Before King Agrippa he spoke of the promises unto which "*our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come*" (Acts 26:6,7).

The apostle James addressed his letter of explanation, warning, and comfort to "*The twelve tribes scattered abroad*", or (RV) "*the twelve tribes which are of the dispersion*", indicating that among the Christian believers were found persons out of all the tribes. The fact that here and in Romans 11 and Galatians 6:16 the Christian Church is addressed as "*the twelve tribes*", "*All Israel*" and "*the Israel of God*", confirms the teaching of the apostles that

when Jesus was raised from the dead He sat down on the throne of David, which was established over all the tribes, and that any descendant of the ten tribes or of the two tribes who did not recognise Him as their king, and join themselves to His New Covenant, was unworthy the name. Even as the apostle said, *"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel"; "he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly"* (Romans 9:6; 2:28).

But some might inquire, what assurance have we that all Israel worthy the name, whether descendants of the ten tribes or of the two, had the opportunity to become parties to the New Covenant? Remembering that the Law Covenant was entered into at the foot of the mount, by the people individually taking upon themselves its responsibilities, how was it possible to lay before the same people individually the terms of the New Covenant into which God was willing to enter with them, when many of them were scattered abroad among the nations? We answer: It was a comparatively simple matter. It was not necessary to gather them all again to the foot of Mt. Sinai, nor yet to Jerusalem. With the New Covenant have come new methods.

God set His Christ, the Anointed, upon the holy Hill of Zion, a mount [symbol of kingdom] of superior grandeur, and *"the city of the living God"*. From these heights came the voice of Eternal Majesty, saying, *"This is my beloved Son, ... hear ye him"* *"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh"* (Psalm 2:1-6; Matthew 3:17; 17:5; 2 Peter 1:16,17; Acts 4:25-27; Hebrews 12:22-25). Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, was ready to reconcile to God everyone who was ready to acknowledge Him as Lord, and accept His services as Mediator, and God stood ready to receive every such one for whom the Son officiated. For we read, *"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself"* (2 Corinthians 5:19).

During His three and a half years' ministry our Lord confined himself and His disciples to *"the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* resident in Palestine (Matthew 15:24; 10:6). And for three and a half years subsequent to His resurrection the gospel message went exclusively to Jews and Samaritans, as far as could be reached. We know this because it had been foretold that He would confirm a covenant with the Jewish people for *"one week"*, during the midst of which the Messiah should be *"cut off, but not for himself"* (Daniel 9:24-27). This prophecy of Daniel's was fulfilled at the rate of a day for a year; consequently one week would be fulfilled as seven years. Thus for seven years the children of Israel were given the exclusive privilege of gathering to Mount Zion to the Son of God, and of adopting the New Covenant *worship "in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:21-24).

But did all Israel know? Were not some in distant lands overlooked? Had the messengers not had divine oversight, we might conceive such a possibility. But our questionings and doubts have been anticipated, and the scriptures themselves have supplied the answer, *"Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."* *"Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. ... But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people"* (Romans 10- 15-21).

The gospel (likened to the sun, Psalm 19:1-6) penetrated everywhere, that the Jews might be left without excuse, and everywhere Gentiles were awakened and blessed, in order that they might provoke to emulation the professed people of Israel (Romans 11:13-15).

After our Lord's resurrection the apostles were instructed to go to all nations and make disciples, but they were to begin at Jerusalem, and it was to *"the dispersed"* in all nations that they first preached the good tidings. The apostle Peter went as far east as Babylon, where still lived many descendants of Jews who had not returned under the decree of Cyrus (1 Peter 5:13); others, according to tradition, reached India; while the apostle Paul and his helpers were directed westward to Macedonia, Rome, and Spain (Romans 15:19-24; Acts 16:6-10; 23:11).

The proclamation of the New Covenant has been world-wide, and here and there men out of every nation, kindred, and tongue have been invited to enter into it; but of Israel after the flesh it may confidently be asserted that every individual Israelite living in apostolic days had the testimony given him, and had the opportunity of accepting or rejecting the offer. The fact that the majority rejected it, and that thus room was made for a few to be called out from among the Gentiles, is another proof that all Israel heard the message, for God was faithful to His promises of blessing upon Israel, and in no case preferred a Gentile to a Jew. It was always *"to the Jew first"*; and only when the Jews rejected the gospel with its Mediator and New Covenant blessings, did the ministers of the New Covenant turn to the Gentiles (Luke 24:47; Acts 3:26; 5:31; 8:1,4; 10:36,37; 13:26-48; 18:4-6; 26:20; 28:23-28; Romans 1:16; 11:17-23; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

As set forth in Romans 11, all members of the twelve tribes who rejected the New Covenant proved themselves to be not of Israel, and all who accepted the New Covenant (whether Jew or Gentile) were counted the true Israel of God, Israelites indeed. All the Israel of God are branches in the "*olive tree*", and the olive tree shall not lack a single branch. All the Israel of God acknowledge the deliverer who came out of Zion as their Lord, as the Christ, their Redeemer, their Mediator, and their King.

### **How to Enter Into the New Covenant**

To any who have not yet taken advantage of the merciful provisions of the New Covenant, we recommend frequent reading of the gospels and epistles, in order to get a full appreciation of the heinousness of sin, the helplessness of mankind in the bonds of sin and death, the gracious gift of God's dear Son to be our Redeemer, Mediator, High Priest, and Intercessor and Advocate.

Then accept the services of this friend, that you may be reconciled to God, and that God may forgive you and accept you as one of His children. All the blessings of the New Covenant will then be yours.

Further comments on Mount Zion and the voice of authority issuing there-from are made in chapter 12.

**8:13** The meaning of this statement was explained in connection with verse 8. We now repeat that the Law Covenant became "*old*" in Jeremiah's day when the announcement of a New Covenant was made. Anything which is 'old' in the course of time grows 'older', until it either decays or is laid aside as of no more use.

So the Law Covenant, in the interval between Jeremiah and our Lord's first advent, became, for reasons already given, more and more useless as an instrument to benefit the Jews, and when our Lord came it was entirely disposed of.

In the Sermon on the Mount He set forth new ideals of conduct under the New Covenant which He had come to inaugurate and to ratify with His blood, indicating its superiority over the old or Law Covenant. During His lifetime and by His death our Lord fulfilled the types of the Law concerning Himself, and the Law Covenant itself was brought to an end by being nailed to His cross (Matthew 5:17-19; Colossians 2:14; Romans 7:6; Galatians 5:4-6).

We also emphasise again the statement of 8:6 that our Lord, as High Priest, now serves in accordance with the terms of the New Covenant, as Aaron served according to the terms of the Law Covenant, and that Jesus is also Mediator of the New Covenant, as Moses was mediator of the Law Covenant, Christ being the antitype of both Moses and Aaron, combining in Himself the offices of Mediator, Law-giver, and High Priest. Consequently, the New Covenant is in force, and the forgiveness of sins promised in it is made available to those who now come to Jesus as Mediator and Reconciler (2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 10:43; 13:38,39; Ephesians 2:1-3,12-17; Colossians 1:21; 2:13; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

## Chapter 9

### THE CLEANSING BLOOD

Well aware of the fact that the Law Covenant had been nailed to the cross, the apostle Paul's desire was that his brethren according to the flesh should recognise their release therefrom. Yet mere freedom from the Law Covenant would benefit them little, for the Gentiles, who had not been under the Law, were in as bad a plight as they, being slaves of sin and death (Romans 1:21-32; 3:9-19; 6:20,21; 8:2). It was necessary that the Jew recognise the New Covenant, with Jesus as Mediator and High Priest, and come under that arrangement. In chapter 9 the apostle presents further evidence that the New Covenant had superseded the Old.

**9:1-5** This description of the tabernacle in the wilderness corroborates that given in Exodus and other Old Testament books. The "*ordinances*" or "*ceremonies*" (margin) and a particular structure or building, first the tabernacle, and afterward the temple at Jerusalem, were inseparably associated with the first covenant.

The tabernacle had two apartments. The first, called the Holy, in which were the golden seven-lamped candlestick and the table of shewbread upon which the unleavened bread used by the priests was continually to be shown. For more on the furniture of the Holy, see the comment on verse 4.

The second apartment was called the Most Holy, or the Holiest of all. In it was the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold, which contained the golden pot of manna, remembrance and evidence of the miraculous feeding of the children of Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 11), and Aaron's rod that budded, token of his call to the priesthood, and demonstrator before the rebels that Aaron's was the chosen family, and not Korah and his family (Numbers chapters 16 and 17).

Most important of all the articles kept in the ark were the "*tables of the covenant*". The two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments had been originally written were broken when Moses came down from the mount and saw the idolatry of the people (Exodus 31:18; 32:15-19; Deuteronomy 5:22). A second set of stones was prepared, and placed in the ark (Deuteronomy 10:1-5), and in addition to this the whole Law, including the ten commandments, was written in a book by Moses, and likewise placed in the ark for safe-keeping and for future reference as a testimony against them (Deuteronomy 5:27-33; 31:24-27; Exodus 20:18-22; 25:21).

Covering the ark was the mercy seat, and overshadowing the mercy seat were the two "*cherubims of glory*". But, at the time it was carried into the temple Solomon built, there was nothing remaining in the ark but the two tables Moses put in at Horeb (2 Chronicles 5:10).

Verse 4 apparently mentions the "*golden censer*" as part of the furnishing of the Most Holy. This passage has presented some difficulties to Bible commentators, because it contradicts Exodus 40:3 and 21, which declare that the ark was the only piece of furniture placed in the Most Holy.

The word "censer" in Old Testament times was applied to the fire-pans used in the service. Those in use at the time of Korah's rebellion were of brass or copper (Numbers 16:39). Solomon made golden censers or fire-pans for the service (1 Kings 7:50; 2 Chronicles 4:22). But 'censer' is not the best rendering of the Greek word here used, which means 'a place of fumigation' (Strong), for the apostle is naming the principal articles of furniture in the tabernacle, and not the implements. The Revised Version margin and other modern translations prefer "*golden altar*".

But substituting 'altar' for 'censer' only increases the difficulty, because the passages already cited state that the golden altar was placed in the first apartment, the holy, whereas in Hebrews 9:4 the apostle is describing the contents of the second apartment, the Most Holy, or Holiest of all. What is the solution to the difficulty?

The solution is found by reference to the Vatican manuscript No. 1209. In it the Greek words corresponding to the words "*which had the golden altar*" are omitted from verse 4, and words meaning 'and the golden altar of incense' are added to verse 2, thus being in full accord with the Old Testament descriptions. It is somewhat surprising that the revisers did not make at least a marginal note of this reading of one of the three most ancient Greek manuscripts.

The Holy Spirit guiding Paul in his writing would not err in the matter, but even aside from inspiration, the apostle was too familiar with the Law to make a mistake in locating the furniture. The misplacement of the words in other manuscripts must be attributed to copyists' errors. As all the copying of manuscripts in the early centuries of our era was done by hand, such errors are excusable, as anyone who attempts to copy a piece of writing will agree. They are not a reflection on the inspiration and accuracy of the scriptures, and we thank God that in our day these very ancient manuscripts are available for reference and comparison.

According to Exodus 30:1-9; 37:25,26; 40:4,5,26, a golden altar of incense was made to stand in the first apartment of the tabernacle, in front of the veil, the golden table of shewbread and the golden candlestick or lamp-stand being on each side. No burnt sacrifice, or meat or drink offering, was offered on this altar, but live coals were brought from the brazen altar in the court and placed upon the golden altar, incense being then sprinkled on the live coals. Thus morning and evening a sweet incense arose before God (Exodus 30:7,8).

It is possible, however, that the apostle did have in mind a golden 'censer', rather than the golden altar, and in that case verse 4 is correct as it stands in the KJV. Possibly he referred to a golden censer reserved in the Most Holy throughout the year for use exclusively on the great Day of Atonement. Or, by "*which had the golden censer*" he might have meant, for one of its appurtenances. From Leviticus 16:12, 3 we learn that on this day, before entering the Most Holy to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat, the high priest took in the censer live coals from the altar and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small. Entering within the veil, he put the incense on the fire in the censer, and thus was formed a cloud which covered the mercy seat, and in a ceremonial manner glorified or honoured God, whose presence was manifested between the cherubim (Exodus 25:22).

Of all these pieces of furniture and of the ceremonies connected with each Paul could have told something interesting. But he had neither time nor space, besides which, mention of these details would have interfered with his present theme, namely, the yearly atonement offering and its antitype.

**9:6** There was only one high priest, but there were several subordinate priests, increasing in number with the growth of the Levitical tribe, Aaron's sons being the first of these assistant priests (Exodus 28:1,40-43). These under-priests were allowed to serve in the court surrounding the tabernacle and in the first apartment only. The "*service of God*": though the words 'of God' are not in the original, the sense is there, for it was divine service they engaged in. The service in the first tabernacle or apartment consisted of caring for the lamps and the table of shewbread, and in other routine duties. In the 'court' of the tabernacle the priests offered, or assisted in offering, most of the sacrifices. They also superintended the work of the Levites (Exodus 30:7,8; Numbers chapters 3 and 4; Exodus 29:38-44; Leviticus 1:5; 9:9,12,18).

#### **The Atonement Day Type**

**9:7** When the tabernacle was to be removed to a new location, the priests were directed to cover up the furniture and prepare it for carrying (Numbers 4:1-16), but on the Day of Atonement, which occurred once a year, they were not allowed to enter the Most Holy. The high priest alone went in with the blood of the beasts which he had offered "*for himself, and for the errors of the people*". The word "*for*" has the sense of 'on behalf of', the bullock being offered on behalf of Aaron and his house, and the goat being offered on behalf of the people (Leviticus 16). The objective of the offerings was to make atonement for and purge away sin. The apostle's present reason for referring to this distinction between high priest and ordinary priests under the Jewish Law is explained in verse 8.

**9:8** The significance of the restriction on the priests was that "*the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing*", that is, while the tabernacle and temple still had a standing as the required place of worship. These ordinances forbidding the under-priests to enter the Most Holy were very important in the formation of the type. They showed that the under-priests had nothing whatever to do with the offering of the Day of Atonement sacrifices. Their sins were atoned for by the high priest sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat, but they had no part whatever in making the atonement.

So now, under the New Covenant, Christ Jesus alone entered heaven to make purification of sins by the blood of His cross (Hebrews 1:3; 9:24-26). Those who become believers in the Lord Jesus in this age are called to be members of the "*royal priesthood*" (1 Peter 2:9), mentioned as "*our profession*", or "*confession*" in 3:1, but they have no part whatever in the making of atonement for sin. That is exclusively the work of Jesus our High Priest.

### As Pertaining to the Conscience

**9:9** *"Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience."* The connective "*which*" refers us back to verses 6 and 7. So long as those gifts and sacrifices were offered in the temple according to the Law, just so long the under-priests must be excluded from God's presence. That exclusion was not, however, intended to be permanent, so far as approach to God was concerned. So he says the figure or representation was only for the time then present. It was a representation of the fact that during the Jewish Age direct approach to the mercy seat was not open to the under-priests or to the Levites or to the people generally.

For sixteen centuries the tabernacle and temple services made a type of exclusion from God's presence, by contrast with which we are now enabled to appreciate more clearly the wonderful work of Christ, who by His sacrifice opened the way into the anti-typical "*holiest*", even heaven itself, for those who believe in Him, as stated in 10:18-22.

The high priest was the one who 'did the service' in so far as the sprinkling of the blood was concerned and the other ceremonies in connection therewith, but all who worshipped in sincerity hoped for and received a blessing, a token of God's forgiveness and restored favour. Yet the offering did not, could not, make either high priest or people perfect so far as conscience was concerned.

Conscience is defined by the Standard Dictionary as, 'the power or faculty which distinguishes between right and wrong; moral sense'. The English word 'conscience' is derived from the French, which in turn is derived from the Latin 'conscientia', from 'con', meaning 'together', and 'scio', meaning 'know'. This Latin word exactly expresses the meaning of the Greek word 'sunei-desis', derived from 'suneido', from 'sun', meaning 'with', or 'together', and 'eido', 'to know'. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance defines 'suneidesis' as meaning 'co-perception; that is moral consciousness'. Young's Analytical Concordance defines it, 'a knowing with oneself'. A 'knowing-with-oneself' would mean conscious knowledge.

Applying these definitions, 9:9 means that, notwithstanding all the sacrifices offered, the high priest remained conscious, or knew within himself, that he was still a sinner. The Law was the standard by which his conceptions of right and wrong were measured, and the clearer his insight into the holiness and beauty of character enjoined in the Law, the more would sin "*become exceeding sinful*" (Romans 7:13), and the greater would become the burden of his imperfections (Deuteronomy 18:13; 6:5; Matthew 22:36-39; Romans 7:12).

**9:10** So far as meats and drinks and divers washings and carnal ordinances or rites were concerned, these might be done with devotion, and faithfully according to the prescribed ritual. But these were not permanent institutions, and therefore were of only limited value. The apostle desired his readers to recognise that the whole of the Law stood or fell together, the regulations regarding meats and drinks and divers washings being as much a part of the Law and therefore binding during its currency as were the Day of Atonement ceremonies. Indeed, a very rigid program was marked out for that day, which the people were bound to carry out: separation and fasting and mourning for their sins and confessing the same (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:27-32). Of none of these obligations and ceremonies and afflictions could they be relieved while the Law remained. Hence any relief must come from some other source.

So he proceeds. Those ordinances were imposed only "*until the time of reformation*". And verses 11 to 15 indicate that what he means by the "*reformation*" is the change brought about by Christ when He offered the true and efficacious sacrifice and opened up the New Covenant under which the disheartened and condemned Jews might find complete forgiveness for their sins committed under the first covenant.

When on the cross Jesus shed the anti-typical and ever efficacious blood of atonement, "*behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom*" (Matthew 27:51). Thus by the rent veil was typified the work of Jesus in opening the way of reconciliation with God, a new way of life, as explained in 10:18-22, "*through the veil, that is to say, his flesh*", which we accept by faith in his blood.

**9:11** *"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come."* Here "*good things to come*" are contrasted with the undesirable fruitage of the Law, which left the Jews still with consciences uncleansed. If Christ came as High Priest it necessarily follows that the "*good*"



*things*” He has to offer succeed the giving of the sacrifice, and do not precede it. From which it follows further that all the good things of the Law of whatever sort are no longer available, being outdated as well as outclassed.

The Jews should have been able to see this point, for they well knew that under the Law the blessing of God followed, and did not precede, the Atonement Day sacrifices. In the final ceremonial of the day, Aaron came out and blessed the people, in assurance that their penitence and tears and the acceptance of the sacrifices as for them were pleasing to God, and thus another year in His favour was begun.

So under the New Covenant the blessing and forgiveness follow the offering on Calvary’s cross. [Compare Leviticus 23:27-32 - fast, repentance and affliction, followed by a feast of joy (verses 34-36, 39,40), with Acts 3:19-26, - repentance and faith followed by blessing and forgiveness.] These “*good things*” began to “*come*” immediately the purgation of sins had been made and our Lord seated at the right hand of God, being invested with all power in heaven and in earth. The first manifestation of these good things was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the waiting disciples and the subsequent preaching of forgiveness of sins in His name, as related in Acts 2:1-5,33,38; 3:19,26; 5:31; 10:43.

The “*greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands*” (verse 11) is a figure of speech. The apostle explains what he means by adding, “*not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building*”, thus again completely separating Christ and His priesthood from the Levitical priesthood, which was inseparable from the tabernacle or temple in which they were required to make their offerings.

Seventh Day Adventists take this to mean that there is a building in heaven similar to the one erected in the wilderness. But we understand the “*greater and more perfect tabernacle*” to refer to the system or arrangement or plan according to which Christ’s offering was made and accepted, rather than to a material structure of any kind. Moses was directed to make the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him in the mount, and that pattern could not have been the real things, because the antitypes did not come until many years later.

#### **The Blood of Bulls and of Goats**

**9:12** “*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*” Another contrast is here presented. Christ our High Priest “*entered in once into the holy place*”. That little word “*once*” is an important one. The Greek word of which it is a translation has the signification ‘once for all’. The Levitical high priest entered the Most Holy many times in the course of his lifetime, because the Atonement Day sacrifices were repeated yearly. But Jesus entered the anti-typical Most Holy only once, because that once was sufficient to present before God that blood of atonement which is ever efficacious and consequently needs not to be repeated. It was offered “*once for all*”.

Another contrast is that our Lord Jesus entered not into the holy place belonging to the earthly tabernacle, nor yet with the blood of goats and of calves, as was done by the Levitical high priest. He entered “*by his own blood*” into that which the holiest typified, namely, “*heaven itself*” (9:24).

It is correct to say that Christ entered into heaven both ‘with’ and ‘by’ His own blood. Just as the bullock and the goat were slain to provide the blood Aaron carried into the typical mercy seat, so Christ was slain in order that in the anti-typical sense His blood might be ‘sprinkled’ on the anti-typical mercy seat.

The blood of bulls and of goats was, so to speak, a ticket of admission to the “*holiest*”, which the Levitical high priest was required to carry in his hand, and without which it was unlawful for him to enter, on pain of death. Hence he entered ‘with’ the blood literally in his hand, and at the same time ‘by’ the blood, that is, by the authority the blood conferred (Leviticus 16:2,3). In this respect the ancient Day of Atonement ritual was an exact type.

Our Lord’s entry into heaven as the High Priest of the New Covenant to symbolically ‘sprinkle’ the blood of atonement on the heavenly mercy seat was both ‘with’ and ‘by’ His own blood. Without that blood of His sacrifice He would not have been entitled to enter, and there was no blood but His own that would have answered the purpose, and given Him authority to enter, for He alone was perfect as a man, and therefore He alone could give blood which God could accept, “*the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Peter 1:19).

This passage (Hebrews 9:12) should be well considered by those who repudiate atonement by blood. God was not, as He is often accused of being, a blood-thirsty God, but He was a just God, who could by no means clear the guilty without some satisfaction for their sins. To denounce sin and then fear to inflict the penalty for transgression would proclaim Him a weak and vacillating God. Either the race of mankind must remain forever dead under the penalty pronounced in Eden, or else some way must be found by which that penalty could be justly remitted. The beauty of the atonement is that the Son of God recognised the justice of God's wrath against sin and willingly offered himself for the purpose of making the necessary atonement.

It must be remembered, too, that not only did our Lord offer himself willingly and gladly as a voluntary sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), but that He had, to sustain Him in the ordeal, many precious promises, the chief of which was that He should be raised from death and given the offices of both King and High Priest, which empowers Him to bless and enlighten all for whom He died. So we read in this same epistle (12:2), "*who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*".

Thank God for the precious blood of Christ, antitype of the blood of bulls and of goats, a sacrifice not for Israel only, as they were, and not divided as they were for different classes of the nation, but the propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1,2), made in one offering on the tree, and 40 days later presented to the Father on behalf of all for whom He died, for the complete and everlasting cleansing away of sin.

At the conclusion of this volume we present an examination in detail of the Day of Atonement types as recorded in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus, which should be read and considered in connection with the explanation of the antitype given by the apostle in Hebrews 9:12-14. And here it may be well to suggest that we have a care not to fall into a very common error in studying type and antitype. It is not for us to study the types and deduce from them what the antitypes are or should be. It is for us to study the antitypes as our Lord and the apostles expounded them, and then look at each type and see how it was the 'shadow' of the greater 'substance'.

### Having Obtained Eternal Redemption

The words "*for us*" (verse 12) are not found in the most ancient manuscripts. The "*eternal redemption*" which Christ obtained was not specifically for us who believe in this age; it was equally for those who believed in previous ages and those who will believe in the Kingdom Age. The only distinction, so far as mankind is concerned, is that we of this age hear of it sooner than others, for at the time we hear of the redemption we are a part of the world under condemnation. By the grace of God we hear the good tidings, and when we accept them we are reckoned as taken out of the world and separated unto God, and then we are no longer under condemnation but are counted righteous (John 5:24; 15:19; Colossians 1:13; Romans 5:1; 8:1). In the next age those who believe and obey will be similarly reckoned as passed from death unto life, from the world of darkness to the Kingdom of light, until they reach perfection and their citizenship in the Kingdom is made permanent (John 11:25,26; Revelation 21:6,7).

Redemption means deliverance, and in the present connection refers to deliverance or cleansing from sin. Our Lord obtained (literally 'found') this deliverance or purgation, not as something to be given without terms or conditions, but as a gift to be granted on conditions, as expressed in 5:9, "*being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation **unto all them that obey him***". Any who desire the complete purging away of their sins may receive it by application to Him, "***by whom** we [believers] have now received the atonement [or reconciliation];*" "*even as God **for Christ's sake** hath forgiven you*" (Romans 5:11; Ephesians 4:32).

Yet there was a sense in which the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ as the antitype of the Day of Atonement offerings was particularly on behalf of the children of Israel who had been bound under the Law, in order that they might be released from its requirement of a yearly day of affliction and sacrifice. Because the Law said, "*Cursed is every one [that is, every one to whom that Law was given] that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them*" (Galatians 3:10-13; Deuteronomy 21:23), it was necessary that Christ become a "*curse*" before they could be freed from it.

Moreover, it was necessary not only that the heavenly "*mercy seat*" be effectually and forever cleansed, but also that the consciences of the Jews themselves might be cleansed from the accumulated sins, both of individuals and of the nation as a whole. This thought of

the cleansing of the conscience of the Jews, both priests and people, is borne out by Acts 13:39, the apostle Paul's words to the Jews in the synagogue, *"And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses"*.

This bearing away by our Lord Jesus of the curse of the Law is referred to by the apostle Peter, *"Who knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth ... Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on [literally 'to'] the tree"* (1 Peter 2:22,24). Paul also made this clear when writing to the Galatians (3:13), *"Christ hath redeemed us [Jews] from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"*.

### **The Red Heifer**

**9:13.** The *"blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean"*, though unable to take away sin completely, were not wholly useless. Attention to these requirements of the Law sanctified or set apart the obedient Jew from much of the sin and uncleanness prevailing in the world. It brought a certain amount of purification of the flesh by means of sanitary laws, frequent washings and moral corrections. Such ceremonies as purification *"by the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean"* would serve to accentuate the desirability of obedience to sanitary and moral regulations.

The ceremony of purification and the method of preparation of *"the ashes of an heifer"* for the purpose are described in Numbers 19:1-22. Not any heifer would do. The requirement was *"a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke"*. The blood of the heifer was sprinkled seven times before the tabernacle. Then her body was burnt, and to the burning were added cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet. The resulting ashes were laid up dry, and when required clean running water was added and sprinkled on the persons or things to be cleansed. This *"water of separation"* was to be used for the cleansing of the ceremonially unclean, that is, for example, those who had become ceremonially defiled by touching a dead body.

The trouble to which the Jews were put to observe the fast or feast days and to bring the various sacrifices, sin and trespass offerings and thank-offerings, and the loss of time and money involved when ceremonially unclean, would keep their imperfect and sinful state constantly before their minds, at least before the minds of the pious ones. They would understand that though the Day of Atonement offerings cleansed them from the accumulated sins and defilements of the preceding year, they still required the cleansings of the other sacrifices and of the *"water of separation"*. They were not permitted to observe some and ignore any other of the ordinances. All the sacrifices of the year were obligatory and necessary.

In some cases, where faith was genuine, inward purity would be increased, for the Law gave some knowledge of God and His holiness, and developed a sense of sin (Romans 7:13-16; Leviticus 11:44). But it was possible for a Jew to practise all the ceremonial purifications and tithing required by the Law and still be defiled in mind and heart, as our Lord said to the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:23-28). So far as outward cleansing went, the Law accomplished much. Where it failed is told in verse 9, *"as pertaining to the conscience"*, as we have seen.

### **The Blood of Christ**

**9:14** *"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"*

If the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctified or set apart the Jewish people from much of the wickedness of their time, with the result of a certain purification of the habits and bodily cleanliness, how much greater results might be expected from the blood of Christ, the blood of a sacrificial victim immeasurably superior to the animals sacrificed under the Law? The blood of Christ is able to do what the sacrifices of the Law could not do, namely, to purge the conscience (verse 9).

In verse 14 the apostle makes a direct application to the consciences of the Hebrews themselves, *"purge your conscience"*. Purge their conscience from what? The apostle answers, *"from dead works"*. In 6:1 we saw the sort of *"dead works"* from which the Hebrews were to repent, namely, their efforts to attain righteousness by keeping the commands of the Law. As they were unable to keep the Law perfectly, they were left with a load of sin on their conscience. Not only did the pious ones feel the burden of their imperfections and faults, sins of omission and commission, but the Law itself kept their shortcomings ever before them by requiring repeated sacrifices, including the special sacrifices of the Day of Atonement for the nation as a whole.

Even if the Jews were inclined to forget their sins, God did not forget them. They were formally brought to His remembrance yearly (10:3). Their “works” were “dead” because they fell short of what the Law required, and hence the doer of these “dead works” came under condemnation to death, as Paul wrote to the Romans (7:10), “the commandment [that is, the Law given at Sinai], which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death”.

Paul wrote this chapter to show the Jews at Rome and elsewhere that the Law had placed them in an unfavourable position as compared with their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who served God acceptably by faith, not having been placed under the restrictions afterward imposed on their descendants at Sinai. This is what he means when he says, “I was alive without the law once”. In this he was not speaking of himself personally, for he had been born a Jew and was under condemnation like the rest. But he was describing the state of the Israelitish nation as a whole, the descendants of free Abraham and heirs of the promises, which promises the Law, which was 430 years after, could not disannul, to make them of none effect. Particularly vital was that grand promise that in Abraham’s seed all the families of the earth should be blest, and this purpose on God’s part the Law could not frustrate.

The Law made many things sins which were not so regarded by God before the Law, hence the Law in a sense gave life to sin by placing those commands on the people, as he says “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Romans 7:11). Later in the same chapter he shows that under the Law his condemned self was like the dead body of a criminal tied to a prisoner, a constant source of infection. The mind of a devout Jew served God, but notwithstanding this he was condemned by reason of his bodily and mental inability to act up to the thoughts and desires of his mind.

Accordingly, the apostle exhorts his fellow Jews to seek deliverance from that “dead body” by coming into Christ (Romans 7:14-25). Up to the time of Christ it was impossible for a Jew, however well meaning, to come out from under the Law. They were “shut up” in it like prisoners in a pit wherein is no water (Zechariah 9:11). Shut up forever? No: only until Christ should come to deliver them from it. Therefore the prophet exhorted the Jews who would be living when their Messiah came, “Turn you, to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope”. The Law was at best their schoolmaster, literally, their pedagogue, to bring them to Christ, that they might by faith in Him become sons of God by faith and adoption (Galatians 3:19-26; 4:5-7).

From all these scriptures and reasonings there can be but one conclusion. The Law brought guilt. On the other hand, the blood of Christ, and the New Covenant in His blood, bring life (John 3:16; 6:53-55; 17:3; Matthew 26:28; 1 John 5:11-13; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Romans 8:1-8).

The fact that the apostle, in 9:13, sets the blood of Christ opposite to all the sacrifices of animals offered for sin and its cleansing away; bullock, goat and red heifer; is proof that our Lord is the antitype of the red heifer as well as of the bulls and goats. We might speculate indefinitely on the meaning of the red heifer type were we confined to the Old Testament description of the rite. We have to thank the apostle (and to God who inspired his utterance) that in one short sentence, the only reference to the subject in the New Testament, he has given an explanation so clear and unmistakable that we are saved all necessity for speculation.

The use as a cleansing fluid of water put with the ashes of the red heifer would represent how Christ Himself cleanses us from daily defilements. “Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:25,26). Himself as an atoning sacrifice was the antitype of the bulls and of the goats slain to make atonement, and of the red heifer, the flesh of which was reduced to ashes. Washing the Church by the Word is the antitype of the cleansing by the water of separation.

Two cleansings are thus effected, one whole and complete, called in Titus 3:5 “the washing [or bath] of regeneration”, and the ‘feet washing’ which our Lord showed the disciples was necessary to remove the subsequent marks of contact with an evil world (John 13:3-16). This was not only a lesson in humility, but a reminder that they would still need Him to keep them clean. It was also a command to the disciples to cleanse one another from the marks of sin. To this the Epistle to the Hebrews alludes, “Take heed, ... exhort one another daily, ... lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (3:12,13). This helping of one another toward a clean and holy life was pictured in Numbers 19:18-20, where any clean person could lawfully sprinkle the ceremonially unclean, and so restore their cleanness.

To “serve the living God”. The objective in liberating the Jew from the Law Covenant and from the burden of sin on his conscience was not that he might continue in sin, but that he might serve God, the “living God”, the God who is able to give life, as contrasted with “dead works”, or works that brought only death (Romans 5:20,21; 6:1,2,22; Acts 13:38,39).

### Through the Eternal Spirit

Of Christ it is said, *“who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God”* (9:14). This brings up the whole subject of the personality or non-personality of the Holy Spirit, and, as it is too long to deal with here, we refer the reader to the book, ‘One God, One Lord, One Spirit’, for the scriptural teaching on the subject. Suffice it to say that we understand from John 15:26 and Acts 2:4,33; 10:38 that the Holy Spirit is an influence or power from God, exerted to accomplish various purposes, such as creation and the inspiration of the prophets (Genesis 1:2; 2 Peter 1:21).

It was in accordance with the divine Spirit that our Lord offered Himself. It was also with the aid of the divine Spirit that He was able to endure, to maintain during His earthly life His purity and perfection of character, and so was able on the cross to offer Himself *“without spot”, or “fault”* (margin), to God. He was *“a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Peter 1:19), and hence a worthy antitype of those faultless animals offered on Jewish altars. The Spirit of God was poured without measure upon Him at the beginning of His ministry (John 1:32,33; 3:34), as a seal of God’s approval, and as anointing for His offices of King and High Priest (John 6: 27).

That they served the true God was the pride of the Israelites. Now they must learn that if they wish to continue to serve their God acceptably they must acknowledge Christ and His cleansing blood as the means provided through which this service must be rendered; they must learn that *“There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). To *“serve the living God”* acceptably, they must have their consciences purged from dead works by the precious blood of Christ. *“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent”* (John 6:20).

### Why Jesus is Mediator

**9:15** This is one of the most important passages in the epistle. In it Paul brings his reasoning to a head: ***“And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament [that is, covenant]”***. The purging of the conscience was not possible under the Law Covenant. It had not been provided for in any other covenant; neither the Abrahamic nor the Davidic. Neither could it be obtained by their being freed from the Law and left, like the Gentiles, without a covenant, to go from bad to worse (Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-19). No: In order that the Hebrews might obtain this cleansing of the conscience it was necessary that a New Covenant be arranged, under which the blessings of forgiveness and of grace to help in time of need might be extended to those of them who would repent of their *“dead works”* and sincerely desire to serve the living and true God.

It was not possible for the Jew under the Law to *“receive the promise of eternal inheritance”* (last clause verse 15); the Law unfailingly brought death (Romans 7:10; 2 Corinthians 3:7). To enjoy an eternal inheritance one must live eternally. Thus the *“eternal inheritance”* is inseparably linked with the cleansing of the conscience, and both depend absolutely on Jesus and His New Covenant for their accomplishment. We must observe here that Paul states positively that in order to accomplish these purposes for Paul and other Hebrews of that day, as well as for others who would be called in later times, our Lord Jesus was made Mediator of the New Covenant.

Again, in verse 15 the apostle repeats that the death of Jesus was necessary to accomplish *“redemption”* or deliverance (verse 12), and here he explains what from; from the transgressions committed under the Law Covenant.

As already remarked, the Jewish Day of Atonement left the *“mercy seat”* cleansed only temporarily, in fact, only momentarily. It also left the people with their consciences unpurged. There was need, then, for the Lord Jesus not only to cleanse the *“mercy seat”* in heaven, but also to purge thoroughly the consciences of the transgressors. It was necessary to purge their consciences from this weight of guilt, as well as to give to God the required propitiatory offering, before they could receive the *“eternal inheritance”* promised.

The Lord Jesus as High Priest accomplished this cleansing work. As Aaron sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices on the furniture and appurtenances of the tabernacle, which the sins of the people had denied, so the Lord anti-typically cleanses from the worship of the true God the defiling traditions and errors of men. When we now draw near to God in prayer, we do so with the worship thus cleansed, if we come in Jesus’ name (10:22). This is the *“blood of sprinkling”* that speaketh better things than that of Abel (12:24), that proves to be the veritable *“fountain for sin and for uncleanness”*, of which the prophet wrote (Zechariah 13:1), that makes possible acceptable worship *“in spirit and in truth”* John 4:23,24; Colossians 1:8-12).

We have said that an eternal inheritance would be impossible without eternal life. We may now add that an “eternal” inheritance would be impossible without an eternal cleansing, that is, a cleansing complete and enduring. Otherwise the sins would pile up again and the inheritance be forfeited, just as had always happened under the Law Covenant.

If those who say that the New Covenant is not yet in operation would candidly study verse 15, they could hardly fail to see that it must have come into operation at the beginning of the Gospel Age, and that our Lord’s mediatorial work began then, because the apostle states that both the New Covenant and the Mediator-ship were necessary to deliver the Jew from the bondage of the Law and to cleanse his conscience from its “dead works”. Other scriptures show that many Hebrews were converted, received the forgiveness of sin, and were accepted into the High Calling with the promise of eternal life, Paul himself being a shining example of this (Acts 2:41; 4:4).

### **The New Covenant Victim**

**9:16** Notice the connectives from verse to verse, showing the continuity of the apostle’s reasoning from verse 8 to verse 28. Now he begins another comparison, namely, between the victims sacrificed when the Law Covenant was ratified, and the victim sacrificed for the ratification of the New Covenant. The word “testator” here is misleading, because the “testament” referred to is not the ‘last will and testament’ of a dying person called the “testator”, but the New Covenant just spoken of. Verse 16 should read: *“For where a covenant is, there must also of necessity be the death of the covenant victim”*.

The victim sacrificed for the ratification of the New Covenant is none other than Jesus Christ. At the Last Supper He said to His disciples, *“This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many”* (Mark 14:24).

The custom of slaying animals when two or more persons entered into a covenant or contract was very ancient. Genesis 15 describes the ceremony on the occasion when God confirmed to Abraham the promise previously made concerning the land. God pledged His power and faithfulness to bring Abraham’s heirs back again to the land of promise, and Abraham pledged his faith (verse 6), the one condition God demanded of him. The covenant with Abraham was confirmed again, and sworn to, over the ram caught in the thicket (Genesis 22:13-18).

What Jacob and Laban ate on the “*heap of witness*” was probably the animal or animals sacrificed to bind the covenant between them (Genesis 31:43-54). It was over the altar of Bethel that God confirmed the promise to Jacob (Genesis 35:6-15). Passing over these, Paul speaks of the ceremony enjoined upon Moses when God desired to enter into the Law Covenant with Israel.

**9:17** The reason why the death of the covenant victim is necessary, as stated in verse 16, is that only then is the covenant considered “of force”. While the covenant victim liveth, that is, until it is actually slain and the burnt offering made, the covenant is still unmade, the parties are still free. But as soon as the matter has gone the length of sacrificing the victim, there is no drawing back: the covenant is in force, and is binding on both parties to the agreement.

**9:18** The death of the covenant victim means the shedding of blood. The first or Law Covenant was dedicated or ratified with blood.

**9:19** The proof is found in the Old Testament scriptures (Exodus 24:3-8), where the ceremony of ratification is briefly described. Moses, as mediator, was the administrant. The book of the Law represented God, the Law-giver, the party of the first part (to use a modern legal phrase), while the party of the second part was present in the persons of the representatives of “all the people”. The covenant was made operative and binding when the blood of the calves and of the goats just slain was sprinkled by the mediator on the book and then on “all the people”, of whom the “seventy of the Elders of Israel” were chiefs (Exodus 24:1,9,10; Numbers 11:16).

**9:20** As he did so, Moses said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words”, or, according to the Variorum, “on the basis of all these words” (Exodus 24:8). Paul paraphrases, “This is the blood of the covenant which God enjoined unto you” or, “to you-ward”. The people not only swore to keep the Law, but they entered into a specific bond or covenant to do so, and they recognised the blood of the covenant as the seal thereof.

The objective in citing this ceremony connected with the Law Covenant is to show:

- (1) The importance of the blood of Christ;
- (2) The blood an evidence of His death as the covenant-victim;
- (3) Its sprinkling on the New Covenant;
- (4) Its sprinkling on those who enter into the New Covenant;
- (5) That before the Jews of apostolic times and since could *"receive the promise of eternal inheritance"* (verse 15), they must enter into this New Covenant and receive the sprinkling of the blood of the covenant victim, Jesus Christ;
- (6) This entering into the New Covenant and receiving the blood of sprinkling was also required of the Gentiles when the gospel was preached to them with the promise of eternal life (Acts 11:18).

The apostle Peter refers, to the blood of sprinkling as a necessity to the *"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father"*. With it he associates obedience, *"unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:2). This is manifestly a reference to the ratification ceremony necessitating the sprinkling of blood upon the parties to the agreement, the obedience being to and under the New Covenant, as the Jews were to be obedient to and under the Law Covenant.

In 12:24 believers now, called out from both Jews and Gentiles to be members of the Gospel Age Church, are said to have come to Jesus as Mediator of the New Covenant, and to have entered formally into the New Covenant as parties of the second part, by having the blood of the covenant sprinkled upon them. That is, we enter into covenant relation with God under the terms of the New Covenant enjoined upon us by Jesus as Mediator of that New Covenant, and our relationship to the New Covenant is made valid and operative in our individual cases by our acknowledgment of the blood of Jesus Christ as binding the New Covenant upon us. Thus the favourable terms of that New Covenant, which God set forth and enters into as the party of the first part, are assured to us.

Thank God for the blessings of forgiveness and reconciliation made possible to us under the glorious New Covenant.

### **Nothing Purified without Blood**

**9:21** The sprinkling of the blood of sacrificed animals was not confined to this initial sprinkling of the book and of the people. Before the tabernacle was opened for service a dedicatory ceremony was performed by Moses and Aaron. The blood of slain animals, followed by the anointing oil, was sprinkled upon the various articles of furniture and upon the various vessels and implements to be used in the service, and also upon Aaron and his sons (Exodus 29:21,36,37; Leviticus 8:30; Exodus 40:1-16). A cleansing of the tabernacle was also made yearly on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:16,18,19).

**9:22** Alford and others prefer *"I may almost say that all things are by the law"*. . The use of blood for purification under the Law was so general that the exceptions, if any, only proved the rule. But in one particular, at least, the use of blood was invariable and indispensable, namely, to secure the remission of sins. Literally, *"without shedding of blood"*, according to the prescribed manner at the altar, *"no remission takes place"*. The shedding of blood for the remission of sins under the Law Covenant was a true type of the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins under the New Covenant.

**9:23** It was therefore *"necessary that the patterns [or types] of things in the heavens should be purified with these"*. The blood of Jesus was not made necessary because blood was shed under the Law. Just the other way about. It was because the blood of Jesus was necessary for the permanent remission of sins under the New Covenant that the blood of animals was used to make suitable *"shadows"* under the Law Covenant. The Law was the shadow; the New Covenant is the reality. The offering of the blood of animals was only a shadow; the offering of the blood of Jesus is the reality. So also with the cleansing or purification. The things cleansed by the blood of Christ are the realities; the things cleansed under the Law were the *"shadows"* or *"patterns"*.

### **Better Sacrifices than These**

*"But the better things themselves with better sacrifices than these."*

Because *"better sacrifices"* is in the plural here, some Christians assume that something more than the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross is referred to, and they therefore invent theories to supply such. Roman and Greek Catholics claim to offer these additional sacrifices in 'the mass', wherein they claim to sacrifice Christ afresh and repeatedly. Others, who

repudiate the 'mass', claim that the word "*sacrifices*" is used in order to include the sacrifices of the Church, either collectively or in its individual members. Scripture does not, however, support such a view, because at the time Christ died and entered heaven with the blood of His sacrifice, there was no church, the early disciples being (as Jews) ineligible to membership until **after** the Law was nailed to the cross and until **after** Christ appeared in heaven, as related in Hebrews 1:3, which states that the purging of sin was done by **Himself**, after his ascension, but **before** He "*sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*".

In the interval between Christ's death and ascension, the disciples were in trouble and perplexity; also, in the still briefer interval between His ascension and His sitting down at God's right hand, while waiting according to command at Jerusalem. They had not themselves received fully the forgiveness of sins, and could therefore offer no acceptable sacrifice to God. But we see in the one "*sprinkling*" of the blood of Jesus Christ alone (upon the mercy seat in heaven for the purification of things in the heavenlies) that which was competent to effect **all** the purification required, and it did accomplish it, so far as satisfying God was concerned, for all people and for all time.

The explanation of the use in this place of the plural "*sacrifices*" for the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ is that His blood was the **antitype of all the blood** offered under the Law, and comprehended within itself a variety of sacrifices, such as the repeated daily sacrifices for sin and the special Day of Atonement sacrifices. Our Lord was the antitype of all 'the beasts on Jewish altars slain'.

The "*heavenly things themselves*" to be purified were not material buildings and furniture, but the spiritual realities which the tabernacle and its mercy seat typified. On the Day of Atonement, for now the apostle reverts to the yearly atonement offering referred to in verse 7, the high priest alone entered the Most Holy, to sprinkle the blood of atonement upon the mercy seat. At other times the blood of the sin offerings was sprinkled before the veil, or put on the horns of the brazen altar (Leviticus 4:6,25).

#### **In the Presence of God**

**9:24** "*For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures [or representations] of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.*" This is a concrete statement that heaven, the place of God's throne, was typified by the Most Holy of the tabernacle, and that our Lord's appearance in heaven after His ascension was the antitype of the high priest entering the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement.

Does "*now to appear ... for us*" mean that when He entered heaven He appeared only for those disciples who waited at Jerusalem? That would have excluded Paul, the writer of this epistle, who no doubt included himself in the "*us*". Did Christ then appear only for the believers up to and including Paul? If so, that would exclude all believers who lived from then until now.

An attempt has been made to use this passage as foundation for a theory that when Christ appeared in heaven after His ascension He applied His blood for only a portion of mankind, and not for all; for the Church, but not for the remainder of mankind. But if we take the words "*for us*" to mean for the church only, we should have to limit the first-person pronouns in other places, such as "*Christ died for our sins*" (1 Corinthians 15:3). But when we say Christ died for "*our*" sins, we do not exclude the remainder of mankind. If an American in Europe says, 'America is my country' he does not thereby deny that America is the country of millions of other people. When Paul said that Jesus, the Son of God, "*loved me, and gave himself for me*", he did not thereby mean that He gave Himself for none others than Paul (Galatians 2:20). Each of us individually may say, 'Christ died for me', and not exclude others for whom He died. Other scriptures show that He "*gave himself a ransom for all*"; that He is "*the propitiation ... for the sins of the whole world*" (1 Timothy 2:4-6; 1 John 2:2).

Since He died for all, He died for each. And when He appeared in heaven with the blood of atonement it was "*sprinkled*" there on behalf of all for whom His blood was shed. Yet we may each say, as one of the all, 'He appeared for me'. We remind brethren that in Hebrews 1:3, where our Lord's purging of sin is described, the three most ancient Greek manuscripts, the Sinaitic, Vatican, and Alexandrine, do not contain the word 'our'. The passage should read: "*when he had by himself made a purification from sins*". (See Revised Version, and footnote in the Variorum Bible.) This great truth concerning the wide extent of the purification from sin is emphasised in verses 25 and 26. Yet there is also a limitation.



The purification from sins was accomplished on behalf of all who would accept it when brought to a knowledge of the fact, whether that knowledge come to them in the present Gospel Age or in the Kingdom Age. This limitation, to those who would accept it, was shown in the type by the fact that only those of the Israelites who afflicted their souls received the benefit of the sacrifices offered on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27-30).

#### Once

**9:25,26** *“Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”*

One might seek long for a more clearly expressed statement than this. Our Lord did not offer Himself often, as the Jewish high priest made repeated sacrifices and appeared yearly in the Most Holy. Had repeated deaths been required, and repeated appearances in heaven for the purging of sin, *“then must he often have suffered from the foundation of the world”*. *“But now [or, ‘as it is’], **once in the consummation of the ages** [literal rendering] hath He appeared to **put away sin** by the sacrifice of himself”* (see Revised Version). Here the sin “put away” is not limited to any class or section. Sin as sin was dealt with when He appeared in heaven.

On the other hand, it must not be concluded from this that the sins of every individual of our race are forgiven whether he believes in Jesus or not. The act of purification laid the basis on which God is willing to forgive sins when confessed and repented of, and when application for pardon is made in the prescribed manner through Jesus, whom God has set forth as Mediator to administer the blessings of the New Covenant in His blood.

The necessity of repentance and faith before the forgiveness of sins can be obtained is set forth in many scriptures with which the reader is no doubt familiar. We mention a few: John 3:16, *“that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”*; John 14:6, *“no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”*; Mark 1:15, Jesus preached *“repent ye, and believe the gospel”*; Acts 10:43, *“that through his name **whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins**”*; Acts 15:9, *“purifying their hearts by faith”*.

Jesus does not save people in sin. He was called Jesus because He would *“save his people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21; compare with Acts 13:38,39). Paul was sent to the Gentiles, *“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, **that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me**”*. Here the Gentiles are promised forgiveness on repentance and faith, and also an inheritance with the Hebrews who in 9:15 are told they could receive the promise of eternal inheritance only under the New Covenant. This inheritance was the *“high calling”*, offered first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-48; 26:18; 28:24-28; Romans 1:16; Ephesians 3:6).

The very fact that Jews and Gentiles in that day received the forgiveness of their sins is evidence that the New Covenant was in force, and that there would be no more offering for sin (Hebrews 10:18.) Not only would there be no more shedding of blood for sin, but no more appearance of Christ in the Most Holy, even heaven itself, to *“sprinkle”* the blood of atonement. Because all the blood for all people, for all time, was *“sprinkled”* on behalf of all at the one appearance. Since then He is set down on the right hand of the Father, with all power and authority, to give the blessing of forgiveness to all who call upon Him in sincerity, and upon the Father through Him. This latter truth is made clear in verses 27 and 28.

#### After This the Judgment

**9:27** *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:”* One significant reason why it was necessary for Christ to die only once is that while the penalty for sin pronounced in Eden required the death of Adam and his race, only one death was intended and only one inflicted. Adam lived 930 years, *“and he died”* (Genesis 5:5). So with all his posterity; each lives so many minutes, hours, days, or years, and then dies. *“Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”* (Genesis 3:19). Death passed upon all men because of one man’s transgression. Consequently only this one all-embracing death required to be dealt with in any plan for man’s deliverance from its power (Romans 5:12,19; 1 Corinthians 15:21,22).

But though the Adamic death by the decree of God has claimed all our race, yet all through the centuries hope more or less explicit was given that the power of death should be broken and the way cleared for another judgment more favourable to mankind.

To our understanding, the apostle (9:27) goes behind the Jewish ceremonies to the universal fact that the sentence pronounced in Eden was of all men to death, but that death does not end all of God's dealings with men, because He has provided for a judgment on New Covenant terms.

### **Christ Bearing the Sins**

**9:28** *"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."* The apostle now brings in the scapegoat type, to which no reference was made in 9:12-14 when dealing with the Day of Atonement types and antitypes. The reason for its omission there was that he was emphasising that feature of the Atonement Day which required the blood of the bullock and of the goat to be sprinkled upon the mercy seat in the most holy. Aaron entered *"by the blood of goats and calves"*, but Christ entered *"by his own blood"* (verse 12).

Then is shown the fact that Christ's blood purges the conscience (verse 14). Then that it was the seal of the New Covenant (verses 16-20). The blood was necessary for all purgations. Christ's blood purged the realities in heaven (verses 21-26). All these references to the blood in type and antitype were necessary to his argument. And now he comes to that other important feature of the Day of Atonement services, namely, the confession of the sins over the head of the scapegoat, that they may be carried away out of sight. This is the significance of the statement that Christ was once offered *"to bear the sins of many"*.

Only in the scapegoat type can it be said that the animal bore the sin. We read (Leviticus 16:21), *"And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat"*. So now the apostle shows that as antitype of the scapegoat our Lord was appointed to be the sin bearer. Isaiah (53:6) prophesied to the same effect, *"the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"*.

The scapegoat in the type was pure and unblemished, and with the *"LORD's goat"* illustrated the two parts of atonement, first appeasement, and second, carrying away the sins atoned for. In the antitype the sins were laid on our Lord Jesus Christ. These sins were laid on Him, the sins of all humanity who will acknowledge the fact, not that He might keep them, but that He might carry them away. To this the apostle Peter refers, *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on [or to] the tree"* (1 Peter 2:24). The apostle John also points to Jesus as the antitype of the scapegoat (1 John 3:5), *"And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin"*. To *"take away"* or *"bear away"* sin are the identical words used by John the Baptist when he pointed out Jesus to two of his disciples, *"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh [margin, beareth] away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). Further remarks on our Lord as the antitype of the scapegoat will be found in chapter 14.

One death suffered by Christ was the acceptable atonement for the sins of the whole world. Through death He conquered death (Hebrews 2:14,15). *"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"* (1 Corinthians 15:55). As stated in Romans 14:9, *"For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living"*. The fact that thousands of millions of our race are dead does not alter this precious truth concerning the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. He was *"once offered to bear [or bear away] the sins of many"*.

### **Appear the Second Time**

But the sending away of the scapegoat did not terminate the Atonement Day ceremonies. Up to this time the people had been mourning and afflicting their souls by fasting, and would be waiting for some indication that their sins had been borne away. Then their mourning would be turned into joy.

One of the functions of the priesthood was to bless the people. After offerings for sin, and contrition, the priest, and on the Day of Atonement the high priest, would require to convey to the people the fact that the ceremonies were concluded and the sins forgiven and borne away. This would account for the expression *"appear the second time"*, that is, appear to the people. The priest's first appearance was to slay the animals and offer the blood, usually sprinkled before the veil. He would then come out, *"appear the second time"*, to bless the worshipper with assurances that the blood had been sprinkled and therefore he might go thence with peace of mind, the consciousness of God's favour restored.

In Leviticus, chapters 4 and 5, the statement, *"the priest shall make an atonement for them [or, if a single sinner, for him], ... and it [the sin] shall be forgiven them [or him]"*, is repeated in connection with each of several sin offerings, and the official declaration of

forgiveness and of the return of God's favour to the penitent one would be the blessing. The words in which such a declaration were couched are not given in these chapters, but such occasions would seem most appropriate for the carrying out of the command of the LORD to the sons of Levi, *"the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day"* (Deuteronomy 10:8). Here the blessing in His name is clearly associated with the ministering unto the LORD, the greater part of this service consisting in the offering of sacrifices.

In Numbers 6:23-26 a form of words for blessing the children of Israel is given to Aaron and his sons, without specifying the occasions on which the blessing should be imparted. After the consecration of Aaron and his sons, described in Leviticus chapters 8 and 9, sin offerings were made on behalf of the people, followed by burnt offerings and peace offerings. *"And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them."* Moses and Aaron also jointly blessed the people; *"and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people"* (Leviticus 9:22-24).

In connection with the great Passover kept by King Hezekiah, we read that, after the offerings had been made, *"Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven"* (2 Chronicles 30:27).

David speaks of the blessedness of him whose sins are forgiven, and whose iniquities are pardoned, showing that some assurance of forgiveness was imparted as well as the forgiveness itself (Romans 4:6-8; Psalm 32:1,2).

Christ Jesus, offered His human body in sacrifice for the sins of the world. As High Priest of the New Covenant it is His pleasure and duty to pronounce the blessing upon those who *"look for Him"*. The disciples in that day were told to *"look for"* a blessing which He would pour out upon them after He had gone to the Father. This blessing was the Holy Spirit, and it was not only a token of the acceptance of the blood of Christ as a full atonement. It was also a sign that their sins were forgiven, that their consciences were purged from the guilt of the Law, and that they should now receive the promise of eternal inheritance. In addition to this, the Holy Spirit poured on the disciples at Pentecost was a power to assist them in carrying on the work of the gospel.

This application of the appearing of our Lord Jesus *"the second time without sin unto salvation"* is not in contradiction of those scriptures which tell of His coming to reign a thousand years, to enlighten all the world, and to execute justice in the earth. But we must interpret consistently with the apostles' explanations of type and antitype, which require us to recognise that having borne away the sins out of sight, into the wilderness of death, He no longer appears with them, as necessarily He did when the sins were laid upon Him. Having dealt with the sin, this appearing to bless with forgiveness those whose hearts grasp the necessity of His sacrifice for sin, and gratefully accept the same, is the antitype of the blessing of forgiveness secured to the sincere Israelites who bowed in worship when the high priest offered the sacrifices and then came out to bless them.

The Holy Spirit led the apostles to recognise this 'appearing', and they exhorted the Jews to bring themselves into line for a blessing, *"Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities"* (Acts 3:26). *"Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19; RV).

Blessed indeed are those who recognise the completeness of the offering of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world, and who, looking by faith to Him as the High Priest of the New Covenant, prepared to bless the contrite heart, are able to realise their sins blotted out, no more to be remembered or brought into mind, and who also avail themselves of the provision for the forgiveness of their daily trespasses through the blood of His cross. They rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, while they look forward to their eternal inheritance in the heavenlies (Colossians 3:1-4), whence a blessing shall come also to myriads of others in the day of His triumphal reign over the subjects of the Kingdom of God under the whole heaven (Daniel 7:27; Revelation 7:14).

## Chapter 10

### THE SHADOW AND THE SUBSTANCE

Again we have the chapter beginning with a connective, “For” (10:1). *“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.”* The Holy Spirit, through the apostle, brings forward another reason why the sacrifices of the Law failed to accomplish what Christ did accomplish when “once offered”, as stated in the previous chapter, namely, because it (the Law) was inadequate. Its provisions were such as to form “a shadow of the good things to come”, but “not the very image of the things”. The Greek contains the definite article before “good things”. Certain specific good things were arranged for by God, and it is these particular good things that are referred to here.

When the sun is shining brightly in late afternoon, the objects on which it shines cast shadows. And from the shadow we may gather some idea of the object which casts the shadow. By its outlines we may distinguish the shadow of a house or of a man from the shadow of a tree. From the shadow we can approximate the size of the house, and we can judge its angles in a general way, but the ornamentation of the house walls, the number of windows, and many other details will not be apparent in the shadow.

Some commentators on the types of the Law have made the mistake of taking the ordinances of the Law too much in detail. As a consequence they have given interpretations of details unauthorised by the New Testament, and then they have forced the New Testament realities into conformity with their erroneous interpretations. The apostle’s statement, that the Law had a shadow but not the very image, should prevent us making a similar mistake. As God’s children living after the realities have come, we must not look at the shadow and from it try to approximate the substance or object that casts the shadow, but, looking intelligently at the reality, and observing its various details, we may note the similarities or general outlines as found in the shadow. And we must also note the extent to which the Law failed of being the “very image” of the realities.

In the preceding chapters the apostle mentions numerous dissimilarities as well as similarities. To these we have already called attention. And no doubt the reader has observed that we have not guessed at or invented these similarities and differences, nor have we claimed wisdom or knowledge on the subject beyond what the scriptures declare. Our method is to take the New Testament explanations as inspired and as sufficient for our instruction, both on the antitypes and as to what features of the Jewish Law should be regarded as types. Left to our own imaginings, we are sure we should not be more successful in inventing interpretations than others have been. We therefore urge all, including ourselves, to a close adherence to the apostolic selection of antitype and type.

It is a truism, then, to say that the shadow or type could not accomplish what the antitype or reality was designed to accomplish. The shadow of a house will not shelter as the house can do.

Shadow and substance are also referred to in Colossians 2, verses 16 and 17, *“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ”*. That is to say, the body or object or substance, the real thing, is of Christ. Those things under the Law were only shadows of the realities which centre in Christ, who is our “meat” and “drink”, and who gives us the true “sabbath” or rest, and the true circumcision, of the heart (John 6:47-56; Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:9-11; Romans 2:28,29; Galatians 5:6; 6:15).

Many Jews made the mistake of supposing that the Law was the reality; that it was God’s last word on the subject of sin and sacrifices for sin; that the Law placed them in a superior position, so that they were not sinners as were others (Luke 18:11,12; Romans 10:2,3). They needed the instruction of this epistle to the Hebrews to show them that they were clinging to the shadow and rejecting the substance.

And if all that the apostle had previously written did not suffice to convince them, they could hardly fail to recognise the force of the argument now brought before them. In verse 1 he makes the bald statement that the sacrifices which were the shadow, offered year by year continually, could not make the comers thereunto “perfect” the “comers thereunto” being those who attended faithfully upon the Day of Atonement, with contrition for their sins.

**10:2** *"For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins."* Had those offerings, any one of them, or all of them combined, made the comers thereunto perfect, would not the sacrifices have ceased to be offered? The answer is obvious. Once completely purged of sin, there would have been no need for further offerings. The very fact that the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement were repeated yearly was proof that the sacrifices previously offered had not accomplished all that was necessary.

Verse 2 repeats what was stated in 9:9, that the difficulty was with the conscience of the worshipper. Only one sacrifice can cleanse it of guilt, and that is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 9:8-14). The sacrifices under the Law could not cleanse it completely and forever, though they did accomplish a certain amount of purification of the flesh, and the Day of Atonement sacrifices gave the contrite of the nation assurance of forgiveness for the year just closed; the Day of Atonement sacrifices being national and in addition to the sacrifices offered throughout the year for individual sins. Thus the contrite Jews began the new year with all past trespasses, transgressions, and sins no longer held against them.

### **Repeated Sacrifices Constitute a Remembrance**

**10:3** *"But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year."* The very fact that the Law demanded a Day of Atonement each and every year had another side to it besides the benefit to the people who participated. The repetition of sacrifices for sin constituted a remembrance of sins. It indicated that sins were still being committed, and that God still required to be propitiated, hence had not been completely and forever propitiated by previous offerings. Through the prophets He said to Israel, many years after the Law was given at Sinai:

*"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God. and your sins have hid his face from you [or, "have made him hide his face from you"]" (Isaiah 59:2).*

*"Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you" (Jeremiah 5:25).*

And lest the Israelites should labour under a misunderstanding regarding God's attitude toward these very sacrifices, the prophets were sent to tell Israel that they gave no satisfaction to God, since repeated sacrifices did not keep the people from sin and idolatry, nor did they even offer them correctly according to the Law. So that the whole system of sacrifices became offensive to God, instead of a sweet savour (Leviticus 1:9,13; Malachi 1:7-10,13).

He also commissioned the prophets to foretell a sacrifice that would take away sin, and that would be entirely satisfactory to Himself (Isaiah 53:4-10,12; Daniel 9:24). Thus, when our Lord came the Jews should not have misunderstood about their bondage to sin, the inadequacy of the sacrifices, and their need of the special sacrifice promised through the prophet, *"when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin"; "the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:10,6).*

**10:4** *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."* The reason for the remembrance of sins every year is found in the status of the offering. The blood of bulls and of goats was of too low an order to suffice for the sins of men, who are of a higher order of creation (Genesis 1:27).

God was pleased to accept them under the Law Covenant as satisfaction for the sins of one year, for the purpose of teaching His people the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the need of atonement and reconciliation, and by giving them a fresh start each year He encouraged them in a life of devotion to Him. Still, the fact remained that mankind's need was for complete forgiveness and reconciliation, and the blood of bulls and of goats could not secure that. To effect complete and lasting reconciliation the blood of a higher being was required, equivalent to man.

Nor would the sacrifice of an angel have been satisfactory for the sins of human beings, for angels are of too high an order. So far as the scriptures enlighten us, they are not flesh-and-blood beings, but spirit beings, with powers and abilities superior to the human. The psalmist describes man's estate as *"a little lower than the angels"*, with lordship over the animal and vegetable creation, a ruler-ship not given to angels (Psalm 8:5-8).

### **The Body Prepared**

**10:5** *"Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me."* At the peak of Israel's greatness, when King David reigned over the full extent of Israel's domain (1 Chronicles 18:1-14), God caused

him to refer to the inadequateness of the sacrifices, and that He himself would provide a sacrifice that would accomplish what was required for man's forgiveness and reinstatement in the divine favour (Psalm 40:6-8). These words are quoted by the apostle as being prophetic of our Lord Jesus's devotion to the Father's will, and as indicating that He would at the proper time give Himself an offering for sin.

The antecedent of "*he*" (verse 5) is found in the last verse of chapter 9, "*So Christ was once offered*". The words of the psalm are attributed to Christ, "*when he cometh into the world*". Does this mean when He was born in Bethlehem? No, for as a babe His body would not have been a sufficient offering. The offering which should satisfy the Jewish Law and deliver the Jews from the curse of the Law, was also to be, by God's provision, a satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and at the same time a ransom or corresponding price for Adam and Eve and their race, all of whom were under sentence of death, some actually in the tomb. It was not until He reached manhood that our Lord could offer Himself as the equivalent of Adam, through whom the sin and death had come at the beginning, before ever the Israelites existed or there was a Mosaic Law.

The word here rendered "*world*" is 'kosmos', meaning 'order of things', or 'orderly arrangement'. Having regard to the fact that the "*body*" which Christ offered on the cross was not fully "*prepared*" for sacrifice until maturity, and also having regard to the apostle's application of the words of the psalm to our Lord's offering of Himself, we take the words "*when he cometh into the world*" to mean when He entered the Jewish order of things as the Messiah, God's anointed, as a prophet and teacher "*like unto Moses*", and as the "*lamb without blemish and without spot*", His purity and blamelessness having been attested by His thirty years of faithfulness in keeping the whole Law without offending in any one point, a test and sign of His absolute perfection (James 2:10; 3:2; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22).

Our Lord's entry into the Jewish order of things with a view to the fulfilment of this prophecy of Psalm 40:6 was undoubtedly when He offered himself to John for baptism, and thus began His public ministry. When John protested, He said, "*Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*" (Matthew 3:15). As a Jew He aligned himself with John's reform movement, though not requiring baptism for the same reason as the remainder of the nation, who thereby confessed and publicly repented of their sins, including the sin of covenant-breaking. (Matthew 3:1-6). To our Lord baptism meant something quite different. It represented the giving up of himself to God, to do His will and accomplish His work, both in and for Israel and also for the Gentiles.

"*Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not*" is no contradiction of the statements frequently made that at Sinai God gave the Law in which ordinances for the regulation of the sacrificial offerings formed a considerable part. Nor does it mean that God disapproves of sacrifice of any kind, and therefore could not have desired the sacrifice of His Son, as many 'higher critics' affirm. That God desired the sacrifice of His Son, that it was in fact required to make atonement for sin, is sufficiently proven by the statement that He prepared Him a body for the purpose, His perfect human body.

**10:6** "*In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.*" In the mere slaying and offering of animals God had no pleasure. He did, however, appreciate the offerings when made in the prescribed manner and for the prescribed purposes, when offered in faith and as an act of obedience (Psalm 147:11; 149:4). It would be inconsistent to say that God commanded certain ceremonials and indicated that the incense offered in connection therewith would be a sweet savour to Him, as in Leviticus, chapters 1 to 3, and at the same time assert that He had absolutely no pleasure in them.

We therefore understand the meaning to be that God had **no pleasure in them as a permanent institution**. He knew beforehand their inadequateness to take away sin, and even the whole burnt offerings brought in connection with sin offerings or as separate voluntary offerings were not the highest form in which men might express their devotion to Him. Often the carrying out of the ordinances by the children of Israel was perfunctory, and their illegal offering of the maimed and diseased and even of unclean animals was offensive, as He told them through Malachi. The slaying and offering up of animals was at no time a benefit to God, and when the purposes for which He required them had been served, and the time came to bring in the true Sacrifice for sin, God could truly say that He had had (the Greek is in the past perfect tense) no pleasure in what had proven, after years of long-suffering and patience on His part, of no avail as a remedy for sin.

**10:7** *"Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God."* Literally the first part of verse 7 should be *"Lo, I am come, ... to do thy will, O God"*, thus expressing the same sentiment as John 4:34; 5:30; and 6:38. Our blessed Lord was in full accord with the Father's will. In the severest trials He said, *"Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done"* (Luke 22:42). Since the will of God involved the offering up of His Son as a sacrifice for sin, the Son gladly *"offered himself"*, as we have seen in 9:14. (Compare with Ephesians 5:2.) Thus the love of both the Father and the Son for the world of sinners was manifested, and this wonderful love draws out our love in return (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9,10).

In the volume (or roll) of the scriptures Christ's readiness to perform the will of God had been foretold. And so it had been, in the sacrificial types from Eden onward, and later in the prophets, as in Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9. Corroborating the prophecies our Lord said, *"for this cause came I unto this hour". "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me"*. In answer to Pilate He said, *"Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth"*. The Son of man *"came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (John 6:38; 12:27; 18:37; Matthew 16:21; 20:17-19,28; Luke 18:31).

**10:8** Verses 8 to 10 contain the apostle's comment on the quotation from the psalm. In verse 8 he limits the sacrifices and offerings in which God had no pleasure to those *"which are offered by the law"*, or *"according to the law"*, thus excepting, or at least not commenting on, those offered by the ancients previous to the Law.

### **The New Covenant Established**

**10:9** Paul's comment on, *"Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God"*, is *"He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second"*. Though briefly expressed, this is an important truth, and shows that the main point of the argument is that the 'old' or Law Covenant, *"the first"*, was taken away by Christ, and that the New Covenant, *"the second"*, was established by Him. Hence those Hebrews desiring salvation should renounce the Law Covenant and accept the New Covenant. Also the statement is clear that our Lord took away *"the first"* in order that *"the second"* might be established.

It was not the will of God that both covenants should continue side by side. It was the will of God that Christ take away *"the first"*, and then establish *"the second"*. This truth is clearly stated also in Colossians 2:6-17, where Christ is shown to have taken away the *"handwriting"* that was against them, that is, the Law Covenant, nailing it to His cross (verses 14 and 15), and to have opened the New Covenant under which He accepts those who believe, *"the faith"* (verse 7) being contrasted with the Law, just as in Galatians 3:23, the same apostle says that *"before the faith came [the Greek has the article before 'faith' in this instance], we were kept under the law"*, but after the faith came the believers are shut up in Christ Jesus, *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ"* (Galatians 3:23-27).

And in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female (Galatians 3:28). Thus Christ, as the Mediator of *"the second"*, that is, the New Covenant, takes the place of Moses, the mediator of *"the first"* or Law Covenant. As the whole Jewish nation was baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, so those who now accept the finished work of Christ and realise their privilege of full devotion to Him, are baptised into Him (1 Corinthians 10:12; Romans 6:3,4).

### **Sanctified through His Offering**

**10:10** *"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* The *"will"* here referred to is doubtless the same *"will"* is mentioned in verse 9, namely, the will of God. The will of God was that Christ should offer the true, efficacious sacrifice for sin, that He should take away the ineffective *"first"* covenant, and establish *"the second"*, or New Covenant. However, these features of His will were not the end, but the means to an end, which end is now described for our edification.

Thus the sanctification of believers is not only described as the will of God, but as one of the objects attained by our Lord's sacrifice and the establishment of the New Covenant. This is corroborative of Hebrews 9:15, to the comment on which the reader is again referred. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 also, the sanctification of believers is described as *"the will of God"*. Sanctification means the state or condition of being set apart to God, and set apart from sin. It contains in it the thought of holiness and separateness.

Sanctification may be said to have two parts: the first being the setting apart from sin accomplished when the sinner is converted and accepts Christ and the forgiveness of sins. He is *“delivered from the power of darkness”*, and translated *“into the kingdom of God’s dear Son”*; turned from *“the power of Satan unto God”*; *“passed from death unto life”* (Colossians 1:13; Acts 26:18; John 5:24).

Part two of the sanctification consists in the gradual transforming of the mind and character by the influence of the Word and the Spirit, and by constant cleansing with the blood (Romans 12:2; 8:29; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 1:7-9).

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross made possible this sanctification of all who will ever believe in any age, but believers in the present age are favoured with the first opportunity to take advantage of the provision, and thus be delivered from the power of sin and death (Romans 6:11-14,22). The fullest provision for the salvation and sanctification of all who will be saved, whether in the present age as members of the Church or in the Kingdom Age as inheritors of the earth, was made in that one *“offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”*. Obviously the *“body”* here referred to is His human body, which was crucified on the cross, and which God had prepared for the purpose by sending His only begotten Son to be born of a virgin, and so possess a human body (Galatians 4:4). This human body of our Lord was perfect, as we saw in studying chapter 2.

The words *“once for all”* express exactly the meaning of the Greek word ‘ephapax’ used in this verse, and also in Hebrews 7:27 and 9:12. Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance defines ‘ephapax’ as meaning ‘upon one occasion (only)’.

**10:11** Again the apostle states the well-known fact that the duty of the Levitical priests was to offer sacrifices daily for the sins of the people, as he mentions also in 9:6. They repeatedly offered the same sacrifices, that is, the same kind of sacrifice: bullocks, goats, sheep, lambs and pigeons. The high priest also repeatedly offered on various occasions, the chief sacrifices offered by him being on the Day of Atonement. As the Jewish Law lasted about 1,600 years, there were 1,600 anniversaries of the Day of Atonement (compare with 9:25). Even with Israel’s frequent negligence of the day, thousands of animals were sacrificed: *“offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin”*.

### **Jesus Christ the Only Sin Offering**

**10:12** And now the apostle repeats the contrast already mentioned in 9:26, *“But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God”*. This one sacrifice put an end to the sacrifices of animals, since it accomplished the will of God as they could not do. All animal sacrifices offered at Jerusalem by the Jews after the veil of the temple was rent in twain were superfluous even as types, all that was necessary in that direction having been served by previous animal offerings.

In the face of the very positive statements of the apostle here and elsewhere that Christ offered *“one sacrifice”*, *“once for all”*, *“forever”*, it is amazing to find Christians claiming that additional sacrifices for sin were appointed. The ‘sacrifice of the mass’, as performed in the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox churches, is claimed by them to be a repetition of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, but an ‘unbloody’ one, nevertheless necessary for the forgiveness of sins committed by the adherents of those churches. Indeed, the assertion of popes and councils is that it is necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman pontiff, and to demonstrate that subjection by attendance at the appointed celebrations of the mass. By this means the uniqueness and completeness of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross are done away.

Still more subtle in its effort to do away with the *“one offering”* of the human body of Christ on the cross as the propitiation for the sins of the world is a theory advanced in recent years, claiming that the Church in some way shares in offering that sacrifice for sins. The apostle’s words here do not, however, lend themselves to such a theory, nor do any other scriptures. Though the Church is sometimes called *“the body of Christ”* (Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:30), this is in respect of blessings received by the Church from the risen Christ, because of faith in Him. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-27 the members of the Church are spoken of as constituting one body because all are interdependent. No member can say to another, I have no need of thee, because all minister to one another, just as in our physical bodies the eye, ear and hand all serve a useful purpose and minister to the good of the person as a whole. So we are exhorted, *“by love serve one another”* (Galatians 5:13).



The body described in 1 Corinthians 12 is not a headless body, of which Christ is the head, but is composed of a head and body. We all know that the head is a part of the body. When the 'body' of a dead friend or relative is 'laid out', the head is included as part of the body. When the 'body' of a man is reported found in the river it is understood to be a whole corpse. If at any time a body without a head be found, the newspapers specify a 'headless body'. From 1 Corinthians 12:21 it is clear that the apostle is using an entire body, not a headless body, as an illustration of the Church on earth, for he says that the head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you. That is true in regard to a human body.

But so far as Christ being the head of the Church is concerned, He is the head in an official sense. He is the leader, guide and Instructor. It is not true of Christ, that He cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you. Our Lord Jesus can truly say to the feet, 'I have no need of you'. He has no need of any of the members, of 'the body' into which all believers are baptised by one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). The need is all on our side. We need Him and we need one another.

The Church is not a sacrifice for sin in any sense. The members of the Church do certainly give up their lives to God, but these are thank and praise offerings, and not sin offerings. The human body of Christ being the only offering for sin which God "*prepared*" and recognises, and it being "*once for all*", for all the race, and for all time, He does not and will not recognise any supplementary offering for sin.

#### **At the Right Hand of God**

The last clause of verse 12, stating that after Christ had made the one sacrifice for sins forever, He "*sat down on the right hand of God*", joined with

**10:13** "*From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool*", is additional proof that Christ will take part in no additional or supplementary sin offering. His expectation to rule over His enemies dates from His death and resurrection, when He was given "*all power [or authority] in heaven and in earth*". As stated in Romans 14:9, "*To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living*".

All of mankind were God's enemies. There can be no doubt on this point, for the scriptures testify, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the **ungodly**. ... God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet **sinners**, Christ died for us. ... For if, when we were **enemies**, we were reconciled*" (Romans 5:6-10). The Jews were enemies because of their broken Law and their crucifixion of the Messiah. The Gentiles were enemies because in their Roman governor they joined in that crucifixion. They were enemies also because they were not recognised or accepted by God through any even typical atonement.

Of the Gentiles Paul wrote, "*That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*" (Ephesians 2:12). "*And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled*" (Colossians 1:21).

The very fact that both Jews and Gentiles required to be reconciled is evidence that they were enemies, and, being enemies, a Mediator was required to do the reconciling.

#### **Christ's Enemies made His Footstool**

Since the whole race of mankind were God's enemies, by what means are they being made Jesus' footstool? We answer, by two distinct methods. The first is by conversion, so that they willingly acknowledge His sovereignty and His rights over them. Those who own Christ as Lord kneel at His feet, confessing their sins, and pledging allegiance. Thus Saul of Tarsus immediately asked "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" or as he relates in Acts 22:10 "*What shall I do, Lord?*". Since the word "*Lord*" means owner, master, or ruler, the very use of the term signifies an acknowledgement at His footstool. That is, of course, when used in sincerity, as in Paul's case, for there are many who say Lord, Lord, whose hearts are far from Him (Matthew 7:21-23).

The other method of making His enemies His footstool is by compulsion. The second psalm exhorts to make friends with the new King before His wrath is kindled. The wrath of the Lamb is described in Revelation 6:16 as manifested on a large scale at the close of the Gospel Age, when the evil fruitage of the age must be dealt with and the kings of the nations deposed to make room for His own Kingdom (Revelation 19:11-21).

In 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 it is set forth that Christ will remain seated at God's right hand throughout the Kingdom Age. Thus Hebrews 10:13 and 1 Corinthians 15:25 furnish us with the evidence that when Christ sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high after His resurrection and appearing on behalf of all for whom His offering was made, He remains in that position. He dies no more, nor does He leave that right-hand position of favour to make any more purifications for sin, that having been finished, as stated in chapters 1, 9 10. He retains the right-hand position until the close of the Kingdom Age, all the while 'waiting' till His enemies be made His footstool. And 1 Corinthians 15:27 conveys the thought that the Father places all things under Him.

While our Lord is 'waiting' for His enemies to be made His footstool, He is not inactive. He is building His Church, officiating as Mediator, Advocate (helper or comforter), and Intercessor, caring for His people as their shepherd and leader. His second coming is also effected without His leaving the right-hand position, which is not a matter of locality, but of chief favour and authority.

The special significance stressed by the apostle of the Lord's sitting down at the Father's right hand, after having entered heaven (the Most Holy) by His own blood to make atonement, is that no more offering for sin is to be made. That part of His work is "*finished*", as He said in His last words on the cross (Hebrews 13; John 19:28-30).

### **Perfected Forever**

**10:14** *"For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are being sanctified"*, literal rendering. The one offering made possible the cleansing and the perfecting of all who will ever be sanctified, including both those who undergo the disciplines of the present age in the hope of attaining joint heir-ship in the Kingdom, and those who will become sanctified when brought to the knowledge of the truth in the Kingdom Age. As the Lord loved righteousness and hated iniquity, so must all those who would have His approval and His help toward their perfecting in His likeness (Hebrews 1:9; 1 John 3:3-10; Romans 8:29).

**10:15** *"Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before."* In further evidence that the offering for sin was complete (to be no more repeated), that the Lord is now seated at the Father's right hand, and that the believers are being sanctified, Paul now cites the granting of the Holy Spirit to the believers.

It seems clear that Paul here, in harmony with Peter's discourse on Pentecost, considered the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as the "*blessing*" following the true sacrifice for sins, and as the antitype of the Jewish high priest's coming out to bless the people at the close of the Day of Atonement offerings (Acts 2:32,33,38,39; 3:19,26).

The word 'spirit' is to be preferred to 'ghost' as the name of the power poured forth by the risen Lord on the disciples in the upper room, and also given to all believers since, as explained in Ephesians 1:13. (See the Revised and other modern versions.)

The sense in which "*perfected forever*" is used in verse 14 must be judged from the context and from other scriptures. As these show that absolute perfection of mind and body are not given by belief in Christ and the receipt of the Holy Spirit, we take the perfection in the sense of completeness as regards their acceptableness to God, and as regards the cleansing of the conscience from the guilt of sin. That cleansing of the conscience the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer could not accomplish. Hence the need of the blood of Christ to make atonement, and so to satisfy the demands of a Just God that He can now fully forgive as provided for in the terms of the New Covenant, that God "*might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*" (Romans 3:26).

### **The Witness of the Spirit**

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the waiting disciples at Pentecost was not only a witness of the reconciliation the Lord had accomplished in heaven on behalf of repentant sinners. It was also a token that the New Covenant was in operation, as Paul goes on to show by immediately quoting that portion of the New Covenant that relates to the forgiveness of sins and the writing of God's law on the minds and hearts of those whose sins are forgiven on account of their faith.

As the word "*witness*" is frequently used in scripture in the sense of 'testifier', we may note that the Holy Spirit testified in three ways to the fact of the forgiveness of sins. First, by inspiring the prophets to write of the New Covenant forgiveness. Second, by being poured out on the disciples as already described and thus testifying that they were forgiven. Third,

by enabling the apostles and early disciples to speak with authority both in exposition of the subject as in the epistle to the Hebrews, and in pronouncing forgiveness upon those who repented and confessed. This authority to give assurance of forgiveness was given the disciples in a figure when Jesus breathed on them, as related in John 20:22,23. On Pentecost Peter was inspired to offer forgiveness to the Jews who would repent of their part in the crucifixion of their Messiah (Acts 2:36-39; also Acts 3:13-19, 26;5:31). And subsequently a similar assurance was given the Gentiles.

**10:16,17** The quotation by Paul of the portion of the New Covenant relating to forgiveness would be pointless did he not mean the readers to understand that the forgiveness experienced by them was in fulfilment of the New Covenant promise and that therefore the New Covenant was in operation. The writing of God's laws on our minds and hearts, is done by the Holy Spirit given to us, and is part of our New Covenant blessing.

As we have already written in detail on the different promises of the New Covenant when commenting on chapter 8, the reader is invited to refresh his memory by again perusing those comments. Here we emphasise the fact that the apostle makes use of them in his argument. And this argument reaches a climax in verse 18.

**10:18** *"Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin."* This is a self-evident truth. The sins of the apostles and other disciples having been remitted, no more sacrifice for sin was required, because whatever sacrifice was able to accomplish this for 120 disciples, the number gathered in the upper room, was able to effect the same remission of sins for all subsequent applicants. The wonderful value of the death of Christ is its universal efficacy for the sins of every member of the human family who has ever lived and for those also who will yet be born.

#### **Boldness to Enter the Holiest**

**10:19** *"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus."* Our entrance into heaven itself as a reward of faithfulness is not here referred to, but our recognition of the work Jesus has done and our acceptance of the invitation to draw nigh unto God through Him.

It is by faith that we accept the invitation, and thus become true worshippers in the new mode of divine worship under the New Covenant. No longer is entrance into the holiest limited to the high priest, as throughout the Jewish Age. His offerings having to be repeated continually, there was no basis on which others might enter. But under the New Covenant, all sacrifice for sin having been completed in the person of Jesus, the Lamb of God, the way is open. We enter not by our own blood, or on account of any sacrifice we offer, but by the blood of Jesus offered over 1900 years ago.

Instead of *"boldness"* the marginal reading *"liberty"* is to be preferred. Now we have liberty to pray to God as our Father, in the name of Jesus, and are assured that He will hear us (John 16:23-27; Hebrews 13:15).

**10:20** We enter by *"a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us"*, that is, 'dedicated', the same Greek word being used here as in 9:18. The idea is 'opened up', or 'made available'. An act of dedication was performed by Solomon when the temple he had built was finished and ready for use. So Christ dedicated a way for us, and that way is now open for use. The Revised Version reads, *"By the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way"*. Some versions have *"a new way of life"* instead of *"a new and living way"*. Paul then explains that our Lord's flesh was the antitype of the veil separating the Most Holy from the holy, *"through the veil, that is to say, his flesh"*. Therefore if we would enter by faith and have our prayers accepted we must do so through Him, in His name.

While He was still with the disciples the Lord spoke of this. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* *"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and receive, that your joy may be full"* (John 14:6; 16:24).

**10:21** *"And having an high priest over the house of God."* Another reminder that the resurrected and glorious Lord is our High Priest, and that He is there to serve us. The expression, *"over the house of God"*, is equivalent to 'over the temple of God', the reference being to this new mode of worship as the temple of God. Over this new worship the risen Lord, High Priest of the New Covenant, presides, and must be acknowledged by the true worshippers. Here Jesus is revealed in His double office of the sacrifice for sin and as the High Priest who offered the sacrifice and then came forth to pronounce upon the people the forgiveness of their sins.

### Draw Near with a True Heart

**10:22** *"Let us draw near with a true heart"*. Let the duplicity, idolatry and indifference of the Israelites under their mode of worship be a warning to us (Matthew 15:7-9). Let us not repeat their indifference and stiff-neckedness, and hypocrisy, still further to try the patience of our loving God and Father. But let us be true, sincere and honest, in our worship. Let ours not be lip service, but true heart devotion.

*"In full assurance of faith."* Full assurance and fullness of faith come from simple acceptance of Christ's finished work, of the promises of the New Covenant, and of all other favours and blessings. They come to us as free gifts from our loving Saviour's hands, with nothing to pay, except the debt of gratitude we owe. That, of course, cannot be paid in full. Full assurance means no doubts or scepticism. And faith means accepting what we cannot see by the natural eye but may grasp with our minds when they are illuminated by the word.

### The Conscience

*"Our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience."* Drawing near would be sacrilege did we not have this credential. In other words, the apostle now tells us that as the furniture and implements of the tabernacle were sprinkled by the blood of the sacrifices, so we, each individually, must submit to the sprinkling of our hearts by the blood of Jesus (9:21,22). We must make personal acknowledgment of our need of cleansing from an evil conscience, and of the power of the blood to purge the sins. We are also reminded of the blood sprinkled on the door posts to protect the children of Israel from the destroying angel (Exodus 12:13,21-24).

Conscience being, in the first place, that faculty of the mind which takes note of right and wrong, it is evident that conscience, as well as other faculties of the mind, requires training. For that purpose the school of Christ is the best. Uninstructed, the conscience may decide that right is wrong and wrong is right. The other faculties of the mind are therefore employed (among other things) in securing information useful to conscience. The word of God is the true source of such information, and the Holy Spirit assists in assimilating and correctly using that information.

An evil conscience is one that approves of or even tolerates evil, and requires cleansing by the blood of Christ. This is accomplished by confession of sin, prayers to God for forgiveness, and acceptance of the atoning blood as the God-provided mode of cleansing.

A weak conscience is one not fully informed and not established in the right, hence easily misled. This was the difficulty of some in the early church just emerging from idolatry, and uncertain as to whether it was right or wrong to eat meat that had been offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8:7). The apostles laid down certain principles upon which to base their judgment (Acts 15:20,29; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Romans 14:1, 4-23).

A strong conscience was one guided by those principles, hence able to act in a manner pleasing to God and helpful to others whenever and wherever the question of meats arose (Romans 15:1). A properly informed and trained conscience may be strong on other subjects as well.

A seared conscience is described as belonging to those who, though fully informed, persist in contriving and doing evil, who do not confess their sins, and who do not avail themselves of the cleansing blood of Christ (1 Timothy 4:1,2).

Notwithstanding that he had been *"a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious"* (1 Timothy 1:13), *"exceedingly mad"* against the Christians (Acts 26:9-12), when he was known as Saul of Tarsus, the apostle Paul said later to his persecutors, *"Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day"* (Acts 23:1). What he meant by *"good conscience"* is clear from his speech before King Agrippa, *"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"* (Acts 26:9). His innermost thought and conviction, his conception of what was right, was to persecute the Christians. We see from this that a 'good' conscience unenlightened may mistakenly justify itself in evil.

In his first letter to Timothy (1:13) he explained that he obtained mercy and forgiveness for this conduct *"because I did it ignorantly in unbelief"*. He had been a zealous Pharisee, and apparently entered with zeal the role of persecutor of Christians without properly looking into the Lord's credentials as the Son of David and their Messiah. So he acknowledges his ignorance was due to unbelief.

From this we see that mere sincerity in a belief and line of action is no guarantee of being right, and not a sufficient excuse. It is the duty of every one of us who hold God's word in our hands to see to it that we understand it and that we then cultivate our consciences by submission and obedience to its precepts and order our lives according to the purpose of God therein revealed.

*"Our bodies washed with pure water"* seems to be an allusion to the personal cleanliness required under the Law, with the implication that bodily cleanliness is also desirable under the New Covenant, even though the New Covenant is not cumbered with endless ordinances.

A clean body is, or should be, the natural expression of a clean mind. A clean body seems more appropriate when approaching the throne of grace than a neglected one. We might gather from this also the desirability of getting rid of and keeping free from disease, especially such sorts as are due to filthy habits. Those who are afflicted with incurable diseases will not be rejected by the Lord on that account. We mean merely that in our efforts to obey the apostle's commands, we do well to observe his directions regarding cleanliness of body as well as those relating to purification of the heart and mind. The apostle wrote to the brethren at Corinth, *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit [or mind], perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* (2 Corinthians 7:1).

**10:23** *"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith [or, "confession of our hope"; RV] without wavering; for he is faithful that promised."* If we hold fast our hope, we shall not waver in our allegiance and faith. James tells us what the man that wavers is like (James 1:5-7). 'Confession' is better than 'profession', as in 3:1. In all this the saints are obliged to take a public stand. They are not allowed to hide their light under a bushel. Faithfulness in the true worship requires that it shall take a prominent place in our lives, and that wherever we are our light should shine as a testimony before men (Matthew 5:14-16; 10:32,33).

God *"is faithful that promised"*, so we have no need to fear that after we have obeyed His commands He will forget or ignore us (2 Timothy 2:13; Philippians 1:6).

**10:24** Worshipping God is not all. Those who have had their consciences cleansed have also a duty to one another, as here stated, *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works"*. In modern English 'provoke' is used in an evil sense, as stirring up irritation, annoyance, or anger. Evidently it is not so used in our text, but rather in a good sense, in harmony with Peter's exhortation (2 Peter 1:12,13), *"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance"*. So also Paul exhorts that we stir one another up unto love and to good works.

That we all need stirring up goes without saying. The cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches and of attempts to gain riches, the natural love of ease of some dispositions and restless activity of others in worldly pursuits and pleasures; all these interfere with our spiritual life. 'Love and good works' should characterise our actions to our families, but should not end there.

We have now to consider that the grace of God and the love of Jesus have brought us into God's family, and that as *"new creatures"* in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) we have a duty toward every fellow-member engaged in the same true worship. We have the duty and privilege of loving them, and of encouraging them to love others, of performing good works on their behalf and of stirring them up to do the same. Thus the saints act and react on one another to mutual edification.

And this means also that we have a care not to stir one another up to evil, not to arouse feelings of anger and bitterness, not to be spiteful or vindictive, and not to retaliate when others show bitterness or other wrong feelings towards us.

Doubtless we can, in our private intercourse, do much to help one another along the narrow way. But those who are travelling in a wrong direction are often very sensitive to criticism and impatient of good advice. They feel, perhaps, that their personal liberty is being interfered with if the brethren make suggestions intended to be helpful. But there is a way to help one another that cannot be construed as interference in the private affairs of the brethren. That method is suggested in verse 25.

### Assembling Ourselves Together

**10:25** *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another”*. When the believers meet together to study the word of God, they have in it all that is necessary *“for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (2 Timothy 3:16). On some occasions the apostles found it necessary to single out certain individuals for reproof before all, and Timothy and Titus were advised so to deal with those who they thought required it (1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:2,10, 14-16; Titus 1:13). But in the main the reading of and commenting on the scriptures is sufficient to stir up each one with renewed love and zeal for God, and fresh determination to root out the works of the flesh and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. Where brethren err seriously, further steps must be taken, as described in Matthew 18:15-20; 5:21-24; Galatians 6:1,2,10; James 5:13-20; 1 John 5:16,17; Jude 21-23.

We have heard it remarked by some who have rejoiced in the liberty wherewith Christ makes free, and who understand the New Covenant arrangement that true worship may be rendered to God in any place or clime, ‘Oh, I can worship God just as well at home as by attending a meeting; and I can learn just as much by studying the Bible by myself’. Evidently some of the Hebrew converts had adopted that attitude, and we are glad the apostle points out their mistake.

The question is not as between the acceptableness of worship rendered in the home and that offered in the assemblies of believers, but, what has God arranged for our good? He has commanded us to observe both private and public worship. Each has its place in our development as His children, and we cannot neglect either without detriment to ourselves.

Besides which, the apostle here intimates that by assembling together (which gives opportunity for private conversation before and after, as well as for study), we can help others. The mere fact of our presence is an encouragement to the others, including those who are conducting the classes or preaching services. It is an example to the children and young folk that the ‘house of God’ is a good place to come to, and helps them to learn how to conduct themselves there (1 Timothy 3:14,15).

All this in addition to the spiritual uplift received from an hour’s dropping of the daily routine, and concentration of the mind and heart on the will of God as expressed in His word. The pity is that often when in need of *“correction”, “reproof”* and other help, such as come from mutual study, the erring one absents himself, and thus fails to receive the admonitions that would deliver him from his fault, and encourage him to begin anew the fight to conquer self and sin.

Paul continues, *“and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”*. Whether this *“day”* be a reference to the great time of trouble with which this present age is to close, with its increase of false teachers, or whether it be the day when the Lord shall manifest Himself to our joy (1 Timothy 4:1-6; Colossians 3:1-4), the disciples of the Lord are urged to meet together *“the more”*.

In Romans 13:11 we read, *“Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed”*. As time passes, and we grow in grace and knowledge and love, the end of our course is less distant. And though the reward is not given at death, for Paul looked for it at the Lord’s return, yet, there being no progress while in death, all the development of character and steadfastness and faith must be accomplished by the time one lays down the present life.

However, this growth in grace and knowledge, according to Hebrews 10:25, does not relieve God’s people of the necessity of meeting together. We cannot ‘grow out of’ our need for Bible study and mutual help.

In times of severe open persecution God’s people have been sharply defined, because it took courage to brave the physical dangers attendant on assembling together in mountains and caves and other out of the way places, or secretly, with doors locked, in the cities and towns. But, as we *“see the day approaching”*, it is apparent that faith, courage, and perseverance are needed to resist also the attacks of enemies in the shape of subtle errors presented with great plausibility by professed teachers of truth. As our Lord said, they come wearing sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15-20). Paul also warned the Church against the false teachers who should increase in the last days, making the times truly perilous (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

It stands to reason, then, that by meeting together and continually building one another up on the most holy faith, the brethren will be fortified against such subtle attacks as well as against more open foes (Jude 20,21; Ephesians 4:1-7,11-16; 6:10-13).

In addition, the necessity for holy living and for the maintenance of a pure conscience is the more frequently impressed upon our minds and hearts. Having experienced the forgiveness of sins, the purged conscience, and other blessings promised in the New Covenant, and having an ever-living High Priest to intercede for us, we have also the responsibility that such blessings impose, and none of us by absenting ourselves from the assemblies can escape that responsibility, as the apostle goes on to show, but rather by so doing we increase the risk of being ensnared into wilful sin.

### **Warning against Wilful Sin**

**10:26** *“For”, again the connective, showing that this is all sequential reasoning on the New Covenant, the forgiveness of sins, the writing of God’s laws on the mind and heart of the believer, and the “one offering” “once for all” which made these benefits possible to us, “if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins”.*

What truth is here meant? Scientific? Geographical? Mathematical? Musical? No. Knowledge on these subjects is not made essential to salvation. Manifestly the truth in particular referred to is that which Paul had been elaborating in this and the preceding chapters, the great truths concerning Jesus Christ as Mediator and High Priest, and all they mean to *“the world”* that God *“so loved”* as to send His only-begotten Son to redeem (John 3:16; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 3:24,25).

Satisfactory as it is to have a knowledge of God’s purposes as they pertain to mankind in general; hope inspiring as it is to know something of the glorious future when our Lord shall take us to Himself and set up His Kingdom in power over the whole earth, the thing which concerns us most is our own salvation.

With the acceptance of the atoning blood for our sins, we have the responsibility it brings. What is our attitude when temptations assail us? How hard are we trying to overcome our natural faults and failings? How sincerely are we striving to know and to do God’s will? For we must see that God’s goodness in forgiving us our sins for Christ’s sake is not in order that we may commit further sin. As the apostle asks in Romans 6:1,2, having told of the grace or favour of God in chapter 5, *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”*

Young’s Analytical Concordance defines the Greek word rendered *“wilfully”* in verse 26 as meaning ‘willingly’ or ‘voluntarily’. Every member of the Adamic race has been born under the condemnation of death on account of Adam’s sin (Romans 5:12,17; 1 Corinthians 15:21,22). In addition, each one has inherited mental and moral biases which render it often easier and more pleasant to do wrong than to do right. Those who, by the grace of God, in after life become Christians are no exception to the rule.

Whether the natural bias manifests itself in disobedience to parents, self-will, lying, or any of the everyday sins commonly seen in even very young children, or immorality and crime as practised by a section of the race in years of maturity, God is willing to overlook much on the score of the ignorance and superstition, lack of instruction, strength of temptation, of those who do these things. This He intimated in His words to Jonah, when Jonah fretted because the Ninevites were not destroyed, *“And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”* (Jonah 4:11). Paul’s words to the Athenians are to the same effect; *“the times of this ignorance God winked at”* (Acts 17:30). God did not often interfere to send specific punishments on the Gentiles for their idolatries and other sins.

Specific punishments were, however, often visited upon the Jews, because they had been given a definite Law as a standard to live up to. And though a distinction was made between transgressions committed inadvertently or accidentally, and those done intentionally, the former were not disregarded, and repentance and reparation were required (Leviticus, chapters 4 to 6). Moreover, God said that whoever offended in one point was guilty of all (James. 2:10,11). That is, the sinful tendency which would cause a Jew to commit one trespass against the Law would show that he was imperfect and unstable, and might at any time break any or all of the remaining commandments.

It has often been remarked that one who steals will also lie and bear false witness; that one who envies will go on to hatred and perhaps murder. Hence, being bound to keep the whole Law, the slightest transgression brought the Jew under the full penalty of the Law, which

was death. No Jew won eternal life by keeping the Law. All sinned, and fell short. Thus all the world, Jew and Gentile, was guilty before God, regardless of the nature of their sins and of the degree of wilfulness or willingness with which they were committed. *"There is none righteous, no, not one"* (Galatians 3:12; Romans 3:10-20).

When Jew or Gentile came to the Lord Jesus Christ for reconciliation, no graduated scale of sins was recognised. It was not said that a Jew required more of the blood of Christ than a Gentile because he had broken the Law or belonged to the nation that rejected and killed the Messiah; nor was it said that the Gentile required more of the blood of Christ because he had been an idolater, perhaps a murderer and a cannibal. It was not said that one apostle or other disciple required more of the merit of Christ for his justification than did another believer. They were all put down on the one level as *"ungodly"*, *"sinners"*, *"enemies"*, having no hope whatever in themselves, all their claimed righteousness being as *"filthy rags"* (Romans 5:6-10; Isaiah 64:6).

### **All Sin brings Evil Consequences**

In warning the Church of the consequences *"if we sin wilfully [or, willingly] after that we have received the knowledge of the truth"*, the apostle gives no list of sins, some more others less reprehensible. Any sin, even apparently the slightest, is dangerous, if willingly or voluntarily committed. It is dangerous because it indicates a rebellion against the Lord who died to deliver us from sin.

This is not to say that a wilful sin on the part of one who has been forgiven and received cannot be forgiven if it be confessed and repudiated. There is nothing in the New Covenant terms to say that a wilful sin will not be forgiven. As a matter of fact, the accumulated sins, repented of and forgiven on first becoming a Christian, have included sins more or less wilfully done. And since the new convert, though given a 'new mind' the 'seal' of the Holy Spirit, has still the same defective brain and imperfect body to work with, he may at times under stress of temptation or in an unguarded moment say or do what he knows is wrong.

We have seen Christians in great distress through fear that some such sin had irrevocably separated them from God, and were glad to reassure them that mercy is one of the attributes of God guaranteed in the New Covenant for our encouragement, *"I will be merciful to their unrighteousness"* (Hebrews 8:12).

But, as we said before, it is dangerous to sin wilfully. Even though God may see fit for a time to forgive the wilfulness, as well as the act committed, when He sees that repentance is sincere, we have to remember that we are creatures of habit. The bad habits of our pre-Christian life have all to be broken off, and new habits formed.

In one place the conglomeration of habits that constituted us is called *"the old man"*. The old man with his deeds was put off on conversion, but unfortunately sometimes continues to manifest himself (Colossians 3:5-9). In order to keep him off it is necessary to *"mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth"*, that is, put to death afresh the old habits each time they rise again. Likewise, the *"new man"* was put on at conversion, but it is necessary to cultivate the new habits. We must continually *"put on"* the things mentioned in Colossians 3:12-14.

Now, if we understand the apostle correctly in Hebrews 10:26-31, he means that wilful indulgence in sin of whatever description, whether what is considered grossly immoral, or only what the world passes over as of no particular consequence, tends to the formation of the habit of sin. If one sins wilfully a few times, repenting each time, and yet still goes on repeating the sin, however trivial, the habit becomes more fixed, and there is less and less likelihood of repentance. Besides which, the constant excusing of one's self leads to self-justification; to setting up one's own standard of righteousness instead of submitting to the standard that God has set up. All of which is exceedingly injurious to the *"new man"*, and encouraging to the *"old man"* to revive and take control.

The apostle Peter speaks of such as having turned *"from the holy commandment delivered unto them"*, as *"the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire"*, their latter end being worse than their beginning (2 Peter 2:20-22).

John also speaks of the seriousness of sin. According to the Revised Version, 1 John 3:4 reads, *"Everyone that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness"*. The state of the natural man is described in Romans 8:7 as lawless. Men are not without laws of their own making (Romans 2:14,15; 13:1-3), to which they conform more or less.



But so far as the law of God is concerned, they are without law, *"... the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you"* (Romans 8:7-9).

It is apparent, then, that one who has accepted Christ as his Saviour, and pledged himself to do the will of God as revealed in His word, and who has in this endeavour the aid of the Spirit of God, must consider carefully every word and act to see that it is not a transgression against the will of God, but in obedience thereto, the law of God for us being not the Old Law given at Sinai, but the law of the New Covenant as our Lord and the apostles expounded it, and briefly comprehended in verse 26 as *"the knowledge of the truth"*. To go against *"the truth"* would be to think or act a lie, and, as before stated, would be rebellion against God.

The reason why it is not safe to trifle with the will of God after having consecrated oneself to do it is that *"there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins"*. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross was to make atonement for the sins of the human race and deliver it (on certain conditions) from the burden and penalty of sin imposed on it by the transgression in Eden.

It was not for the purpose of enabling those who believe to secure certain benefits from Him and then keep on practising the old selfishness. It is distinctly stated that Jesus came *"to save his people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21); to justify the Jews *"from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses"* (Acts 13:39); and to deliver the Gentiles from Satan's power. And as the provision is that He shall give *"eternal salvation unto all them that obey him"* (Hebrews 5:9), the importance of rendering that obedience by all who would be saved is apparent.

Sometimes God's people grow cold and forgetful, and in various ways God reminds them of their laxity. These reminders are called *"chastening"*, and more will be said about this phase of Christian experience when studying chapter 12. At the present stage of his argument the apostle goes on to refer to an extreme case, a case where willing or voluntary sin is persistently engaged in, as we shall see in verses 27-31.

**10:27** *"But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."* Having in a measure taken himself out of the *"mercy"* provided for in the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:12; Jude 21), such a wilful sinner can expect nothing else than very severe punishment. Instead of assuming an attitude of carelessness and self-satisfaction (as is too often the case), his mind should be filled with foreboding, *"a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries"*.

Here the wilful sinner is distinctly described as an adversary of God. The Greek word translated *"adversaries"* is *'hupenantios'*, derived from *'hupo'* (under) and *'enantios'* (opposite), so that the thought is not merely an opponent or antagonist, but one who is covertly in opposition while still professing to be in the truth. Such opposition is far more reprehensible than the sins and oppositions of those who have not been brought to the knowledge of the truth and who make no profession of Christianity, for the sin of duplicity, or deceit, is added.

What God has prepared for such is *"judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour"* them, and they are well advised to reconsider their position before they become so hardened in sin as to be definitely classed as *'reprobates'*, going in the way of Cain, Balaam, and Core (Korah), *"spots on the love feasts of the brethren," "clouds without water"* (a good figure of a pretender), *"trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots"* (Jude 4,8-13,16; 2 Peter 2:1-8).

**10:28** *"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses."* That he is speaking of serious offenders is clear from this comparison with the practice under the Law of Moses. The Law made provision for mercy for the contrite who would confess their sins, offer the appropriate sacrifices, and undergo the prescribed forms of purification, as the book of Leviticus abundantly shows. Even in the case of murder, cities of refuge were provided where the murderer who was such by misadventure could find rest so long as he remained under the protection of the city, or until the death of the high priest (Numbers 35:11-19). But if the murder were the outcome of hatred and deliberate lying in wait to kill, this refuge would not be available. The murderer must be executed. Two or three witnesses were sufficient to convict, and no mercy or pity was shown (Numbers 35:20-33; Deuteronomy 19:11-13).

Other offences besides murder carried the death penalty. For example, the idolatry of Molech, blasphemy, smiting and cursing of parents (Exodus 21:15,17; Leviticus 20:2-6,9-27; 24:16). Concerning witnesses see Deuteronomy 17:6,7; 19:15; John 8:17. Notice that the

witnesses could not testify in secret and thus escape open connection with the case. They were obliged to be first to lay hands on the offender to be stoned, and their identities would thus be known to all. A stubborn and rebellious son would be put to death at the instance of his outraged parent or parents (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

Most of these cases that called for the death sentence were persistent violators of the Law in the face of exhortations and warnings issued by the priests and Levites and the godly parents of the accused. They were justly called despisers of the Law. Yet that Law, the violation of which was so zealously avenged, was only a temporary arrangement which God purposed to supersede with a better covenant and a better high priest, prophet, and mediator than Moses and Aaron and their successors.

**10:29** *“Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”* Manifestly those who wilfully and repeatedly transgress against the superior New Covenant, with its more exalted Mediator and High Priest, would deserve a more severe punishment than did the despisers of Moses and of the Law given through him.

Persistent wilful sin involves the one who has confessed faith in Christ, accepted the forgiveness of sins according to the New Covenant provision, and made a genuine profession of desire to do the will of God: wilful sin involves such a person in a changed attitude toward all these things once professed, as here described, he has (a) *“trodden under foot the Son of God”*; (b) *“counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing”*, (c) *“done despite unto the Spirit of grace”*.

(a) Instead of remaining at the feet of the Son of God, as an obedient subject at His footstool and as a disciple in His school, he now takes a position of superiority to Christ, and desires or endeavours to place Christ under his own feet, as though he, and not Christ, should be the judge of his actions; as though he, and not Christ, should decide what is sin and what is not sin. Christ, who sits at the right hand of God expecting till all His enemies be made His footstool, cannot tolerate such presumption and usurpation of authority.

(b) In this statement we have another evidence that the covenant under which believers are accepted in the present Gospel Age (as they will be also in the future Kingdom Age) is the New Covenant. Here the blood of the covenant is said to be the same as the blood wherewith he was sanctified.

If it be acknowledged that the blood which sanctifies believers now is the blood of Jesus, then it must also be acknowledged that they are under the New Covenant, for that is the only Covenant which Jesus ratified with His blood. As He specifically said to His disciples when instituting the Lord's Supper, His blood was the blood of the New Covenant.

This can be shown in another way. Any covenant once ratified need not be ratified again. One ratification suffices. The Abrahamic Covenant was ratified over the blood of animals, as was also the Law Covenant. Hence the blood of Christ was not a ratification for either of these Covenants. This verse also proves that the sanctification of believers now is accomplished under the New Covenant, and that the wilful sinner who treads under foot the Son of God also despises and rejects the sanctification, or setting apart to God and a life of holiness, which is specifically stated to be the will of God concerning us.

In what way does the wilful sinner count the blood of Jesus *“an unholy thing”*? Could he do so, and still retain an appearance of being one of God's people?

There are several ways in which this can be done. The disparagement of the blood of Jesus may be incidental to the wilful practising of sin, in that it is not availed of to cleanse that sinner, and in that respect is of no more value to the wilful one than any other blood. The wilful sinner who continues to talk of the blood of Christ while denying its power thus claims the blood of Christ as endorsement of an unsanctified life, and in this way the blood of Jesus is made to appear unholy, as though it were the blood of a covenant of unsanctification and wickedness, instead of, as it is in truth, the blood of a covenant of sanctification and holiness.

Another way in which the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified may be counted as *“unholy”* by the wilful sinner is seen by consulting a Greek Lexicon. The word here translated *“unholy”* is *‘koinos’*, which is defined by Strong's Exhaustive Concordance as meaning ‘common, that is., (lit.) shared by all or several, or (ceremonially) profane’. In the KJV it is variously rendered *“common”*, *“defiled”*, *“unclean”*, *“unholy”*.

It has remained for these latter days, which the Lord warned us should be prolific of false prophets and evil doctrines, to develop a theory that in some way the Church, either in its individual members or as a whole, shares the honour of supplying part of the blood wherewith they claim the New Covenant is yet to be sealed. Thus the blood of the man Jesus, which He shed on the cross, is deprived of its unique office and made to appear only as part of a whole to which others contribute to make "*the blood of the covenant*".

We trust that the majority who have adopted this theory have done so without realising all it implies of dishonour to the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, we must note that the apostle does not say that the wilful sinners in the text will realise the extent to which they are guilty of the three apostasies here enumerated. The apostle merely says that those who sin wilfully, or willingly, after having been brought to the knowledge of the truth, do in fact count the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy or common thing.

### **Despite to the Spirit of Grace**

(c) The third fact emphasising the seriousness of wilful sin is that the willing sinner "*hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace*" (or favour). In Romans 5:21 we are told that Christ died so that "*as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord*".

This reign of grace began with our Lord's investiture with all power in heaven and on earth for the blessing of all for whom He died (Matthew 28:18-20). Every believer since, who receives the forgiveness of his sins, is a beneficiary of this reign of grace. "*By grace are ye saved*", and many other scriptures, emphasise that all that comes to us is by the favour of God and not because of any merit of our own (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 3:24; Titus 3:5-7). The wilful sinner does despite to this favour. He is an ingrate.

Hebrews 10: 29 says, "*despite unto the Spirit of grace*", and corresponds with Hebrews 6:4, where the course is mentioned of those who "*were made partakers of the Holy Spirit*", but afterwards sinned so persistently that they could not be renewed to repentance. This limits the wilful sin under consideration to that committed by those who have received the Holy Spirit, which Spirit is given "*after that ye believed*" (Ephesians 1:13), and as a token or witness that the recipient's sins are forgiven (Hebrews 10:15-17).

Having been given as a seal of acceptance and forgiveness, the Holy Spirit is to be retained by the believer. He is to be filled with it. To pray for it. To let it work in His mortal body as a quickening or life-giving power. To sin wilfully after having received it is to express contempt for it, and in a measure to reject it (Ephesians 5:18; Luke 11:13; Romans 8:11-14; Acts 5:3,9; Galatians 3:2,3).

Such wilful sin continually repeated must inevitably result in the complete loss of the Spirit and a complete searing of the conscience, so that the difference between truth and error, fact and fancy, good and evil, is no longer discerned, and the transgressor must necessarily be destroyed as an implacable enemy of God and of righteousness (1 Timothy 4:2; 2 Timothy 3:2-9).

The "*sorer punishment*" of verse 29 is, then, the only just end of such a rebel. Under Moses' Law the offender was deprived of the few years that would have remained to him of the present life. He would have died in any event a few months or years later. But by being executed he was prevented from repeating the offence and from contaminating the remainder of the nation. This did not, however, rob him of a resurrection, for the unjust as well as the just are to be raised (Acts 24:15; John 5:29). Nor did it deprive him of the opportunity which the Kingdom Age will afford to be instructed concerning Christ and the forgiveness of sins through Him.

Nevertheless, the death inflicted was a severe punishment: it was the deprivation of life, which most people consider their dearest possession. A punishment to be "*sorer*" than that can be nothing less than everlasting death, a death from which there is no hope of a resurrection. 1 John 5:16 speaks of "*a sin unto death*". Sins not unto death may be prayed for, to the end that the brother may repent and be forgiven and reinstated in God's favour.

But no such hopeful prayer may be offered for those who sin unto death, willingly and rebelliously. James 5:19 and 20 speaks of brethren who err from the truth and are restored as having been saved from death, manifestly from death as a consequence of continued sin. This death is called in Revelation 20:14 the "*second death*", and is symbolised by the lake of fire. The "*gehenna*" our Lord spoke of was based on the Jewish practice of casting the bodies of criminals into the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, a fitting symbol of the utter destruction of wilful sinners in the second death.

**10:30** *"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people."* God is a god of love and mercy, and in the New Covenant He has provided an instrument of mercy and forgiveness.

But He is also a just and jealous God. He cannot tolerate the placing of other gods before Him, whether those gods be the idols of the nations that Israel sought after or the self-will and covetousness (which is idolatry) of the wilful enlightened sinner. The one who places his own will above God's will thereby sets himself up as a god.

This aspect of God's character must not be forgotten by us Christians as it was often ignored by the Jews. The *"vengeance"* and *"recompense"* which fell upon the Jews should be a sufficient reminder that vengeance and recompense will fall upon us if we transgress. *"The Lord shall judge his people."* (See also Hebrews 2:1-3.)

**10:31** *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* Nor should this statement of fact by the apostle be overlooked by us. Our standing as Christians is in Christ Jesus. We are *"baptised into"* Him. We have *"put"* Him *"on"*. We are under His ruler-ship. He is our King, to whom we must be loyal and true. He is our Mediator and Intercessor, and our Advocate when we sin, obviously when we repent of the sins.

But rebellion against Him, and consequent loss of His mediator-ship on our behalf, would leave us wholly exposed to the wrath and vengeance of God. Well may we tremble at such a prospect, and resolve afresh to humble ourselves in His sight, saying with the great apostle Paul, *"lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"* (1 Corinthians 9:25-27).

**10:32** Stern as Paul's rebukes have been, plainly, as he points out the consequences of wilful sin, he yet had hope that none of the brethren addressed had sinned so grievously. He trusted that, though when they should have been teachers they were still babes in knowledge and experience (5:12), they would wake up to a realisation of the position, and turn again to their first love, as the Church at Ephesus was later on exhorted to do (Revelation 2:4,5).

He urges them to call to remembrance the former days, after they were illuminated by the gospel, and how they *"endured a great fight of afflictions"*.

**10:33** They had been made a *"gazingstock"*. People no doubt pointed to them as peculiar, and otherwise reproached and afflicted them. And these Hebrew brethren were not only faithful and courageous enough to endure this for themselves, but they also openly arrayed themselves with others who were being persecuted for righteousness' sake. What a pity to fall away from such a fine beginning.

**10:34** They had enjoyed also the privilege of the apostles' ministrations, and had compassion on him in his bonds. Paul was not the one to forget this! What they did to show their sympathy for him is not related, but one in prison in those days stood much more in need of supplies of food and clothing from his friends than do the inmates of our modern penal establishments. Moreover, he says, ye *"took joyfully the spoiling of your goods"*. Here was real pecuniary loss, personal discomfort, perhaps eviction from their homes.

Can such a list of sufferings for the faith be made out for us? All this they endured from the highest motives, their faith being in God, and their treasure in heaven. In heaven they had *"an enduring substance"*. Their hope was fixed *"within the veil"*. Peter refers to this future prospect as *"an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Peter 1:4,5).

**10:35** *"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward."* How important is this matter of continued confidence in God, to which he exhorted them in 3:6,14 and 6:17-20, and to which theme he now returns. Confidence, obedience, and hopefulness. The reward promised is great; it is well worth our while to struggle along in the hope of attaining it.

**10:36** *"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."* Patience! Yes, patience is another much-needed virtue in the Christian who would be an over-comer. As the apostle here points out, it is not only patience under persecution, and patience while doing, or at least striving to do, the will of God, as agreed on in our consecration, but also patience after we have done it. In other words: having a promise of a reward for righteousness, we naturally look for some of it here and now. And truly we can say that many tokens of God's love and favour do come to us all as we travel along the narrow way.

But it is a narrow way nevertheless, and no doubt we, like the Hebrew brethren, grow a bit weary and wish for more tangible evidences of God's approval. Perhaps we should like a little more earthly prosperity in return for goods spoiled and other sufferings through persecution. So then we must not grow impatient or weary as each test on doing the will of God in preference to our own is passed, and we feel we should like a little of our own will now and then by way of a relaxation and a change.

**10:37** *"For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."* Still must we bear in mind that our reward is not to be given until our Lord comes again. Shortly after (or possibly before) writing this epistle Paul wrote to Timothy that the time of his departure was at hand, and that henceforth there was a reward *"laid up"* for him (2 Timothy 4:6-8). So he did not expect his reward at death. The eyes of the whole Church from that day to this are thus fixed upon the wondrous time when He who went to prepare a place for us shall come again and receive us unto Himself (John 14:2,3; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). Till then He seems to us to tarry; waiting time seems long (Matthew 25:5). Yet, after all, it is only *"a little while"* as God counts time. And we must not forget that other side of the subject, His long patience with us for over more than eighteen centuries (2 Peter 3:8,9; Revelation 2:5,16,20,21; 3:5,16-19).

**10:38** *"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."* This quality of faith is the mainspring of all patience, of all endurance, of all confidence. As not one member of the human race is actually *"just"*, we see in this passage the exhortation that those who are justified by faith (Romans 3:24; 5:1) shall live by faith. Their entire life is, must be, a life of faith, a daily living by faith, a constant witness of the fact that their whole standing with God is on the basis of faith, and that however many years their earthly life may last, and however great the privations and persecutions endured, each day must be a repetition of doing the will of God and having faith that He will see us through and reward us in His own due time.

But if any man draw back, and cease the life of faith, God's pleasure in him will fade. To think that God can have pleasure in our little lives of faith, in our obscure homes and amid oft-times sordid surroundings, should be a wonderful incentive to us to persevere in the life of faith. In the gospel *"the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith"* (Romans 1:17). The more we increase in faith, the more God's righteousness is revealed to us.

Notable examples of persons who have lived by faith, whose faith has been manifested throughout their lives, are given in chapter 11. These heroes of faith are in strong contrast to those who fell in the wilderness through unbelief. In their case the *"word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it"* (Hebrews 3:15-19; 4:2).

**10:39** In this paragraph the apostle again shows his great love of the brethren and his humble opinion of himself, by placing himself on a level with them, including himself with them, and them with himself, as those whose confidence would be firm unto the end. *"But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."*

Two lines of conduct with two terminals are depicted here: drawing back to perdition, on the one hand, believing to the saving of the soul, on the other. After all the promises and expectations that the scriptures hold out for the Church, to live and reign with Christ the thousand years, and to participate in the great work of enlightening mankind in the Kingdom Age, the apostle here reminds us that the thing of greatest importance to each of us is *"the saving of the soul"*.

The reign of Christ and the blessings of His reign will go on whether we are there or not. If we *"draw back unto perdition"*, not one iota of change will be made in God's great purpose. The whole loss will be ours.

The theological definition of *"perdition"*, as given by the Standard Dictionary, is, '1. Future misery or eternal death as the condition of the wicked; hell'. The second definition, of a more general character, is, '2. Utter destruction or ruin'. The latter is more in accord with the Greek original, *'apoleia'*, which is defined by Strong's Concordance as meaning 'ruin or loss (physical, spiritual, or eternal)'. This word is also translated *"destruction"*, *"die"* and *"perish"*. It is derived from a presumed derivative of *'apollumi'*, meaning *"to destroy fully"*.

This 'death' and 'grave' are not the equivalents of the *"perdition"* referred to in Hebrews 10:39, where the apostle is speaking of a prospect which can be avoided, and which is threatened only against wilful sinners after enlightenment and drawing back.

The simple English words 'ruin' and 'loss' better express the thought; the ruin or loss being complete to the extent of destruction in the case of those who go the full length of perversity. In 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, "*everlasting destruction*" is represented as the verdict issuing from the throne of God against those who wilfully "*obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*", "*flaming fire*" being a symbol of His wrath and vengeance and of the destruction ensuing.

In a nutshell, the reward of the saints is here expressed as "*the saving of the soul*". Our Lord said, "*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it*" (Matthew 16:24-27). Similar words were spoken by Him when referring to the fate of Lot's wife who disobediently looked back when fleeing from the burning city (Luke 17:32,33), and in special reference to "*the day when the Son of man is revealed*".

The only way for the one who has started to follow in the footsteps of Christ to save his soul is to keep on following Him. This can only be done by daily self-denial, by 'losing' the present life as something readily given up for His sake and the gospel's, and as unworthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us (Matthew 16:24-27; John 10:9,27; Revelation 14:4).

The importance of saving one's own soul, using the word 'soul' in the scriptural sense of one's being or life, and not in the unscriptural sense of an intangible something no one has ever been able clearly to define, is also set forth by Peter. Just following the words already quoted concerning the glorious heavenly inheritance, he speaks of salvation as a process extending over the Christian's years on earth.

*"That the trial of your faith ... might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom not having seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving [present tense] the end [or objective] of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end" (1 Peter 1:7-13), and further along he associates this process of salvation with obedience and holiness (1 Peter 1:14-16).*

### **Righteousness Imputed and Practised**

The question has been asked, if the apostle Paul wrote the epistle to the Hebrews under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, why is 'counted' or 'imputed' righteousness not mentioned? Why the absence of 'justify', 'justified by faith', God as 'the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus', and similar expressions, so frequently found in the epistle to the Romans?

The epistle, though of much value to Gentiles as an exposition of the types, was written specially for Hebrew Christians, to establish them more firmly in the faith and to protect them from Judaizing teachers who everywhere sought to instil into their minds that obedience to the Mosaic Law was still required.

On the other hand, the Church at Rome consisted of both Jews and Gentiles, hence much of their epistle was presented in a manner to instruct believers unfamiliar with the Law; whereas the epistle to the Hebrews takes such knowledge for granted.

Furthermore, the main argument of the Roman epistle was to show that Gentiles and Jews were all under sin, and that since God could favour Abraham before the Law came, and accept his faith for righteousness, the Law was an unnecessary arrangement, so far as having the approval of God was concerned. And if God could count Abraham's faith for righteousness, He could as justly count the faith of believers in Jesus for righteousness, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. God had set forth Christ to be the propitiation for sins, hence could be just, and at the same time the justifier of him who believes in Jesus. Thus is made clear the doctrine of justification by faith; and, "*being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*".

Now, although the words 'imputed', 'reckoned', and 'counted' are not used in the epistle to the Hebrews, justification by faith, or imputed righteousness, is taught nevertheless. Writing exclusively to Hebrew Christians who were familiar with the scriptures, it was not necessary to stress that point at the outset. He wrote as to those who knew Genesis 15:6, "*And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness*".

Besides which, if the dates in the reference columns of our Bibles are to be accepted as accurate, Romans was written before Hebrews, and would be in circulation among the brethren. Hence, much that it contains is to be borne in mind while studying the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Moreover, as we have said before, the theme of this epistle is cleansing from sin. The pious Jews believed in atonement by blood, it being taught in their Law, and every year they took part in the Atonement Day observance, afflicting their souls, and prostrating themselves before God for mercy. God saw their need of a clear-cut explanation of the types to convince these Jews that they were types and shadows and not the real thing.

By comparing and contrasting what was and what was not accomplished by the type, the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul showed clearly that the realities (the antitypes) were greatly to be preferred. Christ was a High Priest greater than Aaron, a Mediator and Law-giver greater than Moses, plus a sacrifice greater and more efficacious than the blood of bulls and of goats. Sins were carried away absolutely by the anti-typical sin bearer upon whom they were laid, and not brought to remembrance again every year as was the case under the Law.

That faith should be counted for righteousness was, then, no new thing to the Hebrews. That *"The just shall live by faith"* was also well known. But it is noteworthy that whereas in Romans this quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 is used in chapter 1, at the beginning of his argument on imputed righteousness, in Hebrews it is not brought forward until 10:38, after a thorough examination of the Atonement Day type. The elaborate ceremonial of that yearly observance was ineffective to take away sin and thus make the worshippers actually righteous or perfect, but as a type it was most effective in showing the inviolability of God's justice, the intensity of His hatred of sin, the need of the blood of Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice, and the necessity of carrying away the sins. Yet even after all this it is necessary to have faith, or all that has been done will fail to bring forgiveness and reconciliation to the individual sinner.

Thus the apostle brings us to the conclusion in 10:38, with which he began in Romans 1: 7, that *"The just shall live by faith"*. And we can see that since there are none just by nature, their justness or righteousness must be imputed or counted to them on account of their faith. Yet imputed righteousness alone is not sufficient; they must live by faith. Then he proceeds (chapter 11) to give well known examples from their history, to show that God has in the past counted faith for righteousness, as demonstrated in His promises to the faithful of old.

But he shows more than that. He shows that living by faith means to make the imputed righteousness as nearly actual as possible. The believer must put righteousness into practice, must endure affliction and persecution for righteousness' sake. The Law was a matter of doing, without prospects because of the weakness of the flesh. Under the New Covenant doing is also necessary, but under it prospects are good, good not only because the works are mixed with faith, are indeed the outcome of faith in the invisible God and the things as yet unseen, but because based on the true propitiatory offering for sin.

Abel had faith, but it was because he lived his faith in his works that he was called righteous (11:4). Here and throughout the New Testament *"righteous"* is rendered from the same Greek word translated *"just"* in 10:28 and elsewhere. A *"just"* man was a *"righteous"* man. Noah's faith was counted for righteousness, but it was faith that persisted through years of testing and opposition. Only then is it said he *"became heir of the righteousness which is by faith"* (11:7). And so on through the eleventh chapter. Faith brings imputed righteousness, but the faith must endure and bring forth actual righteousness in obedience to God or the imputed righteousness will lapse, just as he says in the latter clause of 10:28, *"but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him"*.

The imputation of righteousness is another way of saying the forgiveness of sins. Justifying the believer does not make him right, it only counts or reckons him right or just. And to be reckoned righteous or just means that the sins must be got rid of. First God graciously forgives the *"sins that are past, through the forbearance of God"*, and thence onwards accepts our faith backed up by our earnest efforts, and counts it for righteousness, thus giving us a permanent standing as His sons and heirs.

Let us then be not of those who draw back, failing to make the proper use of imputed righteousness, but let us, in harmony with the terms of the New Covenant, submit our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit of God, that His will may be properly written thereon and become a part of our very lives.

## Chapter 11

### HEROES OF FAITH

Having exhorted the brethren not to cast away their confidence, and to have patience that after having done the will of God they might receive the promise, for the just shall live by faith, and God has no pleasure in those who draw back, and having expressed the conviction that the Hebrew Christians addressed were not of those who draw back, but of those who *“believe to the saving of the soul”*, the apostle now proceeds to cite the ancients as men who had lived by faith, and had pleased God by so doing.

**11:1** But that there be no mistake as to exactly what he means by *“faith”*, the apostle now defines it. Faith is *“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”*. The English word *“substance”* here is not the best, since it is commonly used of things that can be seen and handled, such as the substance or substances of which a certain article, brick or cloth, for example, is composed, whereas faith is an operation of the mind. The marginal reading, *“confidence”*, is consistent with 3:14, where the same Greek word is used; as also in 2 Corinthians 9:4, where it is rendered *“confident”*.

The Revised Version reads, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for”*, while the Emphatic Diaglott has *“basis”*. All three renderings are in accordance with the meaning of the Greek word *‘hupostasis’*, which, according to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, means literally ‘a setting under’ or ‘support’, and figuratively either (concretely) ‘essence’, or (abstractly) ‘assurance’. The Emphatic Diaglott rendering, *“basis”*, is similar to the KJV margin, *“ground”*, but as both these words are often used of the foundation of a structure, their use might lead to misunderstanding here, as meaning that faith is a basis or foundation, which it is not. The things hoped for are not based on faith, but on God’s promises. There is something to be said, however, favourable to the Revised Version marginal reading, *“the giving substance to”*. (See also Variorium footnote.)

Faith gives the promises of God, *“the things hoped for”*, more than a casual glance. To faith the things promised are not vague possibilities, but realities to be accepted as surely as that the sun will rise to-morrow. The action of faith is to grasp these promises and make them real to the believer. Thus it may be said that the believers’ faith gives substance or body to the promises, making them tangible.

This thought of tangibility or substance being given to things unseen is expressed in regard to Moses’ faith, *“he endured, as seeing him who is invisible”* (11:27). Other faithful ones *“looked for a city”* (11:10). And that *“city”* was so real to them that, though they wandered all their lives as pilgrims in the land, they died with full assurance that some day they should receive it. So our Lord could say to the Jews, *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad”* (John 8:56).

#### The Evidence of Things Not Seen

The second definition of faith also requires some comparison of different versions, and some consideration of the meaning of the Greek word translated *“evidence”*. In present-day English the word ‘evidence’ means something brought forward as testimony or proof. Faith is based on evidence presented to the mind, but the evidence and the faith are two separate and distinct things. Dr. Strong defines the Greek word rendered *“evidence”* as meaning ‘proof’, or ‘conviction’. The latter seems the most appropriate definition, for it means ‘thoroughly convinced’. It is employed in the Emphatic Diaglott and in the American Revised Version, the English Revisers using the words ‘proving’, margin ‘test’.

It is true that faith tests or proves things not seen, but mere testing or proving is not faith. Faith is the conviction, or state of being fully convinced, which follows the proving of the things not seen. The conviction comes from perfect reliance on the word and promises of God. Faith accepts God’s promises as immutable, that is, unchangeable. When any given promise is comprehended, faith accepts it. Not only so, faith has strong convictions concerning it. It was because the ancients had strong convictions that they were able to endure. Similar faith on our part will enable us to endure.

The things *“hoped for”* are *“the things not seen”*. Hence the need of faith that we who believe may live and act as though they were seen. We see them with the eye of faith, as intimated in 1 Corinthians 2:9,10, *“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit”*.

We therefore correctly read 11:1 thus, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*.

**11:2** *“For by it the elders obtained a good report.”* Though the things hoped for will not be received by the ancients until the resurrection, they did receive something as a present reward and as an encouragement to perseverance in faith. That something was *“a good report”*. The Revised Version reads, *“For therein the elders had witness borne to them”*. The Diaglott reads, *“were attested”*.

Faith brought the ancient worthies more than an comprehension of things unseen. It brought them also the assurance of God’s approval. The witness of God’s approval was in some instances conveyed by a repetition of the promises, as in Abraham’s case (Genesis 22:16-18). In other instances God’s approval was demonstrated by deliverance from peril, as in Daniel’s deliverance from the den of lions (Daniel 6:20-22,26,27).



### Framed by the Word of God

**11:3** *“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”* We, too, perceive certain things by faith. For example, he refers to the belief current among the Jews, taught in their scriptures, and adopted by Gentile converts to Christianity, *“that the worlds [literally, ages] were framed by the word of God”*.

An age is a period of time, and time as such is invisible to the natural eye. Time is comprehended by the mind.

All God’s activities took place in time, for He is *“from everlasting to everlasting”* (Psalm 90:2). Before the creation of the material universe as we see it He must have existed somewhere in order to devise or map out the ages or cycles of time. These ages, we saw by 1:2, were made for the Son, the Son as the Word or Logos being God’s agent in creation (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17). Each of the seven creative days was a period of time set apart for its own particular work, as outlined in Genesis, and following these He arranged other ages, each with its own purpose, the development of which the student of scripture may understand. Some of these ages are known as Antediluvian, Patriarchal, Jewish, Gospel, and Kingdom. \*

Anyone who knows history knows how common is the allusion to the past as ages of time. The faith comes in when we believe that definite periods were *“framed by the word of God”*, that He determined them, and that when He spoke the word it was sufficient to insure their order and succession.

Among Christians a distinction is often made between ‘time’ and ‘eternity’. But the scriptures make no such distinction. They teach us that eternity is simply prolonged time. As we are unable by our finite minds to grasp how there could ever have been a time when there was no time, or a time when God did not exist, we see a display of divine wisdom in His describing to us (in the scriptures) principally those of His activities which relate to our earth and man’s life upon it, while placing before us His claim to be the author or originator of all visible and invisible things, and the divider of time to suit His own purposes.

We cannot for a moment suppose that God is dependent upon the sun, moon, and stars, or upon a clock, such as man finds convenient, for the consciousness of time or to learn ‘what time it is’. Since He set the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens for *“signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years”*, and *“to give light upon the earth”* (Genesis 1:14-18), and since these were not made until the fourth creative day (Genesis 1:19), we can see that God is independent of such markers of time.

God was, and is, above time. Time is His servant, and He divides and apports it according to His own pleasure.

Faith finds no difficulty in believing that the wonderful Creator of the universe framed the ages. Faith is encouraged in every way to study the purpose or plan of the ages spoken of by the apostle in Ephesians 3:11. The words *“eternal purpose”* in this passage do not give the full meaning of the Greek, which is, literally, ‘the purpose of the ages’ (see Revised Version footnote).

God’s purpose in the Gospel Age is to make known that which He purposed ages ago, even before the world was, that Christ should come, and that both Jews and Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the promises in Him.

*“So that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”* God not only framed the ages by His Word, He also, by His Word, created all things which are now visible to us. We do not see the creation going on now. The things we see are the results of creative activity in the past. In buried forests we can see coal in process of making. This is not, however, a creative act, but rather the slow working of chemical processes and changes which God ordained in the distant past. By faith we believe that He did make the universe out of nothing, ordaining and fixing what are called ‘the laws of nature’, and setting the whole in operation. This He did for His own pleasure, but countless millions of beings, human, angelic, and animal, enjoy the benefit (Revelation 4:11; Job chapters 38 to 41).

*“The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament sheweth his handywork”*

(Psalm 19:1).

*“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made;  
And all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.  
He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap;  
He layeth up the depth in storehouses.  
Let all the earth fear the LORD:  
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him  
For he spake, and it was done;  
He commanded, and it stood fast.”*

(Psalm 33:6-9).

But in all probability, what the apostle means by his statement *“so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear”* is this. Ages of time are real, as real as things which we can see and handle, yet they are not ‘made of things which do appear’. An age is not, for example, made of bricks and mortar, bricks and mortar being things that ‘do appear’. God took time, an invisible thing, and out of it made ages. When we comprehend this, we ‘see’ the invisible. With our minds and by faith we grasp the invisible ages, not only those which are in the past, but those which are to come. This is true faith: *“the confidence of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*.

### By Faith Abel Offered

**11:4** *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."* The sacrifice Abel offered was more acceptable than Cain's because Abel had respect to God's expressed desire on the subject. It was not, as some commentators suppose, that Abel accidentally hit upon a sort of sacrifice God approved of while Cain unfortunately hit upon something not acceptable. In such circumstances there would have been no room for faith on either side. In order that there may be faith there must be something definite in which to have faith.

Since God slew animals to make skin-coverings for Adam and Eve, and since we find afterward that men offered animals in sacrifice, we conclude that God indicated to Adam and Eve that such and such sacrifices should be offered. Abel then had faith that God would accept the offerings He had prescribed, while Cain disregarded all precedent and deemed that anything he might bring should be good enough. In all probability Abel recognised the propitiatory nature of the sacrifices, and the necessity of confessing himself a sinner, while Cain made no acknowledgments, and would not humble himself to secure from Abel or elsewhere the animals required for sacrifice.

Pride and envy then carried him further, and he slew his brother. The reason is given in 1 John 3:12, *"because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous"*. Cain's works are thus described as evil even before he slew his brother. Christians are warned against allowing the same evil disposition to get a hold on them. Jude also holds up Cain as a warning to the Church (verse 11). Such are some of the results of refusal to submit to the will of God.

Abel received testimony of God's approval by His acceptance of his gifts. It is not necessary to conclude that only upon one occasion were the two brothers at variance over the nature of their offerings. God has always been long suffering and patient, and willing to allow time for wrongdoers to repent. Besides, it would have been a more severe test of Abel's faith had the matter been allowed to run on for a time without special divine interposition. Thus the testimony that Abel was *"righteous"* would relate to Abel's character as developed and refined under trial, and not to some single act. Character is not developed instantaneously. It is a slow and painful process, and God often tries the faith of His people by letting them endure hardships without apparent help from Him. But sooner or later the tokens of approval are given, to the great joy of the men and women of faith.

*"And by it he being dead yet speaketh"*. Abel's faith and zeal (as recorded in the scriptures) have spoken for centuries to the godly. He was the first martyr. May his example be an inspiration to us to-day. Abel's sacrifice brought him peace and the approval of God. Abel speaks to us of the value and necessity of faith, and of obeying God's instructions, in order to be considered *"righteous"*.

### By Faith Enoch was Translated

**11:5** *"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."*

Enoch also was a man of faith. He lived to the age of 365 years, not a good age as lives went in those days, for his progenitors lived to upward of 900 years, excepting one who lived to be 895 years old, and his son Methuselah was the longest lived of any human being, 969 years.

Enoch's life and translation are briefly recorded in Genesis 5:18,21-24. To translate means *"to set over"*. Thus to translate from English into French means to set over into French the sense of the English words and phrases. The word 'translate' has also an ecclesiastical significance, as when bishops changed, removed, or set over, from one province to another, are said to be 'translated'. In regard to Enoch we must inquire, in what sense was he translated from one condition to another, and what was the condition to which he was translated?

It has been suggested by some commentators that Enoch did not die, but was taken bodily to heaven. This is thought to be the meaning of *"for God took him"* (Genesis 5:24). But when the other scriptural uses of 'translate' are noted, in addition to the definition supplied by the dictionary, it is seen that this does not necessarily follow. Young's Analytical Concordance defines the Hebrew and Greek originals thus,

1. To cause to pass over (2 Samuel 3:10)  
*"To translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba."*
2. A putting over, translation, 'metathesis' (Hebrews 11:5)  
*"before his translation he had this testimony."*
3. To put over, translate, 'methistemi' (Colossians 1:13)  
*"and hath translated [us] into the kingdom of his dear Son."*
4. To transpose, translate, 'metatithenai', (Hebrews 11:5)  
*"Enoch was translated ... God had translated him."*  
This Greek word past tense is rendered *"carried over"* in Acts 7:16, and *"removed"* in Galatians 1:6.

From Hebrews 11:5 we see that the sense of *"took"* in Genesis 5:24 is not took to Himself, or took to heaven, but merely translated, or put over, from one condition to another. The condition in which Enoch was before translation was one of life and of activity in God's service. He was a man of faith who practised righteousness, and on that account he had God's approval. The reason why he was 'set over', or 'put over', is stated to be *"that he should not see death"*.

Shall we understand from this that Enoch is still alive? No; for Genesis 5:24 says, “*he was not*”. Hebrews 11:5 says, he “*was not found*”. In the Old Testament the expression “*was not*” means that the persons of whom it is said had died. Compare with Jeremiah 31:15, “*Rahel weeping for her children ... because they were not*”. Matthew 2:18 applies this prophecy to the children slain by Herod, of whose fate there can be no doubt. Death is thus shown, as in many other places, to be a condition of non-existence. Non-existence can be called a ‘condition’ only because by God’s arrangement these little ones and myriads of other little ones, and big ones too, shall be called forth by the Saviour who died for them.

The prophecy says they are in “*the land of the enemy*”, thus agreeing with both the Old and the New Testament description that death is an enemy of the human race. An enemy robbed the mothers of Israel of their little ones. An enemy, the great enemy, death, has taken and is still taking away every succeeding generation of mankind. But, thank God, that enemy is not to prevail always. God has given to His Son Jesus the keys of hell [hades] and of death (Revelation 1:18). And when Christ has used the keys, and delivered death’s victims out of hades, then death itself shall be destroyed. And hades also. God has spoken, and it will surely come to pass (Revelation 20:14; Isaiah 55:8-11).

Since Enoch “*was not*”, and this expression is used elsewhere of death, there is no alternative but to conclude that Enoch died. This is corroborated by Genesis 5:23, “*And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty and five years*”, and by Hebrews 11:13, “***These all died in faith***”, evidently referring to all the ancients mentioned previously in his historical review, including Enoch.

If then Enoch died, in what sense are we to understand that he did not see death? We understand this to mean that Enoch was not afflicted with disease or accident or any other cause of death. He was in his prime, and God took him from life in the full strength of his manhood. In Enoch we find a contrast with the Jewish nation, who were promised long life if they would be obedient (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; 11:8,9,21; Proverbs 3:1,2). In Enoch’s case God chose to show His favour by removing him early from a world (order of things) which was already deteriorating, and was shortly afterwards to be destroyed in the flood.

Other proof that Enoch was not taken to heaven, but that he died, is found in John 3:13, “*And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man*”. The words ‘which is in heaven’ are not found in the two most ancient Greek manuscripts, the Sinaitic, and the Vatican 1209.

Furthermore, our Lord spoke of the prophets as being in the resurrection, and that all that are in the graves should hear His voice, and should come forth, the prophets and other ancient worthies being given a ruling position in the Kingdom. Enoch was a prophet (Jude 14), and therefore we may expect him to be raised with his fellow prophets under the sound of the seventh trumpet (Luke 13:28; 14:14; John 5:28; 2 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 11:18). [See also the comment on 11:35, the promise of a “*better resurrection*” prepared for the prophets.]

Just in what way Enoch received the testimony that he pleased God is not explained, but we may reasonably consider that some explanation was vouchsafed him concerning his removal from the world whose evil deeds he reprov'd. But he did not see death, that is, he did not see it approaching, there was no preliminary failure of his powers. He passed quietly away (possibly in his sleep), in full assurance of faith, and with the consciousness of having pleased God.

#### **God a Rewarder of Faith**

**11:6** “*But without faith it is impossible to please him.*” This is a positive, inspired statement of fact to be borne in mind by all who desire to please God. Our Lord Jesus came to do the Father’s will, and could say, “*I do always those things that please him*” (John 8:29). The effort to please God is most beneficial to the believer, since God’s way is perfect, and His will for each of us is the essence of wisdom and love. And since we know that faith pleases Him, let us have faith, simple and unchanging confidence or assurance concerning Him and all His arrangements and promises.

The remainder of this verse is a self-evident truth, “*for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*”.

No one would seek to approach God if he did not believe in His existence. Nor would one seek to please a God he did not believe in. God’s knowledge of human nature is such that He lets it be known that whoever does come to Him will be rewarded. Constituted as we are, and in our fallen estate, unless God held out incentives and rewards, few, if any, of our race would be able to persist through all the trials and temptations and disappointments of life. But seeing how God rewarded the ancients, and having many precious promises given to us of His intention to reward those who believe now, we are well advised to exercise faith and to keep on exercising it.

In fact, God tries our faith in order that it may develop. “*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you.*” “*That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*” 1 Peter 4:12,13; 1:7).

The reward to be considered is not only the ultimate one, but also all those evidences of divine love and kindness experienced by us all along the way, even in the midst of trials and persecutions. Acts 23:11 tells how the Lord stood by Paul and spoke to him. We of our day, not being apostles, need expect no such ocular and audible demonstration. Very few Christians there are, however, but can tell how ways out of difficulty have opened up in an almost if not quite miraculous manner, and how all things have worked together for their good, always spiritually, and often temporally as well (Romans 8:28; 1 Timothy 4:8). To “*diligently seek*” God means to draw near in prayer, and also to endeavour always to do His will.

### **By Faith Noah Prepared an Ark**

**11:7** *“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”* Some translations begin this and other similar descriptions ‘in faith’. But *“by faith”* is correct. The thought is, by reason of faith, or because they had faith. Noah’s faith did not build the ark. Simply believing that an ark was necessary did not build it. The point is that because Noah had faith he did what God told him to do. He was obedient. And that is one of the first effects of faith in each of us now. If the faith is genuine, it will prove itself by works, as in the examples cited here and in James 2:17-26. The faith that does not work is dead.

Noah was warned *“of things not seen as yet”*. From Genesis 2:6 we learn that in Eden *“there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground”*. There is no mention of rain, and some astronomers are of the opinion that up to the time of the flood the earth was encircled by a ring of moisture which excluded the direct rays of the sun and made the earth’s climate equable in all parts.

It is also thought that this moist condition may have accounted for the long lives of the antediluvians. Recent experiments have shown that if a rather high percentage of moisture be added to the air of a hospital ward, the recovery of patients is hastened, particularly in surgical cases. At any rate, the drop in longevity after the flood is very noticeable, and the fact that Noah, the just and righteous man, was overcome by wine would seem to add emphasis to the view that an atmospheric change had taken place. The action of the sun on the grapes may have increased the alcoholic content, or Noah’s susceptibility might have been increased (Genesis 9:20,21).

It would seem, then, that rain was one of the *“things not seen as yet”*. The people derided Noah’s preaching of repentance that they might escape the threatened downpour. They laughed when told that the highest mountains would be covered, and escape then be impossible. But all this opposition and ridicule had no effect on Noah’s faith. He still believed, and went on building the ark which should provide safety for all who would take refuge therein. His faith must have been vital indeed to spur him to build an immense ship on dry land, in full confidence that it would be required.

Both *“moved with fear”*, and the margin, *“being wary”*, seem inadequate as descriptions of Noah’s frame of mind. ‘Fear’ is often used in scripture for ‘reverence’, and reverence toward God seems more likely to have been the motive; even more than a natural caution to provide in advance for the safety of himself and family. Those who had no faith made no provision, nor would Noah have done so had he not been thoroughly convinced that God would indeed destroy that wicked generation by a flood of waters. *“Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he”* (Genesis 6:7-22).

By his faith and the preparation of the ark, as well as by his constant preaching of righteousness, Noah *“condemned the world”*. All these testimonies were a test to the people of that time, a challenge as to whether they would repent and serve God, or not.

It would seem also that there was a class of beings brought into the world contrary to the divine order. These beings were destroyed in the flood, and thus the earth relieved of a contaminating influence.

The faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah was of the same quality as that of Abraham, the next of the ancient worthies mentioned as pleasing to God on account of their faith, yet it was Abraham who received the title the friend of God, and has been called *“the father of all them that believe”* (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23; Romans 4:11). Abraham became, by God’s selection, the head of a tribe and nation to which special privileges and promises were given, so that the apostle could say, *“Abraham our father as pertaining to the flesh”*, and the Pharisees could proudly claim him as their father, but more especially because the men of piety in that nation looked back to him as their example in godliness, patient endurance, and faith (Romans 4:1,12-16; John 8:33,37,39; Galatians 3:6-9).

So distinguished was Noah in God’s sight that, with Daniel and Job, he is named in Ezekiel 14:14,20 as the nearest approach among men to the righteousness required to redeem Israel from their wickedness. Yet none of these three righteous men could deliver Israel. Their righteousness was of avail only for themselves. A deliverer had to be looked for even more righteous than they before Israel could be cleansed. That perfect one to come was the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **By Faith Abraham Obeyed**

**11:8** *“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”* The first recorded exhibition of Abraham’s faith was when he was known as Abram, and still lived with his own people.

The original home of the family was Ur of the Chaldees, and they traced their lineage through Arphaxad to Shem.

In Genesis 11:26 we read that Terah *“lived 70 years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran”*. Because Abram is mentioned first it is often thought that he was the eldest son. But the fact is that he is named first because he became the most illustrious, for it was with him and his descendants that God afterwards had special dealings. Genesis 12:4 says that Abram was 75 years old when he departed out of Haran, while Genesis 11:32 says that Terah was 205 years old when he died in Haran. And the implication is that Abram departed immediately after his father’s death, this being plainly stated by Stephen (Acts 7:4). Hence, Abram must have been born when his father was 130, leaving either Nahor or Haran as the eldest son, born when Terah was 70.

Stephen relates that it was while in the land of the Chaldees that Abram received the call from God to *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee"*. Recent excavations on the reputed site of Ur of the Chaldees prove it to have been a city of size and wealth, with a great temple of idolatry. It is useless now for anyone to hint that Ur was only a tradition, and not a real city from which Abraham came out. Ur of the Chaldees was locked away by divine providence that it might be opened up and bear its witness in this sceptical age.

When, hundreds of years later, Stephen spoke of Abraham and his migration to Canaan, he acknowledged the Genesis account of his call and his temporary residence in Haran as true history. *"Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell."* Acts 7:2-4).

Terah his father also undertook the journey as far as Haran, located on the Euphrates at a convenient point for passing over into Canaan, accompanied by Lot, the son of Haran, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, Abram's wife. In this family, from Shem downwards, the true worship of God, as then understood, had been preserved, and it is probable that Terah and Lot, as well as Sarai, shared Abram's faith in God's call. It is to be noted, however, that the special call and promise were given neither to Terah nor to Lot, but to Abram only. In Abram God was about to undertake a special purpose, namely, the separation to Himself of a people from whom the *"seed of the woman"* should come, who would in due time bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).

The promise and covenant made with Abram are detailed in Genesis 12:1-3. But they were conditioned on his leaving his country and kindred, and his father's house. When Abram had entered Canaan he passed through to the place of Sichem and the oak of Moreh (Genesis 12:6; RV). This was probably an important meeting place of the Canaanite tribes, but they appear not to have molested Abram. There he built an altar to God, who appeared unto him, and who renewed the promise previously given, saying, *"Unto thy seed will I give this land"* (Genesis 12:7).

In these days of infidelity and scepticism, of unwillingness to bow to a supreme being, of boasted independence of mind, it is refreshing to go back four thousand or more years and find that the chief virtue in Abram's action was obedience, a willingness to do what God desired, even though it involved leaving his home and kindred, for *"he went out, not knowing whither he went"*. It mattered not to him where the country was to which God would direct him, or what adventures should befall him by the way or in occupation. So strong was his faith that for God to express His will was for Abram to obey. Is this the secret of Abram's favour with God? We read of many great things accomplished 'by faith', for our admiration and for imitation as far as circumstances permit. Well may we take to heart this example of Abraham's, and make it our highest duty and privilege to obey in every particular God's will as He makes it known to us.

In these days also we hear much of wonderful works done in the name of Jesus, of great sacrifices made as 'voluntary' offerings to God, as though we are privileged to give to God or not as we choose. Let us remember, then, this description of the faith of 'father Abraham', *"By faith Abraham ... obeyed"*.

Someone might say, 'Oh, there was nothing remarkable in that because God promised to make his name great, to give him a numerous posterity, and to make him a blessing to all nations. Who would not have gone, with all that wealth and honour awaiting him?'. To this we reply, after having seen that Abraham actually entered the land and became wealthy and great, it is all very well for critics to belittle Abram's faith. These things, so apparent to us now, were not apparent to him. He undertook a journey of several hundred miles to a strange land, of which he knew little or nothing.

How many nowadays would be willing to do that on the mere promise of God? We can see that not many would do so, because in our day God is offering another great inheritance, to the followers of His Son, and not many have faith enough to take God's invitation as a command and obey. We see also a call for labourers in the vineyard, which has the promise attached, *"He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto eternal life"*. But how many are willing to take God at his word, trust Him to provide, and go forth in faith not knowing whither (John 4:34-38; 1 Corinthians 3:8,9; Matthew 19:27-30; 20:7; 16:24-27)?

### **By Faith He Sojourned**

**11:9** *"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise."* From this we see that Abraham's faith was still further tested, tested by delay in giving him the land promised.

Genesis 13:14-17 relates how he was told to look to the north, east, south, and west, and all the land he saw was to be his. But in the meantime he should walk up and down the length of it and the breadth of it without actually possessing it. In other words, Abraham, as Hebrews 11:9 says, dwelt in *"tabernacles"* or tents. He was a nomad, with flocks and herds and servants, but no settled place of abode.

Genesis 15 tells how Abram, while not doubting, wondered how the promise of becoming a great nation could be fulfilled while as yet he had no son, and he asked for some bond by which he might know he should inherit the land. God then made a covenant with him over an animal sacrifice, after the manner of the time, and Abraham was reassured.

At the same time God told him that his heirs should not immediately occupy the land, for they should be in bondage four hundred years to another nation. All these delays were tests of Abraham's faith. It was the land of promise, and yet to all appearance and experience it was a strange or foreign country. Isaac and Jacob, his son and grandson, *"the heirs with him of the same promise"*, were of the same faith, and likewise became wanderers or sojourners for their whole lifetime. Isaac and Jacob and their faith are further commented on in verses 20 and 21.

**11:10** Literally, *“For he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”* A city is an established community under a regular form of government. In olden times a city ruled the surrounding district, as far as its rulers could extend their influence. A city is therefore an expressive symbol of government. Abraham looked for such a government to be established by God, with himself in an honourable position in connection therewith. His confidence in this promise was so great that he willingly passed the whole of his life as a sojourner and wanderer, and when the time came to pass away he still believed that God would give it to him.

This faith of Abraham is one of the strongest proofs the Bible contains that the ancient worthies believed in the resurrection of the dead, and that they should come back to the very land in which they spent their years of sojourning and toil. Stephen asserts, and we are glad the Holy Spirit led Stephen to give the Church this corroboration of Genesis, that God *“gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on”*. In order to bury Sarah fittingly he purchased a piece of land from the children of Heth, Canaanites who shared with him the pasturages (Genesis 23; Acts 7:5).

The children of Heth had a city, or established headquarters, and could bargain for the sale of the land. Abraham sought not to take this city from them, nor to establish another. He looked to God to establish one for him in His own good time.

#### **By Faith Sarah Received Strength**

**11:11** *“Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.”* The words *“was delivered of a child”* are not found in the Sinaitic or Alexandrine manuscripts, and are omitted from the Revised Version. The passage thus corrected reads *“received strength to conceive seed, and that when she was past age”*.

In the KJV verses 3, 11, and 28 begin with *“Through faith”*. There is no reason why they should not read ‘By faith’, as in the other verses in this chapter. Possibly the translators rendered it *“through”* in these three instances by way of varying the language. Sarah’s faith was of exactly the same quality as that of the other ancient worthies, and for the same reason, as here stated, *“because she judged him faithful who had promised”*.

In several ways Sarah showed her personal faith in the promise of God. There were two obstacles: she had been all along barren, hence incapable, and now in addition she was past age (Genesis 11:30). At first she thought that while Abraham was undoubtedly to have a son, she would not be blest with being the mother of it. Her generosity, as well as her faith, was shown by her proposition that her handmaid should take her place for the purpose of assisting to fulfil the promise. This was ten years after entering Canaan, when Abram was aged 86, and Sarah 76 (Genesis 16:1-3,16).

But subsequently she came to realise that a son born of a slave was not God’s choice of an heir for his servant and friend Abraham. It will be noticed that in referring to the faith exhibited by Abraham and by Sarah no mention is made of their plan which resulted in the birth of Ishmael. They were in a hurry, so they tried to help God in this way, an exhibition of zeal, but an error of judgment, yet that error was not held against them.

#### **Abraham’s Laughter**

However, for a time Abraham centred his hopes in Ishmael, as revealed by his replies to God, recorded in Genesis 17:17,18. The renewal of the covenant and the giving of circumcision as a sign of that covenant took place when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, Sarah eighty-nine, and Ishmael thirteen years old. Whoever of Abraham’s seed would not adhere to the rite of circumcision, every male child to be circumcised the eighth day after birth, *“that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant”* (Genesis 17:1-14, 24-26).

God further said that Ishmael should not be the heir, he was not the one He had in mind when He in the first instance said that in Abraham and his seed should all nations be blest. God had in view a son by Sarah, the married wife and woman of faith. Abraham’s marvelling on being told that Sarah should have a son is not to be wondered at under the circumstances. Almost anyone, on hearing a startling piece of good news, might express astonishment and wonder.

And Abraham, in recommending the son already born as suitable, was no doubt prompted by his love for the child, as well as by his human fears that Sarah was incapable, himself being also of a great age. So while Abraham’s prayer on Ishmael’s behalf was heard (Genesis 17:20), God in no wise altered His purpose to make of Sarah *“a mother of nations”*, or literally, *“she shall become nations; kings of people shall be of her”*. *“And I will bless her”*, said God, *“yea, I will bless her”* (Genesis 17:16).

Abraham’s surprise and laughter were not held against him by God, nor are they said in the scriptures to have been evidence of lack of faith. Neither do modern Christian commentators dwell upon this incident of Ishmael as indicating unbelief on Abraham’s part.

#### **Sarah’s Laughter**

In Genesis 18 it is recorded that Sarah laughed when she heard the angel talking with Abraham concerning the promised son. Nowhere in scripture is this laughter of hers held against her, nor is it anywhere in scripture spoken of as evidence of a lack of faith. It has remained for Christian commentators to pass over the laughter of Abraham, and to fasten upon the laughter of Sarah as a mark of unbelief. Why?

Perhaps because of prejudice. Prejudice against women has been one of the outstanding phenomena of the past few centuries of our era, ever since papal Rome gained the ascendancy and decreed that women were a snare and devils incarnate, in order to fortify her priests against marrying, and so be able to fill convents with thousands of unmarried men and women, as devoted slaves of the Church. Protestant preachers have also seemingly taken pleasure in pointing to Sarah's laughter as evidence of unbelief, not having rid themselves completely of the papal traditions or that human prejudice which makes so many men exalt their own at the expense of the opposite gender. Thus Abraham's faith is extolled as not having failed, while Sarah's faith is by some completely denied.

To such an extent is this prejudice against Sarah carried that when in Hebrews 11:11 the apostle says, "*By faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed when she was past age*", these objectors say it was not her own faith but Abraham's that is here meant. Sarah, they say, bore a son in spite of her unbelief because Abraham had the faith. Not so our text, for it concludes, "*because she judged him faithful who had promised*". What objective could there be in including Sarah's name in the list of those who "*obtained a good report through faith*" if she were, instead, an example of unbelief? As if emphasise the fact that Sarah's own faith is referred to the apostle wrote, "*Sarah herself*"; "*By faith Sarah herself received strength*".

The record in Genesis fully confirms the apostle's statement that Sarah did have faith, did "*judge him faithful who had promised*". Those who accuse her of slyness in being in the tent and of listening to a conversation not intended for her ears, of laughing in unbelief, and then of lying when accused by the angel, are committing a serious offence, for it is a serious thing to take away the good name, to besmirch the character, of one of God's faithful ones.

Sarah had just prepared a meal for the angels, which was the occasion of her being in the tent, at the door of which the angels partook of the veal and cakes set before them. Before the angel spoke the promise, he inquired particularly, "*Where is Sarah thy wife?*". And Abraham replied, "*Behold, in the tent*" (Genesis 18:9). Hence, in speaking, the angel evidently intended her to hear. Sarah "*laughed within herself*", consequently was surprised when the angel knew she had thus laughed, for she had not laughed aloud, and her denial may well be considered as true when applied to laughter aloud. She did not know these strangers to be other than men (Hebrews 13:2), until this ability to read her thoughts and to announce a definite miracle would convince both her and Abraham that their visitors were not men, but angels of God appearing in human form.

### **The Son of Promise**

Sarah was not averse to having a son, she spoke of it as a pleasure, and it is her words on this very occasion that are referred to approvingly by the apostle Peter when admonishing Christian women to give due respect to their husbands (1 Peter 3:6). She had faith to believe that God would give her that great joy, as He had said. So we find that when the child was born she referred to laughter as an indication of gladness, not of unbelief, "*God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me*" (Genesis 21:6,7). In other words, God had made her rejoice, and all that hear, who know the great promise bound up in Isaac, the seed of promise, rejoice with her.

The very name "*Isaac*" means 'laughter'. How fitting a name for the heir of the promise that all nations and families of the earth shall be blest. In the light of that name the laughter of Abraham and, of Sarah on hearing the good news of a son to be born to them in their old age by the miraculous power of God becomes a symbol of the laughter and joy which shall yet come to all people when the Seed of Abraham, Christ Jesus, the heir of David, sits on the throne of His glory to bless every man for whom He died, even as He has already blessed a few in the present age with the light of His truth and the forgiveness of sins.

Truly we, even now, can laugh in faith with Abraham and Sarah as we look forward to that grand time, laugh "*with joy unspeakable and full of glory*", because we judge him faithful who has promised (2 Corinthians 4:17,18; Colossians 1:11; 1 Peter 1:8).

We Christians are not, however, of the circumcision pertaining to the Abrahamic covenant, which was circumcision of the flesh, but we are the circumcision of the New Covenant, a circumcision of the heart, and we are complete in Christ, for in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:2,3,10-13; 3:11).

Since we have referred to 1 Peter 3:6 regarding the respect due a husband by a wife, it will not be amiss to call attention to an occasion when the husband was required to render respect to his wife's judgment, an instance in the lives of the two whose wonderful faith we are now studying. In Galatians 4:29 we read that "*he that was born after the flesh* [that is, Ishmael] *persecuted him* [that is, Isaac] *that was born after the Spirit*", an allusion to Genesis 21:9: "*And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking*".

Sarah protested that the son of promise, the heir, should not be placed in so invidious a position, and that the bond-woman and her son should be deprived of the familiar position which gave rise to such incidents. Abraham, however, seems to have been inclined to uphold Ishmael. Then God intervened, backing up Sarah, and reminding Abraham of the promise, "*in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called*" (Genesis 21:10-12).

From this it will be seen that God does not condemn a wife for holding tenaciously to the truth and the promises of God, even against her husband's opposition, and that the true method of securing harmony in a household is for both husband and wife to regard the will of God as supreme, and submit themselves to it. Whether the husband or the wife be first to understand the truth, or the most ardent in living the life of faith, it is the privilege and duty of the other to yield, and thus both be united in the will of God. Were the wife compelled to yield when in the right, the



unity would be in the will of man and in error, instead of, as it should be, a unity in the will of God and in the truth. Our Lord, according to Matthew 10: 84-89, requires the woman of faith, as well as the man of faith, to stand out against the opposition of family relations. To do this is part of the taking up of the cross daily to follow the Master and thus to prove 'worthy' of Him.

Abraham's faith is extolled in Romans 4. Abraham believed what God told him, and his faith was "*counted unto him for righteousness*". Particular stress is laid on his strong faith in connection with the promise of an heir when both he and Sarah were incapacitated by age. "*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God*" (Romans 4:20). In this promise God spoke of nations yet unborn as though they were, saying, "*I have made thee a father of many nations*" (Romans 4:17). Abraham believed this also; he had conviction concerning the "*not seen*". So the apostle exhorts us to accept the promises of God in Jesus Christ our Lord with unwavering faith, and righteousness will be imputed to us (Romans 4:23-25. See also Galatians 3:6-14).

#### **As the Stars and As the Sand**

**11:12** "*Therefore*", because Abraham and Sarah had this great faith, "*sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky for multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable*". Do these figures of speech, "*stars*" and "*sand*", represent two separate classes, one heavenly, the other earthly? We should say No, they do not. It is just the employment of two illustrations to represent the one thing, the numerous posterity of Abraham and Sarah. Moses used the figure, "*the stars of heaven*", of the children of Israel when they stood "*on this side of Jordan, in the land of Moab*", in the fortieth year of their wandering, with the promised land just before them, ready to go in and possess it. "*The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude*" (Deuteronomy 1:1-10.) Other references to the same effect are Deuteronomy 10:22; 28:62; Nehemiah 9:21-25.

#### **These All Died in Faith**

**11:13** "*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*" In this instance "*in faith*" is better rendered "*according to faith*", as in the margin; or, in the faith considered as a definite belief. The "*all*" we understand to refer to those persons of faith previously mentioned, including Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, or such of them as adhered to the promise made to their fathers.

They died "*not having received the promises*", hence their faith was tested down to the last hours of their lives. They saw the promises "*afar off*", because God had made known the fact that they would be four hundred years in bondage in a strange land, therefore the time for actually possessing the land would be long after their death. But they were thoroughly "*persuaded*" that God's promises were steadfast, they had "*embraced*" or taken firm hold of them, and would not let go. Thus their daily lives were a confession that they were only pilgrims and sojourners under the order of society then existing.

**11:14** "*For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.*" The proverb has it, 'Actions speak louder than words'. In the case of the ancient worthies, they both spoke of their hopes and acted accordingly. God said they should be sojourners, and such they were content to be. By both speech and action they declared that they sought a country, literally, 'a native country', that is, a home (see Variorum footnote). Strong defines the Greek word here used as meaning, 'a fatherland, that is, native town', and the American Revised Version renders it "*a country of their own*".

The apostle probably used the word in the sense of town or city, in harmony with verse 10, "*the city which hath the [true] foundations*", the city or government which God would establish, and which, when established, would be to them as their native home.

#### **A Better Country, City, or Government**

**11:15** "*And truly, if they had been mindful of that country [or city] from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.*" Had their thoughts turned to the place from which they came, Ur of the Chaldees, or the later Haran, they could have returned thither. Evidently the home they sought was some other, different from the one they had left, as well as different from the regime under which they lived in Canaan. When Jacob, driven from home, found refuge in Haran, he did not remain. He returned to the land of promise.

**11:16** "*But now [or, 'as it is'] they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*" What they desired was a better one than either of these, that is, an heavenly. Some commentators conclude from this that the city these ancients sought was heaven itself, but that would be a contradiction of the previous statements that God had promised Abraham the land up and down which he and his descendants wandered, dwelling in tents. Heavenly is an adjective, a contraction of heaven-like. The idea is that they desired a city or government of a heaven-like character. In this their wish coincided with God's plan, "*wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city*".

#### **God Not Ashamed**

This statement, God not ashamed, is worthy of our meditation to-day. Have we ever thought that God might be 'ashamed' of us or of the conditions upon which He will not be ashamed of us? If the hopes we entertain are such as God authorises, and the lives we live are consistent with the same, God is not ashamed to be owned as our God. The mistake often made by Christians who do not go on to full consecration to the will of God, or who for some reason or other fail to study out in the scriptures what God's plans really are, is that they devise a plan for God



and expect God to father it. In such a case God could well be ashamed to be called their God. Especially is this true of some of the traditions of the dark ages, wherein God was (and still is) represented as more like a fiend than like a God of mercy and love.

Our Lord Jesus also mentioned circumstances under which He would be ashamed of us;

*“And he said to them all. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. ... For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.”* (Luke 9:23-26; Matthew 10:32,33; Mark 8:38).

Here our Lord Jesus places upon His disciples a test similar to that placed upon Abraham. Ours is also a pilgrimage, a following of the Lamb *“whithersoever he goeth”* (Revelation 14:4). Walking in His footsteps, we go out not knowing whither, but taking step after step as He shows us the way. And as we thus demonstrate that we are not ashamed of God or of His Son, but are willing to confess both before men, and thus, like the ancient worthies, demonstrate that we seek a city, a government, whose builder and maker is God, and in which our Lord Jesus Christ is King, He on His part is not ashamed to be known as our Lord and master, and God is pleased to own as His sons.

And, finally, our blessed Lord will acknowledge us before His Father and the holy angels. In the meantime may we faithfully pursue our way, enduring every test, every apparent delay in the fulfilment of our hopes, with patience, knowing in whom we have put our trust (Matthew 10:32,33; Mark 8:38).

#### **By Faith Abraham offered up Isaac**

**11:17,18** *“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called.”* Abraham was severely tried by God’s command to offer up his son Isaac, not only because of a father’s natural repugnance to such an act, but because, as here stated, all the promises were bound up in that son. For the account of how, after all preparations had been made, Abraham’s faith reached such a height that he willingly renounced all, being convinced that God could and would fulfil His promises notwithstanding, see Genesis 22. In Genesis 22:1 we read that *“God did tempt Abraham”*. ‘Prove’ or ‘test’ more exactly expresses the thought, *“for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man”*, in the sense of inciting to sin (James 1:13; see RV).

It was after Abraham had endured this proof or test of his faith that God confirmed the promise with an oath. Not for a moment do we suppose that God would sanction the slaying of a son by a father. But he brought Abraham, as He has brought many others of like faith, to the point where God’s will in taking away became as precious as His will in giving. And faith is able to see in these times of deprivation what it sees less clearly, or perhaps not at all, in times of enjoyment of God’s gifts.

**11:19** *“Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”* Abraham’s faith grasped the fact that death itself is no barrier to the fulfilment of the promises of God, even the death of the very son born by a miracle to be the heir of the promise, for God had said to Abraham, *“In Isaac shall thy seed be called”* (verse 18; Genesis 21:12). Were it His purpose to raise up to Abraham a great posterity through Isaac, God could raise him from the dead, and then accomplish His design.

*“From whence also he received him in a figure.”* To all intents and purposes, so far as Abraham was concerned, Isaac had died as a sacrifice. Hence, when his hand was stayed and another sacrifice provided, he practically received his son out of death. Some commentators regard this as meaning that this act of offering up his son and receiving him back was a figure of how Christ was offered up and afterward resurrected from the dead. But we do not understand it so. The *“figure”* consisted in receiving him back as from death, for Isaac had not actually died.

The stress of the apostle’s remarks is upon Abraham’s remarkable faith, which was able to reach beyond the grave of the son of promise and in his mind see that son raised again to fulfil all that God had said. For it must be remembered that up to that time no dead person had been raised to life again, as was afterward the case during the Jewish Age and under our Lord’s ministry. Abraham therefore envisioned an entirely new thing. And he backed up his faith by his works, as James says, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered [or, ‘in that he offered’] Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect [or, ‘complete’]?”* (James 2:21,22).

#### **By Faith Isaac Blessed Jacob and Esau**

**11:20** *“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.”* Not much faith would seem to be required for a dying man, before his departure, to bless his two sons. The gathering of the family around the death bed takes place every day, many times a day, as one after another of our race passes away. Inheritances are passed on to surviving sons who are expected to make the most of them and, if possible, add to the prestige of the family. The uniqueness of the blessing conferred by Isaac, and the evidence it gave of faith, was that it was *“concerning things to come”*.

At one time Isaac might have thought that the blessing of all through him as Abraham’s *“seed”* would take place in his lifetime, for in Genesis 26 we read that God appeared unto Isaac and renewed the covenant with him.

But Isaac would recall that it had been said, *"In Isaac shall thy seed be called"*, thus indicating that the time for the seed of promise was future from his day. And as he drew near his end he would recognise that all of the promise had not been fulfilled, for, though he had been made great and rich, he was still a nomad, a sojourner in the land, and not an owner of any portion thereof. Hence he would understand that the promise was to be passed on to his eldest son.

In those days the eldest son inherited the birthright portion of his father's estate. This birthright carried with it the headship of the family, as well as a larger share of the patrimony than fell to the other sons. In the case of Jacob and Esau, the promise of God concerning the "seed" as a 'blessor' would go as a birthright to the elder, that is, to Esau.

### **Despising the Birthright**

Whether or not Isaac had been informed of the transaction between Esau and Jacob, whereby the former sold his birthright, we are not told. It is often thought that Jacob took an unfair advantage of Esau, inducing him to part with the birthright when he was overcome by hunger and fatigue. Undoubtedly Jacob did make use of the opportunity, but the fact that God confirmed the covenant to Jacob, without censuring either Rebekah or Jacob, would seem to exonerate them of wrongdoing.

Esau was *"a cunning hunter, a man of the field"*, and Isaac loved him because of the venison provided by him. Jacob was *"a plain man, dwelling in tents"* (Genesis 25:27,28). The word *"plain"*, according to a Variorum footnote, means 'perfect', or 'blameless'. His character was unimpeachable, as much as to say that Esau's was not.

The fact that Esau grieved his parents by marrying two Hittite women would show that his religious convictions were lax, hence the promise made to Abraham and confirmed to Isaac was lightly esteemed. Jacob knew this, as did his mother Rebekah. It will be remembered that Abraham was at much trouble to secure for Isaac a wife from his own kinsmen, who were worshippers of the true God (Genesis 24). Afterward Jacob took a wife from the same branch of the family (Genesis 29). But Esau was unmoved by any such considerations in choosing a wife. Therefore it is evident that Rebekah and Jacob held the Abrahamic promise in honour, while Esau despised it.

Instead of blaming Jacob for the method pursued to obtain the birthright from Esau, the scriptures denounce Esau as a despiser of his birthright (Genesis 25:34), and the New Testament holds him up before Christian believers as an example to be shunned, *"Looking diligently ..... lest there be any ..... profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright"* (Hebrews 12:15,16). And Romans 9:10-13 reminds us that even before the children were born God had said, *"The elder shall serve the younger"*, so that in securing the birthright, Jacob and his mother were fulfilling what they understood to be God's purpose.

On the other hand, the duplicity of Esau was manifest, in that, though he had despised his birthright and sold it to gratify his hunger, he was willing afterward to accept the blessing from his father, entirely regardless of Jacob's rights in the case (Genesis 27:1-4,36).

The drama staged by Rebekah and Jacob in order to secure the birthright blessing from Isaac may have been unnecessary (Genesis 27:5-29). It is possible, even probable, that had they done nothing God would have used other means to cause Isaac to give the chief blessing to Jacob in accordance with His prediction, *"The elder shall serve the younger"* (Genesis 25:23).

Isaac could have been led by divine guidance to cross his hands, as at a later time Jacob crossed his hands when imparting blessings to Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:8-20; Hebrews 11:21). God is fully able to carry out His purposes without human aid. Yet Jacob's faith in the promise and his zeal to honour it are held up to us in scripture as an example to emulate, whereas Esau's unbelief and despising of the birthright are condemned, and no sympathy is expressed for his tears. We read, *"For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears"* (Hebrews 12:17).

Does this mean that Esau was sorry he had wronged his brother? No: because Esau showed hatred toward Jacob by threatening his life (Genesis 27:41).

The *"place of repentance"* Esau sought was some way of getting the blessing back again. And his tears were tears of vexation and disappointment, not because he had lost his inheritance in the Abrahamic promise, but because he failed to receive the firstborn's larger share of his father's estate and the ruling position among his brethren that went with it. Too late he found that in despising the covenant of promise he had engineered himself out of the other advantages of the first-born son.

However, Esau was not deprived of all blessing. He lost the special promise handed down from Abraham, but he received, in accordance with God's arrangement for him, a promise of material things, and of success (in later generations) in breaking off the yoke of service. All of Edom became David's servants (2 Samuel 8:14). Judgments against Edom are recorded in Jeremiah 49:7-22; Amos 1:11,12; Ezekiel 25:12-14. But when the nation of Israel itself became a subject people (first under Nebuchadnezzar), they could no longer rule over Edom.

It was *"by faith"* that Isaac pronounced this blessing upon Esau, as well as the blessing upon Jacob. Faith was required to believe that God would fulfil the blessings pronounced.

### **By Faith Jacob Blessed**

**11:21** *"By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."*

That the blessing of the two sons of Joseph was an act of faith on Jacob's part is apparent when we realise that it was God's purpose to make of his descendants a nation composed of twelve tribes, out of which one tribe, separated for special service, should have no inheritance in Canaan. Thus only eleven tribes would have been allotted the land.

To what extent God revealed His purpose to Jacob is not clear, but shortly before his death Jacob repeated to Joseph the promise of the land, saying that he would take Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own. Thus these two sons of Joseph had two inheritances in the land, as against the one portion which would have fallen to Joseph. The crossing of the hands, whereby the younger was given the firstborn's blessing, was divinely directed (Genesis 48:8-20). The blessings upon the other sons of Jacob are recorded in Genesis 49. Jacob's action was a work of faith, as well as a prophecy of the future greatness of his heirs, and all in accord with the original promise given to Abraham and confirmed to Isaac.

#### **By Faith Jacob Worshipped**

Moreover, to his last hour Jacob worshipped the true God with undimmed faith, for worship means more than the rendering of reverence; it means also service, the doing of God's will to the best of ability. He showed his faith by his works, directing Joseph and his other sons that his remains be buried with his fathers in the land of promise. A fine cortege, provided by Pharaoh, wended its way through the desert from Egypt to Canaan, and Jacob was buried in the cave of the field in which were the remains of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 49:29-33; 50:1-13).

Faith in the promise of a resurrection was Jacob's motive when commanding that he be taken to Canaan for burial, a conviction that he would rise again to inherit the land of promise. In this faith he died, and in this faith he will rise again in the last day. For the Lord specifically mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being in the Kingdom of God. And God, by calling himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, centuries after they had passed away, indicated that He looked forward to their future life, for *"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living"*, albeit for a time His people sleep with their fathers (Luke 13:28; 20:37,38; Matthew 22:31,32).

#### **By Faith Joseph Gave Commandment**

**11:22** *"By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones."* The same motive was behind Joseph's command, when he was dying, or drawing to his end, that his bones be carried to the land of his fathers (Genesis 50:24-26). *"God will surely visit you"*, he said, *"and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."* On this point Joseph had no doubts. His faith was positive conviction based on a definite promise of God that Israel should inherit the land of Canaan. Many years later this wish of Joseph's was fulfilled by his descendants, who were privileged to follow Joshua into the promised land (Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:82; Genesis 33:18,19).

Stephen recounts these things, as recorded in Acts 7:9-16, fully accepting the scriptural record of the facts.

#### **By Faith Moses' Parents Hid Him**

**11:23** *"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment."* Pharaoh's efforts to diminish the children of Israel having been frustrated by the faith of the parents, the midwives, and others whose co-operation was gained, a great passive resistance movement, God prepared an instrument for the deliverance of His people from the land of Egypt. That Moses was intended for this purpose there can be no doubt. Nevertheless, the faith of his parents and their cleverness in placing him where he would be found by Pharaoh's daughter, and thus, they hoped, be saved alive, does them great credit (Exodus 2:1-10). Their faith in God was so strong that *"they were not afraid of the king's commandment"*. Faith led to their keeping the child in the first place, and then to devising the plan for its further preservation, in all of which it would doubtless be correct to say they were God-directed.

The word rendered *"proper"* in this verse is the same as is rendered *"fair"* in Acts 7:20.

#### **By Faith Moses Refused**

**11:24** *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years [or, 'grown up', RV], refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."* Under her patronage he *"was learned in [or, was taught] all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds"* (Acts 7:22). Apparently Moses kept more or less in touch with his relatives, God no doubt having overruled to this end when He led Pharaoh's daughter to employ the babe's mother as his nurse, and this service would doubtless have been prolonged throughout his boyhood.

But it was not till he was forty years of age that he took the first open step on behalf of his oppressed brethren. As Stephen relates, *"And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand was delivering [RV] them: but they understood not"* (Acts 7:23-25).

Moses, in this first espousal of his brethren, made the mistake of many another reformer by supposing that the enslaved ones were ready to be made free, and would accept a deliverer as soon as one should appear among them. He thought that they, like himself, had held to the promises made to the fathers, but found them instead suspicious and jealous (Exodus 2:11-14; Acts 7:26-28). Then Pharaoh sought his life, and Moses fled to Midian, where he married and had two sons.

And after forty years the angel of the LORD visited him and gave him his commission to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. These forty years were doubtless of value in fitting Moses for his task as well as in preparing the Israelites for their deliverance. Yet even then Moses had much to cope with in their indifference and unbelief.

**11:25** *“Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season”,* Moses showed his faith by his works. Forty years of exile was a severe affliction, to be the servant of a Midianite instead of a favourite at court. Yet he was destined to endure much more in the forty years of his leadership.

His life at the court is here described as *“the pleasures of sin”*. By this we are not to infer that Moses led an evil life. His faith would have enabled him to lead a pure life, even as Joseph had done. But for him as an Israelite to be content at ease in the palace while his brethren were persecuted slaves would have been a sin. It would have separated him from God and from the promises which he knew God had given concerning their future deliverance and return to their own land. In our day also, comparatively innocent amusements may be ‘the pleasures of sin’ to us, if we are led thereby to associate ourselves with worldly friends instead of remaining in touch with those of ‘like precious faith’, sharing also their trials and disappointments, griefs and cares.

*“For a season”* only would Moses have enjoyed the pleasures of the Court, and then have lost the inheritance which became his by faith. But by enduring the affliction and being faithful to the promises, he pleased God and became one of the greatest leaders of men, besides making sure his inheritance in the *“city”* or Kingdom toward which the Ancient Worthies looked.

**11:26** *“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.”* Moses’ career was not one of chance. He definitely chose the service of God, knowing that to do so would bring the loss of all things. Some difference of opinion exists among Christians as to just what is meant here by *“the reproach of Christ”*, or *“of the Christ”*. The word *“Christ”* means ‘anointed’, and from this it is sometimes urged that the anointed were the children of Israel, God’s anointed or chosen people, that Moses did not know of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed, and consequently could not be considered as *“esteeming the reproach”* of Jesus.

We are inclined, however, to think that Paul here interprets Moses’ faith in the Seed of promise as having been faith in the Lord Jesus. As we Christians look back to Christ as the Seed of the promise (Galatians 3:16), so the ancient worthies looked forward to the Seed of promise, but of course with but limited knowledge of His mission as the sacrifice for sin, and no knowledge whatever of His identity. They saw Him as the blessing of all nations, and they rejoiced at the prospect.

But Moses had seen fulfilled what God told Abraham concerning the affliction and bondage for four hundred years. Thus the hope in the promise was refined in the furnace of affliction (Jeremiah 11:4; Deuteronomy 4:20). Moses saw that before the inheritance could be entered into they as a nation and as individuals must endure many hardships. And he esteemed it a greater privilege to endure these hardships and reproaches of the Seed of promise than to possess all the treasures of Egypt. And the reason Moses preferred the reproaches to the treasures was, as stated in the last clause of verse 26, *“for he had respect unto [more literally, ‘looked away to’, or ‘had before his eyes’] the recompense of the reward”*. Moses’ faithfully measured up to the definition of faith with which this chapter opens, *“The confidence of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*.

The recompense of the reward was in part the return to Canaan from Egypt. But Moses was well aware that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and many others of faith had passed away without inheriting the land, yet hopeful of a resurrection, at which time the promise would be abundantly fulfilled. He too, therefore, looked away to that time as the period of his own reward. Our Lord Jesus said, *“For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me”*. On the way to Emmaus He expounded the prophecies of Moses concerning himself (John 5:46; Luke 24:27,44).

Peter quoted Moses’ statement concerning a prophet which should be raised up unto them like unto him, whom they should hear in all things (Acts 3:22,23; Deuteronomy 18:15,18,19). Counting all the cost therefore, Moses committed himself to faith in the promises, with a willingness to die as had others without receiving the promise, but in hope of a reward at the resurrection of the just. His hope of a resurrection is made all the more evident by his having died without entering the land, only seeing it from a neighbouring mount (Deuteronomy 31:14,16; 32:48-52; 34:1-7).

#### **By Faith He Forsook Egypt**

**11:27** *“By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”* A very brief reference indeed is this to Moses’ controversy with Pharaoh, the ten plagues, and the wrath of the king. All this he did because *“he endured, as seeing him who is invisible”*. God’s personality and God’s interest in the deliverance of the Israelites, His power and might, were all real to Moses, and thus he was able to stretch forth his rod at any time that God instructed him to do so, in full confidence that the foretold miracle would be done. We, too, are to go forward, as seeing the invisible God, and looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

#### **By Faith He Kept the Passover**

**11:28** *“By faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.”* The experience of God’s deliverances from the first nine plagues prepared the people to believe that God would indeed deliver them out of Egypt at the appointed time. Nevertheless, the responsibility of the preparations and the instruction of the people rested

upon Moses. His faith had to be strong enough to bear up and encourage the people as well as to carry on the conflict with Pharaoh. He had also to have, and to impart, a strong conviction that if the firstborn of Israel and their parents did not realise the situation and follow directions, the first born of Israel as well as the first born of Egypt would die. The sprinkling of the blood over the doorposts was essential to salvation, and then the people had to be marshalled and led out toward the Red sea. In all this Moses acquitted himself as became a man of courage and faith (Exodus 12).

### **By Faith They Passed through the Red Sea**

**11:29** *“By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.”* Pharaoh’s consent for the children of Israel to depart was soon repented of, and he pursued them to the Red sea. Here again a mighty miracle was wrought for their deliverance. Many of the people afterward showed themselves lacking in faith, but with Pharaoh’s hosts behind them and the path through the sea open in front of them, they rushed through and were saved.

Moses and the leaders and doubtless a goodly number of the people had faith even before the sea was parted, that God would deliver them. The faith of the others consisted in a trust or confidence that the waters would hold up until they had reached the opposite shore. There are degrees of faith, and God was merciful to all who followed, even weakly, His appointed leader Moses. And then the last catastrophe overtook the Egyptians, the hosts of Pharaoh were drowned (Exodus 14).

The Passover, the sprinkling of the blood, and the deliverance following, were a significant type of Christ our Passover sacrificed for us, of the sprinkling of His blood upon our hearts, and of our salvation under His leadership (1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2; Matthew 26:28).

### **By Faith the Walls of Jericho Fell Down**

**11:30** This incident is recorded in Joshua 6. God had determined to give Jericho into the hands of Israel, but He required co-operation on their part. Their faith in His promise would manifest itself by obedience to the instructions given. They did believe, they did obey, and they immediately realised the fulfilment of God’s promise. Yet in the seven days of walking around Jericho each day probably seemed an age to the marchers. Each day provided its additional test of faith.

Thus it is with us. In some things our faith is tested over long periods of time. On other occasions God grants promptly what we ask for in faith, provided, of course, we ask according to His will. Taking Jericho as an illustration of obstructions in the Christians’ path, we realise that they are overcome by faith and by perseverance in doing exactly what God tells us to do.

### **By Faith Rahab Perished Not**

**11:31** Joshua 2 contains the account of Rahab’s reception of the spies sent to Jericho. Verse 9 tells of her confidence or belief that God, who had done great things for them, had given them the land. She believed the accounts that had reached Jericho of the passing through the Red sea and their victories over the two kings of the Amorites. By reason of this faith she favoured the spies and helped their escape, asking only that when the city was taken her life and the lives of her kinsfolk should be spared. This promise was given, and she had faith that it would be fulfilled. Joshua directed that she and her people be delivered from the slaughter following the collapse of the walls. She became a proselyte to the Jewish religion, and an ancestress of Jesus Christ (Joshua 6:22-25; Matthew 1:5).

### **Other Men and Women of Faith**

**11:32** Time would fail to tell of the achievements of the great leaders of Israel. Judges 4:1-24 describes Barak’s victory over Jabin king of Canaan, when exhorted by Deborah the prophetess and judge of Israel at that time. Chapters 6 and 7 tell of the valour of Gideon; chapters 13 to 15 relate how Samson judged Israel for twenty years and of the wonderful strength given him because of his faith in God. Judges 11 contains the account of Jephtha’s vow and the faithfulness of himself and daughter in fulfilling the same. David’s history is a lengthy one, with many notable exhibitions of faith.

Samuel also was a man of faith, whose activities are described at length in the scriptures. He, in all probability, compiled the history of the children of Israel from the crossing of the Jordan to his own day, making use of notes left by Joshua, the Judges, and other participants in the events following the entrance into Canaan. The prophets, too, were men of faith, whose lives are well worth reading for our own stimulation in faith and patience (James 5:10).

### **Who by Faith Subdued Kingdoms**

**11:33** These mighty men of faith *“subdued kingdoms”*, as when entering Canaan, and as, under the judges and kings, the surrounding tribes were repulsed or subjugated. They *“wrought righteousness”* by living exemplary lives, or in the sense of executing justice and judgment in Israel. By faith they *“obtained promises”*, that is, had promises confirmed to them because of unqualified acceptance of them and of the conditions upon which the things promised were offered.

In verse 32 the prophets are mentioned. These also *“obtained promises”*. Our Lord said that the prophets would be in the Kingdom of God. Daniel is probably referred to here as having *“stopped the mouths of lions”* (Daniel 6). God stopped their mouths by a miracle, but it was because of Daniel’s faith and obedience.

**11:34** By faith the three Hebrew children *“quenched the violence of fire”*. Because of their faith God intervened on their behalf (Daniel 3). Israel often *“escaped the edge of the sword”* when they repented of their back-slidings, and cried to the LORD God for help. 2 Kings 6 affords one example of such deliverance.

The next, *“out of weakness were made strong”*, may refer to physical healings, such as Hezekiah experienced, or to a renewal of courage when beset by adversaries, or to a revival of religious fervour as when King Josiah overturned the idols and re-instituted the Passover (2 Kings 20:1-7; 19:20-34; 22:8 to 23:28).

The next, *“waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens”* were also accomplished by faith and obedience, because on those conditions God worked with and for them. Jonathan, with a handful of men, turned back the Philistines, and David’s encounter with the giant Goliath is well known (1 Samuel 14:1-23; 17:38-54).

#### **By Faith Women Received their Dead**

**11:35** *“Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.”* Women as a rule had little or no opportunity of showing faith by valour in battle. Their faith was manifested in other ways, for example, the widow who showed her faith by providing lodging for Elisha. As a reward God renewed her barrel of meal and her cruse of oil all through the famine. And when her son sickened and died he was restored to her (2 Kings 4:25-37).

It has been suggested in some quarters that these women did not receive their dead raised to life or by a resurrection in their lifetime, that they only looked forward by faith to receiving their dead in a future resurrection. But this suggestion is inconsistent with the line of argument, for the apostle is relating what was received of victory over enemies and vigour in battle, in the past history of the Israelite nation as a reward of faith.

Hence the reference to women receiving their dead likewise refers to experience of God’s mercy in restoring their dead, as in the case of the widow’s son. This was a genuine resurrection from the dead, for the breath of the child had left the body. The Greek word here rendered by the four words *“raised to life again”* is *anastasis*, and is elsewhere rendered *“resurrection”* and *“rise from the dead”*. It means ‘standing up again’, and is used both with regard to such raisings up as that of the widow’s son and also the raising up to everlasting life promised to the faithful. The Revised Version renders verse 35, *“Women received their dead by a resurrection: and others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance [margin, the redemption]; that, they might obtain a better resurrection”*.

The *“better resurrection”* is thus compared with the resurrection experienced by the widow’s son. He came back to conditions as they were, when a famine was in the land, and a wicked king ruled. The others mentioned gave up the present life rather than relinquish their faith, the ‘torture’ being either to be broken on a wheel, or beaten to death. Their faith supported them in these ordeals because they believed in the resurrection promised to the fathers, a resurrection to the better conditions which will obtain when the ‘city’ or government of God for which they looked is established in the earth.

Our Lord referred to the treatment meted out to the prophets (Matthew 23:29-32), and Stephen accused Israel thus, *“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One”* (Acts 7:51,52). These unlawfully done to death shall rise in the *“better resurrection”* provided for the Ancient Worthies, which, as we shall see toward the end of this chapter, is to great honour and privilege, yet is distinct from the resurrection promised to the Gospel Age Church. The Jews of our Lord’s day, excepting the sect of the Sadducees, believed in the resurrection (Luke 14:14; Matthew 22:23; John 11:24; Acts 23:6; 24:15).

#### **The Sufferings of the Faithful**

**11:36** The lot of the faithful was one of severe trial and testing, for *“cruel mockings, scourgings, bonds, and imprisonment”* are heavy penalties for preaching the truth and condemning the covenant-breakers. Jeremiah writes of his experience in prison. Joseph also suffered imprisonment, and scourging was a usual accompaniment of a prison sentence in those days. As for *“mockings”*, the ridicule heaped on the prophets and leaders whom God raised up to teach Israel was fostered by *“false prophets”* who made it their business to stir up the people against the true prophets of God (Genesis 39:20-23; Jeremiah 37:15-21; 38:1-28; Ezekiel 20:49; Deuteronomy 13:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1).

**11:37** *“They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.”* Further sufferings endured are here enumerated. Westcott and Hort and others suspect corruption in the text, since the Greek word rendered *“tempted”* is much like another Greek word meaning burnt. It would seem from the context to refer to some form of punishment or martyrdom. On the other hand, ‘tempted’ is often used in the sense of ‘tried’ or ‘tested’. These men of faith were tried or tested in a thousand ways. At one time Elijah was three and a half years in hiding from Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 17:1-7; 19:1-18). Naboth was stoned to death because he would not break the Law by selling his inheritance (1 Kings 21:1-14).

Those whose names are mentioned in this eleventh chapter were not the only sufferers for their faith. In Elijah’s day there were 7000 who refused to bow the knee to Baal or kiss the calves, and who doubtless were persecuted in various ways (1 Kings 19:18). At other periods, also, there was a faithful minority who by faith resisted the false prophets and the tendency of their time toward idolatry and corruption. A coat of sheepskin or goatskin or camel’s hair was the usual garb of a prophet, for they wandered from place to place, and often slept in the open air. John the Baptist was so clothed. Elijah was recognised by his garments of hairy skin (2 Kings 1:8; Matthew 3:4). Elijah was for a time so destitute that God miraculously provided his food (1 Kings 17:4-6; 19:4-8).

**11:38** Of these, says Paul, *“the world was not worthy”*. Here *“world”* is a translation of ‘kosmos’, meaning orderly arrangement, or order of things. The social order of their time was unworthy of these men and women of faith. Had it been worthy or deserving of them it would have treated them differently. That they were allowed to wander *“in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth”* is a sad reflection on the nation which professed to be God’s people. (See also 1 Samuel 22:1,2 and 1 Kings 18:13; 19:9).

#### **Obtained a Good Report through Faith**

**11:39** *“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.”* Other passages in which the phrase *“good report”* is found undoubtedly refer to the standing of the persons described. For example, the seven deacons of Acts 6:3 were men of *“honest report”*. Timothy was *“well reported of”* by the brethren (Acts 16:2). A bishop (literally, overseer) *“must have a good report of them which are without”* (1 Timothy 3:7). The ancients *“obtained a good report by faith”* would therefore mean that by reason of their faith and because of the afflictions they endured these men and women were well reported of among the true people of God, in the records kept by the prophets and scribes, and in the sight of God. They were all men and women of character.

And yet they *“received not the promise”*, that is, the thing promised, the city *“whose builder and maker is God”*, the land of Canaan, and the life everlasting implied in the promises. They all died. And the reason they were all allowed to pass away and remain for centuries in the grave, without entering into their reward, was because another part of God’s plan was to be put into operation before their reward would be given. This part of God’s purpose is explained in verse 40.

#### **Some Better Thing For Us**

**11:40** *“God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”* The *“us”* in this case are the Gospel Age Church, the disciples whom Jesus selected and called and those who believed on Him through their word. This statement makes it clear that great as is the promise to be fulfilled to them, namely, giving them an honourable place in the Kingdom of God when established in the earth, an even higher position is reserved for the Church.

Our Lord drew the distinction when He said, *“Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”* (Matthew 11:11). John the Baptist was the most distinguished of the prophets because he was granted the honour of announcing the Messiah to Israel.

It is not a question of the members of the Church suffering more or being more faithful, and therefore deserving of a higher reward. It is merely that God purposed to have the over-comers prior to our Lord’s first advent occupy a certain position as earthly rulers in the Kingdom, *“princes in all the earth”* (Psalm 45:16), while His purpose for the over-comers of the Gospel Age was that a few, an election, be chosen to be joint heirs with Christ, seeing His glory, and being made *“like Him”*. This is indeed *“some better thing for us”* (John 15:16; 17:11-24; Ephesians 1:3-12; Romans 8:14-18; 1 John 3:2).

The resurrection and perfecting of these ancient worthies will take place when the Lord Jesus Christ has established His Kingdom and the joint heirs are seated in the throne with Him, for we read that *“the dead in Christ shall rise first”*. Then we that are *“alive and remain”* shall be *“changed”* into His glorious likeness (1 Thessalonians 4: 3-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51).

The Revised Version rendering, *“apart from us”*, is no improvement on *“without us”*, since two separate positions are indicated by the statement that one is a *“better thing”* than the other.

The time for rewarding the prophets is stated in Revelation 11:15-18 to be after the seventh trumpet has begun to sound. Here a distinction is made between *“thy servants the prophets”*, *“the saints”* and *“them that fear thy name, small and great”*, representing all the saved, while the corrupters of the earth are to be destroyed if they prove perversely such under the Kingdom rule.

Those to be *“made perfect”* will be: (first) the saints who will rule with Christ as *“kings and priests”*, enjoying a heavenly inheritance; (second) the faithful ancients as perfect men occupying responsible official positions on earth for the administration of earth’s affairs; and (third) the race of mankind in general who prove amenable to instruction under the enlightenment and blessing spread over the earth by that benevolent and yet despotic Kingdom.

Thus will be brought to pass the fulfilment of our Lord’s prayer, *“Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10). This will be the establishment of that great *“city”* or government for which the ancient worthies looked, and which is pictured in Revelation 21 as the New Covenant administration, coming down from God to remove the curse and to open up *“the fountain of the water of life freely”*, for all the dead, small and great, shall stand before that Great White Throne, and hear the gracious invitation (Revelation 20:11-13; 21:3-6; 22:1,3,17).



## Chapter 12

### CONSIDER HIM

A review of the lives and faith of the ancient worthies, such as Paul gives in Hebrews 11, is interesting and instructive, but it would fall short of its purpose did we not make personal application of its lessons of faith and patient endurance. These ancient worthies are held up to us for our admiration, but that is not all. To admire and to wonder should lead to imitation, to a desire to conduct ourselves as acceptably in the eyes of God as did they in their far less enlightened age.

**12:1** That this was the apostle's objective is shown by the opening words of chapter 12, *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us"*. We are not to think of these ancient worthies as characters who lived a very long time ago, to be taken out now and again as curios from a cabinet, admired for a few moments, and then returned with indifference or relief to their place on the shelf. On the contrary, we are to regard them as though they were living beings deeply concerned in us and our development in faith, and urging us on to do our best in our day and generation.

Before proceeding further we must disclaim any interpretation of verse 1 involving belief in the immortality of the soul. The scriptures clearly show elsewhere that the dead are really dead, and know not anything, but await the resurrection, when the Lord Jesus shall call forth all that are in the graves. The soul is the individual, the person, and not some mysterious entity inside the person.

Taking it as proven that the ancient worthies are asleep, and that (11:40) they must wait for their reward until the Gospel Age Church has been gathered out, we understand the apostle to mean that the influence of their example should be as great as though they were standing around the course and urging us forward in the race.

The Revised Version reads, *"Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight"*. The different placing of the word *"also"* undoubtedly makes the meaning clearer. It is not that we as well as they are surrounded by witnesses, but that we as well as they have a race to run, and should *"lay aside every weight"*, as these faithful ones had done.

#### The Cloud of Witnesses

The use of the word *"cloud"* here has been taken to imply that these ancients are in heaven, and looking down upon us as eye witnesses of our efforts. No doubt clouds do usually refer to masses of vapour floating in the air, but not always. We speak of clouds of dust and clouds of incense. The idea in 'clouds' is a mass of vapour or dust or incense. The apostle says *"so great a cloud"*, that is, so large a mass, so many, for he had said (11:32) that time would fail him to tell of all the faithful of preceding ages.

The word *"witnesses"* has also lent seeming support to the teaching that the ancient worthies are alive in heaven and looking down upon us. But the word 'witness' has other meanings than that of eye-witness or onlooker. It also means one who testifies or gives evidence. The testimony or evidence of their faith was given during their lifetime on earth, as Paul had just been showing in the preceding chapter. By both words and deeds they testified that they sought a *"city"*, or *"country"*, he says in 11:10,13 and 14.

Nevertheless, while all this is true, that their witness or testimony was given during their lifetime, the Lord would have us consider their lives so real, their experiences so vital, and their example so stimulating, that we might well regard ourselves as *"compassed about"*, or closely surrounded, by them, and hence encouraged to be as faithful in our race as they were in theirs.

#### The Race Set Before Us

It is quite the usual thing among Christians to regard the ancient worthies and the Christians as running in the same race, and if that race be considered the effort to win the approval of God by an exhibition of faith well demonstrated by works, no doubt it could be said that we strive for the same goal that they reached. But as the apostle had just said (11:40) that God had *"provided some better thing for us"*, it would be inconsistent to say now that the end to be attained is the same for both, except, as already stated, that they and we are alike in seeking by faith and works for the approval of God.



The point is that while the method of attaining the respective goals is the same, namely, laying aside every weight and running with patience, or patient endurance, *"the thing promised"* is not the same. Our race is for *"the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"*, whereas theirs was for an earthly reward, even the land which they saw with their natural eyes and the new government on earth which they saw by the eye of faith (Philippians 3:14; Acts 7:5; Luke 13:28; Hebrews 11:10).

### **Lay Aside Every Weight**

Runners in a race are as lightly clad as possible. They lay aside all unnecessary weights and encumbrances, not only unnecessary weights in the form of clothing, but also in the shape of flesh. They live abstemiously, and train vigorously, that they may be a good match for their competitors. So, in order to be a victor in the Christian race, much of self must be laid aside; habits and thoughts as near and precious as one's own flesh; also *"the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches"*, false ambition and love of ease must be cast away.

### **The Close Girding Sin**

Different individuals have different faults, and are prone to different forms of sin. One may be addicted to lying, more politely called prevarication, another may indulge in frequent outbursts of temper, another may be hypercritical, especially happy when putting others in the wrong, another may be unfair to his family by spending money they need for necessities on strong drink. When such become Christians they *"put off the old man with his deeds"*, and should thereafter be free from these sins (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9).

In Romans 8:13 we are told to *"mortify [or put to death] the deeds of the body"*. Nevertheless, the old nature often refuses to remain dead, and so the runner in the race has his work cut out to repeatedly fling away these impedimenta, while at the same time striving to make progress towards the goal.

But while each individual runner has his own peculiarities and pet sins to overcome, there is undoubtedly one sin which encumbers and hinders all more or less. From the remarks made in 3:7-19 concerning unbelief, we may well suppose that the apostle here had this in mind as the besetting sin of the Hebrews, and therefore as something those Hebrews who accepted Christ would specially need to contend against. Unbelief, faithlessness, hardness of heart characterised the children of Israel in the wilderness, and were certainly manifested in their treatment of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And can we say that Gentile believers are exempt from this *"close-girding"* sin as the Diaglott has it? The Revised Version margin reads, *"doth closely cling to us"*, or *"is admired of many"*. Unbelief usually arises from pride and self-will. It closely clings, and is often admired. The meek and humble are despised, while the proud and haughty are looked up to by those who take the worldly viewpoint (Malachi 3:15). The one word 'unbelief' seems to cover all these: pride, haughtiness, faithlessness, self-will. These are the things God hates. He abhors the proud, but gives His favour to the humble. *"Yea, all of you be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace [or, favour] to the humble"* (1 Peter 5:5).

Unbelief does not always deny facts. The children of Israel in the wilderness did not deny the miracles. The Pharisees did not deny that Jesus did many wonderful works. The unbelief in both cases consisted in denying that God was behind the miracles, and that therefore the onlooker should acknowledge both God and the one whom God endorsed by the miracles. So now we may go on with a belief in much that the Bible teaches, but if we do not act in accordance therewith, and honour God by obedience and faithfulness, we are guilty of unbelief. Let us heed the admonition to lay aside this *"sin which doth so easily beset us"*, asking God's help so to do.

### **Looking unto Jesus**

**12:2** *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."* These three words, *"Looking unto Jesus"*, differentiate between the ancient worthies and the runners in the Christian race. The ancient worthies give us encouragement as friends might do, but, after all, our eyes are fixed on another for our chief inspiration. Looking unto Jesus we see a wonderful example of faith and love and patient endurance. He is, moreover, *"the author and finisher of our faith"*.

The Greek word here translated *"author"* means 'chief leader', and is translated *"captain"* (Hebrews 2:10) and *"prince"* (Acts 3:15; 5:31). Jesus is more than an example. He is our Prince or King, our Ruler, our Leader. He is also the author of our faith in the sense of

'beginner', thus distinguishing it from the faith held by godly men and women in previous ages, since by His death He laid the foundation of our faith and made reconciliation with God possible in a way not before opened up.

*"... God, who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." "So great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord" (2 Timothy 1:9,10; Hebrews 1:2; 2:3,4).*

He is also the *"finisher"* of our faith; the Revised Version has *"perfecter"*. Faith in Christ Jesus is essential to salvation, and is the first step in order to receive the forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; 16:31). But we must continually look to Him to complete or perfect our faith, to strengthen and establish it. This He does in the manner illustrated in the parables of the sycamine tree and the unprofitable servants.

Our faith is increased in proportion to our diligence in waiting upon and obeying our master, for the more we do of His will the more manifest it becomes that He knows best and that all His commands and admonitions are for our good. Particularly is our faith increased when we are weary, but must still go on serving while the rest and the reward seem to be indefinitely postponed.

Well worthy is He to be looked unto. He *"endured the cross, despising the shame"* (compare with Philippians 2:5-8), without reward in the present life (in that respect like the ancient prophets), but *"for the joy that was set before him"*. That should be our motive also in the race He has set us to run, not looking for earthly reward, but doing it all for the reward or joy set before us in the precious promises of God.

Although the ancients had not received their reward, the Lord Jesus had received His, the apostle states, for He *"is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"*, and is therefore a living power able to succour and help those who keep looking unto Him as their goal. We look to Him also as our High Priest, *"touched with the feeling of our infirmities"*, who *"ever liveth to make intercession for us"* (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:24-26). Seeing that God was faithful in giving Him His reward, we have every reason to believe that God will give us ours if we hold our confidence firm unto the end (Hebrews 3:6,14).

The joy that was set before Him may be taken to include several things: first, the joy of having successfully completed the work He set out to do in obedience to the Father's will; second, the joy of being reunited with His Father, from whom His mission on earth had necessarily separated Him, particularly in the dark hours of death; third, the joy of sitting at the Father's right hand as Ruler of the universe and acknowledged authority over all things in heaven and in earth; fourth, the joy of using that great power to deliver men from sin and to establish the will of God on earth (John 17:4,5; Hebrews 1:3,4; Philippians 2:9; Matthew 28:18; John 8:28; 12:32; Matthew 6:10; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 5:6; 11:15; 21:22-27; 22:1-6).

In ancient times it was a common custom for the heir to the throne to occupy it with his father, and perform many of the functions of the sovereign. Nebuchadnezzar is said to have ruled jointly with his father for a term of years, as did also Belshazzar with his father. In such case, the same respect was due the son as was accorded the father.

Concerning our Lord, see John 5:22,23, *"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him"*.

### **Consider Him**

**12:3** *"For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."* The ancient prophets endured much contradiction against themselves, but, being imperfect men, their conduct was sometimes open to criticism. We might not always know just where to draw the line between their virtues and their failings.

But in the case of Jesus, our Lord and forerunner, there is no question but that His conduct was absolutely perfect, for He had been miraculously born of the virgin, for which purpose He left *"the glory"* that He had *"with the Father before the world was"* (John 17:5; Philippians 2:6,7; Matthew 1:18-23). He did not partake of the imperfections of the human race, but was *"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"* (Hebrews 7:26; 2 Corinthians 5:21;

1 John 3:5). From whatever angle we view Him, His perfection is glorious. His words were the words His Father gave Him to speak; His actions were the perfect expression of His perfect mind and sanctified heart (Psalm 45:2; Luke 4:22; Matthew 27:24; Acts 10:38; 1 Peter 2:22).

Let us consider Him in all His beauty, and then consider what He suffered of *"the contradiction of sinners against himself"*, so undeserved, so mean and despicable, and even His disciples, who were daily with Him, not always understanding Him. Consider His patience, His loving solicitude for His disciples, His strenuous efforts to deliver the people from the bondage of tradition and sin.

Truly, if we consider all these things it will enable us to resist that weariness and faintness that comes over us at times when we experience either the open or underhand opposition of enemies and the pinpricks of friends. *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not"* (Galatians 6:9). *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously"* (1 Peter 2:21-23).

### **Not Yet Resisted Unto Blood**

**12:4** *"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."* Another consideration. Christ suffered this contradiction of sinners against himself right down to the last moments of His agony on the cross (Matthew 27:39-44). We, on the other hand, are still alive to read these admonitions of the apostle, consequently *"have not yet resisted unto blood"*, that is, unto death, the shedding of our blood as martyrs. We have still a distance to travel in the race. We must not think that because we have endured some contradiction the end should come immediately, at once, to save us further suffering. No, we must still press on, ready to endure much more, and still keep looking unto Jesus as our example and helper the rest of the way.

### **Striving Against Sin**

Had the apostle believed that the Church, either individually or collectively, endured suffering as part of the atonement for sin, here would have been a good place to state that belief. Since He was writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and yet gives not the slightest hint of such an idea, we may take it that he entertained no such thought. In preceding chapters of the book he made it plain that Jesus alone was the offering for sin, and that the sacrifice He offered was that of His perfect human body on the cross ((Hebrews 10:5; 1 Peter 2:24). That was the sufficient price for the sins of the whole world, and no additional sacrifice could be accepted by God, even in a complementary sense.

The apostle does emphasise here that what the believers of the present age, who take up their cross daily to follow Him, must do is to *"consider Him"*, keep on *"striving against sin"* and continually resist the *"contradiction of sinners"*, three things which will keep them busy, and, of course, the sin to be most strenuously fought is that within oneself. The sins committed by others against us may be painful and difficult to endure without desire for retaliation, but nothing that anyone else does can affect our standing with God. *"Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do"* (Luke 12:4; Matthew 10:28). It is the sinful thoughts which rise within, the sinful words that come to the lips, the sinful acts that follow the thoughts, that really injure us, and must be valiantly striven against (Matthew 15:17-20). One who is thoroughly occupied with this fight in true humility of mind will find no place for reflections on how good he always was, so much better than other men, after the manner of the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14).

This striving against sin must go on while life lasts, for though realising and rejoicing in justification by faith and peace with God, the saint has still the imperfect flesh, and will not lay it down until death.

### **The Chastening by the LORD**

**12:5** How applicable to the self-satisfaction of the Pharisaical is the next statement, *"And ye have forgotten"*, forgotten the need for chastisement, forgotten that God continually rebukes us (through His word and Spirit, and often indirectly through the criticisms of others) for our faults, to the end that we may correct them. He has said not to be wearied and faint when suffering *"the contradiction of sinners"* against us.

Now he quotes the proverb familiar to all Hebrews, to show another cause of faintness, namely, God's chastening and rebuke. Some of the God's rebukes are undoubtedly allowed to us through the everyday experiences of our lives in our intercourse with those around us.

Some chastening may be accepted as disciplinary rather than punitive. We are more able to sympathise with others did we not ourselves pass through various illnesses, losses, and bereavements (Proverbs 3:11,12).

**12:6** *“For whom the LORD loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”* Seeing that all sons whom He receives are chastened, we may be comforted by the thought that we are not the only ones. Since God does not single us out for these chastisements, but allows them to all His sons, we may get some comfort by comparing notes with others, and so humbly acknowledge our unity in this sort of suffering as well as in the joys of faith.

**12:7** Instead of being downcast when chastened, we should regard the chastening as evidence of son-ship. In earthly families is there any son who receives no punishment for wrongdoing? If there is, he is sure to be a spoilt child, and bring grief to his parents in after years (Proverbs 29:15,17).

**12:8** If you do not receive chastisement, you are not a son. The word *“bastard”* often means an illegitimate child. But that is not its only meaning. Another of its meanings is ‘spurious’. God cannot be thought of as having illegitimate children, that is, children outside the New Covenant, which in Galatians 4:26 is called *“the mother of us all”*, the Jerusalem above being a figurative way of referring to the New Covenant, just as the Jerusalem in Palestine was used as a figure of the Law Covenant, a covenant of bondage, whereas the New Covenant is a covenant of liberty (Galatians 4:24-31; 5:1; James 2:12; John 8:34-36). Says the same apostle in another place, *“Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:26). We are also spoken of as *“adopted”* sons (Galatians 4:5).

And this arrangement, whereby God accepts as His sons those who have faith in Jesus, is made possible by the terms of the New Covenant, for it alone of all the covenants provides for the forgiveness of sins; and the gospel points out that that forgiveness is through the blood of Christ shed on the cross for all mankind. Since God has no illegitimate sons, the *“bastards”* must be ‘spurious’ sons, that is, those who pretend to be His sons but in reality are not. Imitating the apostle’s plainness of speech, we are obliged to say that all who profess to be God’s children but are not *“in Christ Jesus”* are spurious or bastard, likewise all who profess to be His, yet do not receive chastisement.

**12:9** To receive chastisement would be nothing new. Every one of us, at one time under the care of parents or guardians, remembers well that one of their painful duties was to punish disobedience and to discipline in many cases where actual punishment was mercifully spared. If some parents now are afraid or too lazy to use the rod, that was not the case among Jews who took as their guide Proverbs 13:24; 19:18,19; 22:15; 23:13,14; 29:15,17.

When corrected, we gave our earthly parents reverence. The natural consequence of a parent’s assertion of authority is to develop reverence or respect in the child. Doubtless there are parents who are unwise in administration, and cruel and vindictive in their methods, but this does not alter the fact that the majority of parents fulfil an obligation when they punish a disobedient child. And even if, at the time, the child lacks appreciation of the good done him, in after years he will look back and be grateful for the care taken to make an honest and upright man of him.

If that is so, *“shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?”*. The intimation here is that the chastisements given by our earthly parents were beneficial, but they did not, and could not, give us ‘life’. They, as earthly parents (*“fathers of our flesh”*), gave us only the condemned life of members of the fallen race, and while their disciplines fitted us to live the present life with a measure of success, they could not prolong our existence much if any beyond the *“three score years and ten”* (Ephesians 6:1-4). On the other hand, in addition to many blessings in the present life, our heavenly Father promises everlasting life to those who become His children by faith in Christ Jesus (1 John 5:11-13; 3:14; 2: 25).

### **The Father of Spirits**

The Revised Version margin reads, *“the Father of our Spirits”*. The limitation is appropriate because the apostle is addressing Christians who have been recognised as sons, having received chastisement, and they are now admonished to be in subjection to God, that is, they are to take the chastisement as the proper thing, and permit it to have the proper humbling effect.

The expression "*Father of spirits*" is thought by many to teach that men have in them an immortal part called the soul or spirit, of which God is the Father. But it must be observed that the contrast is between our fathers who gave us fleshly life, and God who has given us spiritual life. The spiritual life is that which we receive when we become believers in Jesus and are "*adopted*" by God as His children. As 1 Peter 1:23 says, we are "*born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God*". We are "*new creatures in Christ*" (2 Corinthians 5:17); we are God's "*workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works*" (Ephesians 2:10).

We have therefore to submit to God not only as the Creator of the universe and of the race of mankind, and therefore entitled to our allegiance, but also in the affectionate relationship of a child to a Father who has given it a new life and is interested in its development as His own son (Galatians 3:26; 4:6,7).

### **Partakers of His Holiness**

**12:10** The fathers of our flesh cared for and chastened us for comparatively only a few days. The Father of our spirits chastens us during the whole term of our Christian life, in some cases as many as 80 years and more. In their chastening our parents used their best judgment, and sometimes applied the rod or the scolding for the satisfaction it gave them to work off their own feelings. But our Heavenly Father's judgment is unerring, and He does not punish for the sake of any pleasure to Himself. On the contrary, He is long-suffering and merciful, and His chastening is solely for our profit. Our profit is "*that we might be partakers of his holiness*", that is, that we might develop a character similar to His own, even as at the first He made man in His mental and moral image.

Holiness means purity, to be set apart from evil, and is elsewhere called sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). To partake of God's holiness would be to become of His mind and disposition, for holiness is a state or condition. In Leviticus 11, verses 44 and 45, it is contrasted with various defilements indulged in by the idolatrous nations of ancient times, as by degenerates of to-day. 1 Peter 1:14-16 shows that holiness is to be acquired by obedience and by discontinuing the indulgence of former desires, "*As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [that is, manner of life]; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy*". (Compare with Acts 17:30 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). In verse 11 this holiness is referred to as "*the peaceable fruit of righteousness*", and in verse 14 as absolutely necessary if we would see the Lord.

### **The Peaceable Fruit of Righteousness**

**12:11** "*Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*" Much as children may laugh and pretend they do not care, a chastening or punishment is "*grievous*". It is an unpleasant experience at the time. The same is true of God's children. When chastening comes along we, if we have any character about us at all, endeavour to take it cheerfully. A Christian who is always complaining of his lot, as it would appear from this epistle some of the Hebrew converts were doing, is on the wrong track. He is forgetting the exhortation contained in verse 5.

At the same time it cannot be said that trials and troubles and losses are "*joyous*", "*no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous*". It is grievous, painful, humiliating. Yet if we are living up to our privileges as children of God, we shall remember to "*count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*", not falling into temptation in the sense of yielding to enticement, but in the sense of experiencing trials, afflictions, and conflicts (James 1:2).

### **Exercised Thereby**

The outcome of a chastisement or period of discipline depends on how we take it. Those who spurn the Father's disciplines and grow restive under restraint, who persist in their own way, can expect only further chastening, as the Father endeavours to cure them of their wilfulness and bring them to see that His way is best. In 6:4-8 and 10:26-31, we saw that persistent wilfulness and perversity eventuate in the Father's displeasure to such an extent as to bring an even "*sorer punishment*" than that which befell the apostate Hebrews in the wilderness, namely, the second death.

The Father of our spirits is justified in inflicting this extreme punishment when He finds unavailing the disciplinary punishments or chastening. It is well for us to remember this, and seek to be of those mentioned in verse 11 who are "*exercised thereby*", that is, who take it all

as spiritual gymnastics, and so develop spiritual strength (1 Timothy 4:6-8; 2 Timothy 2:5; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

To those who learn the intended lessons, the outcome of each chastisement is character development, *"it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness"*. Fruit is a matter of slow growth. In the parable of the vine and its branches our Lord showed the necessity of careful tending on the part of the husbandman if choice fruit is desired. Christ Jesus is the vine, and each believer is a branch. Outside the vine, the branch cannot exist. In the vine, it obtains nourishment and life, growth being dependent upon the sap supplied by the vine. Much pruning is required that it may bring forth fruit, and more fruit. This 'pruning' corresponds to the *"chastening."* It lops off the unfruitful branches and the tendrils which cling where they should not (John 15:1-8; Matthew 7:20).

The Father judges and chastens us in order that we may not be *"condemned with the world"* (1 Corinthians 11:32), or be cut off as useless branches from the vine.

### **The Perfect Pattern**

As Christians our position is to be *"dead"* to the world, *"dead"* to sin and self, and *"alive unto God"* (Romans 6:11-13; Colossians 3:3). If our affections be too deeply set on things on the earth, God will chasten us, prune us, that our affections may be more deeply fixed upon Him, as our Father. This is necessary in order to the development of *"the fruit of the Spirit"* (Galatians 5:22-24).

In verse 10 this bringing forth of fruit is described as being *"partakers of his holiness"*. In God this fruit is found in perfection. He expects nothing of us that He does not practise Himself. So our Lord said, *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:14-16). By contemplating His character and seeking to imitate it, we grow in like character; and where we fail to discern and to imitate, His disciplines discover to us our deficiencies and constrain us to 'try again'.

Yet were God himself our only pattern, we might mistake the operations of some of His attributes. Doubtless this was one reason the Father sent the Son into the world. Godliness or God-likeness required demonstration to us in a way that our five senses could readily grasp. Paul wrote, *"without controversy great is the mystery of godliness"*, and his epistles were designed to help Timothy, *"that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"*. But the mystery or secret of godliness was manifested or made plain by His Son our Lord, *"He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory"* (1 Timothy 3:14-16).

The Revised Version and other modern translations read *"He who"* instead of *"God"*. From the description the reference is undoubtedly to the Son, Jesus Christ, as having demonstrated or manifested what true godliness consists in (John 14:9). One of His principal characteristics was humility. Another was obedience to the Father's will, also unselfishness, generosity and patience. The gospels show us how all these traits of character worked out in His daily life (John 1:14,18). We can do nothing better than to persevere as His footstep followers (Matthew 11:28-30; 9:37-39; 16:24-27; 1 Peter 2:21-23).

Godliness is mentioned in 2 Peter 1:7 as one of a number of traits to be added to our faith. Exceeding great and precious promises are given unto us, *"that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature"*. Here *"nature"* is used in the sense of disposition, for the apostle immediately proceeds to show this as a present experience, *"having escaped [present perfect tense] the corruption that is in the world through lust [or desire]"* (2 Peter 1:4). All the sin and selfishness and meanness of the *"old man"* is here denominated under one name as *"corruption"*. This corruption is characteristic of the whole world, and a Christian must be separate from it (Ephesians 4:17-20; 1 Peter 4:2-6). If we are Christ's, we have *"escaped"* the corruption.

Righteousness is imputed to us on account of our faith (Romans 4:22-25; 5:1; 8:1), but *"the fruit of righteousness"* is the actual righteousness developed as a result of our dwelling in the true vine, and the pruning and chastening of our heavenly Father, just as joy and peace are our actual experience following the receipt of the Holy Spirit. The flesh and the Spirit lust against each other, and with God's help we must destroy the one and cultivate the other (Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 4:17-32).

Outwardly we are still flesh, but inwardly, in mind and heart, we are spiritual, and live unto Him who is the Father of our spirits (1 Peter 4:6; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12), for *“we have the mind of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5).

This development of holiness is spoken of in New Covenant terms as the writing of the law or will of God in the fleshy tables of our hearts, the Holy Spirit being the ‘ink’ (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16; 2 Corinthians 3:3). The New Covenant is also called *“the ministration of the Spirit”*, giving life (2 Corinthians 3:6-9).

### **Lift up the Hands and Feeble Knees**

**12:1** *“Wherefore”*, for these reasons, there is something for each of the sons to do to help one another when chastening is being experienced, to *“lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees”*. These figures of speech represent weariness, discouragement, and dejection. When we see brethren and sisters depressed, and not understanding God’s dealings with them, it is our privilege to speak a cheering word or render other assistance that will encourage them to take up again their daily fight of faith, and pursue their walk in the narrow way. Thus we shall be doing a service such as the angels rendered our blessed Lord after His temptation in the wilderness, and Aaron and Hur performed when they held up the weary hands of Moses (Matthew 4:11; Exodus 17:8-12).

These words are quoted from Isaiah 35:4, *“Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees”*, and we take them as the inspired application of the prophecy not only to believers in Jesus in the present Gospel Age, but also in the Kingdom Age, when a spirit of kindness and helpfulness will prevail among those who will be rightly exercised by the disciplines of that age (Matthew 25:34-40). The physical healings performed by our Lord and the apostles were also in fulfilment of this prophecy of Isaiah 35, though all will admit that conversion from sin and the strengthening of character are of more vital importance to salvation than is physical healing (Matthew 4:23,24; John 14:11,12).

### **Make Straight Paths**

**12:13** The exhortation to *“make straight [margin, “even”] paths for your feet”* suggests that some *“chastening”* can be avoided if we take the time and trouble to arrange our course in life. To the same intent are the apostle’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:30-32, *“If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged”*. It also suggests that there are things we can do to make the path of our brethren more level and easy to walk in. We know how distressing it is for the physically lame to negotiate a rough and rocky road or a tortuous path up a mountain side. Accompanying such we should consider ourselves despicable did we not render all the assistance in our power, both by supporting and guiding the lame and clearing away obstructions as far as possible.

Since we are all walking in the same way of holiness, it follows that if we make the path level for our own feet we are at the same time helping to make it level for our fellow pilgrims, because example counts for much. We do not want to be the means of causing others to stumble or to *“be turned out of the way”*. Let us be careful *“that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way”* (Romans 14:13). *“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself”* (Romans 15:1-3).

Better still than straightening the path and otherwise assisting the lame is that the lame be *“healed”*. Then they will not require assistance. How happy we are when a babe is able to ‘walk alone’. The Christian babe requires much care until then, and such care is a delight to the older ones of the faith. But we gather from the apostle’s words that there is no real need for any of the brethren to be lame and constantly requiring the crutch or a friendly arm, *“let it rather be healed”*.

However, as we are all imperfect, there are bound to be times when each and all of us walk a bit lame, requiring consideration and help. Reflection on one’s own shortcomings and needs should make us quick to sympathise with and aid other lame ones. Those who suffer from sore feet, physically, know what torture there can be without actual displacement of bone.

The healing of the lame seems also an allusion to Isaiah 35. These lame are to walk in the *“highway of holiness”*, from which the *“unclean”* are excluded. Justification by faith, righteousness imputed on account of faith, is necessary in order to enter the highway. The scriptures even now make the way so plain that there is no need for the wayfarers, even though ignorant and inexperienced, to err so far as holy living in general is concerned. There is no excuse for immorality, for example, in any who have once been thoroughly converted. Whatever the believer may have been guilty of before conversion, he should now see to it that

he 'walk straight'. Of such a serious lameness he should be completely healed. If not, the apostle instructs the brethren to put such an one out of their company, after due efforts to induce reform have failed (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 5:9-13).

Methods of dealing with the spiritually lame among the brethren are given in Matthew 18:15-18; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:13-20; 1 John 5:16, 17; Jude 21-23; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:1,2). On repentance, confession, and reformation the erring should be restored, whereas persistence in evil in spite of admonition and warning should result in his exclusion from the fellowship of the brethren.

*"Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed"* is a strong hint to cure every fault, however small, at as early a stage as possible, and thus avoid the progressive accumulation of related faults and their enlargement into serious wickedness. This is intimated by the Revised Version margin, *"lest that which is lame [limping] be put out of joint"*.

### **Follow Peace and Holiness**

**12:14** *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."* There is stimulation in the thought that all the Father's 'sons' are walking together along the same road, and not each by himself alone in a narrow track. It is natural for us all, when passing through trials and troubles, to think that no one else has trials like ours. We flatter ourselves that we are somehow unique, and that God's dealings with us are very special indeed. To the latter we would say, yes, His dealings with each are special, in that the chastisement and discipline are fitted to the individual case and administered under His personal supervision.

But, as far as uniqueness is concerned, while combinations of faults may vary in different brethren, they are in their essence all alike, all having their root in selfishness and worldliness. *"There hath no temptation [or trial] taken you but such as is common to man"* (1 Corinthians 10:13). The admonition now given is that the way to make straight or even paths is to *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness"*.

Peace with all would mean peace with all walking in the same road. We cannot leave the world altogether, and consequently are brought into contact with all manner of individuals. The landlord, shopkeeper, employer, or employee and others met in business may be of the sort mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9,10, and it might not be possible to avoid them altogether, but we would not be required to be at peace with them in the sense of being on fraternal terms.

We are bound, however, to fellowship as our brethren all whom our Father acknowledges as His sons. It is not for us to pick and choose our brethren, the *"strong"* may not despise the *"weak"*, nor may the *"weak"* judge the *"strong"* (Romans 14:3,17,18).

A similar exhortation occurs in Romans 14:19, *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things where-with one may edify another"*. In order to *"follow peace with all"*, we must all follow after the things which tend toward peace and things which edify. The peaceableness and oneness amongst ourselves derive from all being in the same way of holiness and all walking towards the same goal. The more completely worldly considerations are set aside, the more united shall we be in the things of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-6,13-16).

James mentions one cause of discord and heartburning in the early church, which has been a prolific source of unrest among the 'sons' down to the present day (James 2:1-7). Other causes of friction are mentioned: friendship with the world (James 4:4); failure to control the tongue (James 3:1-18); strivings to be rich (1 Timothy 6:9,10); and many more which will doubtless occur to the reader.

If we keep our peace with God our Father, and seek always His honour and glory, we shall be better able to follow peace among ourselves, with our brethren.

To *"follow holiness"* is the duty of each, and the more that holiness is manifest in the life the more loving and lovable will we be, and this also will *"make for peace"*.

### **Seeing the Lord**

Another great truth to cause us serious thought is now expressed, *"without which no man shall see the Lord"*. The Lord may be taken to mean either God, or Christ, or both. God is called the God of peace, and Christ is called the Prince of peace. God is holy, so also is our Lord Jesus (Romans 15:33; 16:20; Isaiah 9:6; 1 Peter 1:15; Hebrews 7:26).

To see God may be taken in two ways. To see Him in His person in glory, and to see Him with the spiritual eye, to discern His character and understand His principles. To



understand His character and the mainsprings of His actions it is necessary to take His point of view and to have the same moral principles. Development in holiness brings one always nearer to God's perfection, and consequently more in tune with Him.

Although God is compelled to be stern, He is not vindictive. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that all should turn unto Him and live. Even the ultimate destruction of wilful reprobates is done in mercy for them and in protection of the obedient (Ezekiel 18:1,32; 2 Peter 3:9). In this sense of understanding Him, "*the pure in heart*" see God now (Matthew 5:8; Job 42:5).

This manner of seeing the Lord will be the happy experience of all who have faith in the invisible God and render obedience as a result of the Kingdom rule during the thousand years, who will then be called God's sons, even as it is now the happy privilege of the truly sanctified believer (Revelation 21:7).

To see God as He is in glory is an honour and privilege reserved for the Church alone, for they only are invited to occupy the position of joint heirs with His Son, and are promised a change from the human existence to the likeness of their forerunner, who entered heaven to prepare a place for them (John 14:2; Romans 8:14-17; Hebrews 6:20). These shall have the "*better thing*" mentioned in 11:40.

To see the Lord Jesus "*in the days of his flesh*" (Hebrews 5:7) was the happy privilege of the Jews, though only a few appreciated the honour. The disciples saw Him as the Son of God, the Messiah.

The others indeed saw His flesh, but discerned not who or what He was. The Pharisees professed to see, but in reality were blind, blind leaders of the blind (John 9:41; Matthew 15:12-14). Nevertheless, He was so true an image of the Father's character of love, goodness, and truth that He could say, "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*" (John 14:9).

Since His resurrection and ascension His words are fulfilled, "*a little while, and the world seeth me no more*" (John 14:19). But those who discern that He was indeed the Son of God 'see' Him with the eye of faith, "*We see Jesus*" (Hebrews 2:9) in all His beauty, both that which He had as a perfect man on earth, and that which He has now in His many offices at God's right hand: Redeemer; Mediator; Advocate; Christ (Anointed); Lord; Shepherd; High Priest; and King. All who believe, whether now or in the Kingdom Age, shall see Jesus in this way, and seeing, will be grateful for all He has done for them.

To a few it is to be given to see Jesus as He is in His glory, even as He prayed (John 17:24), "*that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me*". He now dwells in light unapproachable, "*whom no man hath seen, nor can see*" (1 Timothy 6:16), hence those who are to see Him must be "*changed*" into His likeness, clothed upon by their glorious "*house from heaven*" (1 Corinthians 15:49-52; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5). And being made like Christ, they shall be able also to see the Father in person, even as the Son is able to delight in His glorious presence.

Thank God for these wonderful promises and prospects, which enable us to realise the importance of following peace and holiness.

### **Any Root of Bitterness**

**12:15** While peace and holiness are being followed, we are to keep looking, "*looking diligently*", to right and left and all around, "*lest any man fail of [or fall from] the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be denied*". Since those spoken to are the 'sons' of God, they are in the grace or favour of God, hence must give close attention to continue in His favour by following peace and holiness. One of the quickest ways to fall from the grace of God is to allow a root of bitterness to spring up, any root (the apostle mentions none in particular) belonging to the 'bitter' family.

Roots of bitterness may spring up at any time as part of Satan's effort to grow weeds and thorns in our hearts and thus choke the good seed of truth. Jealousy, envy, evil speaking, and super-sensitiveness all cause bitterness, and all cause trouble. Care must be exercised not only over ourselves personally, but also over our brethren, because we are to an extent our brother's keeper (Galatians 6:1), and in the early stages we may be able to root out the cause of the difficulty. If not quickly rooted up, there is danger that "*thereby many be defiled*". Evil speaking and envy have wrought great havoc in the Church in the past. Our Lord Himself was a victim of these twin evils (Matthew 27:12,13,18; Acts 13:45). Those who indulge in envy "*shall not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5:21).

12:16 *“Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.”* Fornication once allowed to take root in any assembly of believers would work great havoc, whether it be the natural or the spiritual kind. Any profane, unconverted, person would also do mischief. To discredit holy things is to ‘profane’ them, and may be done even by persons professing to serve God (Malachi 1:12). Esau is named as an example of such. As Isaac’s firstborn he was heir to the birthright promise and blessing, but did not value them. He was, in his heart, ungodly. He thought more of gratifying hunger than of his relationship to God. So if Christian brethren lay more stress upon their temporal than upon their spiritual well-being they well deserve to be called *“profane”* (2 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:15).

**12:17** The root of bitterness consisted in the feelings of anger and jealousy with which Esau regarded his brother Jacob. When he repented of his bargain and would have deprived Jacob of his rights, he found, as many others have done, that he could not sell the blessing and have it too. The words *“found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears”* indicate his chagrin at finding no way to get the blessing back again, not that he cared for the special promises of God, but that he wanted the larger share of the property which would have fallen to him on his father’s death, for, according to ancient custom, the eldest son of a family always inherited the largest share of his father’s estate (Luke 15:31; Genesis 27:29; 48:18,19; Deuteronomy 21:17).

Some commentators take *“place for repentance”* to mean that he found no way or loophole by which he could induce his father Isaac to repent of his action in pronouncing the chief blessing upon Jacob. There was no repentance whatever on Esau’s part, for an attempt to commit a second wrong is hardly the way to make amends for the first wrong. And grief and tears at being balked in the second attempted evil are a different thing from genuine tears of sorrow. God is longsuffering and merciful, but if we, as His sons, do not value the favours He gives, He will withdraw them and leave us to *“weeping and gnashing of teeth”*. This is shown in the parable of the talents, where a mean thought entertained was a root of bitterness which grew into a tree of wickedness, and was correspondingly punished (Matthew 24:51; 25:24-30). All this loss may be the outcome of tolerating one small root of bitterness.

### **The Smoking Mount**

**12:18-21** *“For”*: Now the apostle gives the reason why great care must be exercised to avoid roots of bitterness. Passing from the consideration of Esau’s profane conduct and its warning to us, Paul returns to the main theme, namely, comparisons and contrasts between the Law Covenant and the New Covenant.

*“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:”* (For they could not endure that which was commanded. And if so much as a beast touch the mountain it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: “And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:”).

Great was the privilege of the children of Israel to see at Sinai the demonstrations of divine power and majesty, to hear the sound of the trumpet and the voice of words. The mount *“might be touched”* that is, Sinai was a tangible, material mountain, to the foot of which they came, to witness the spectacle of fire, blackness, darkness, and tempest. Yet they were obliged to regard the mount as sacred, and not approach too near (Exodus 19:12,13,23,24; 20:18). The voice so overawed them that they entreated that they should hear it no more (Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:23-27). Even Moses was so impressed that he said, *“I exceedingly fear and quake”*.

When the children of Israel had properly presented themselves before God, they were: (1) face to face with God (Deuteronomy 5:4), who proposed a covenant; (2) face to face with Moses, whom He appointed Mediator to act for both parties and assist in the ratification of this covenant in a formal manner; and (3) face to face with the covenant itself as something they must accept and enter into, the salient features thereof being read in their hearing.

The Israelites were bound by that Law, not only those personally present, but also all their descendants up to the time Christ nailed it to His cross, Christ himself having been born under the Law, of the tribe of Judah, and house of David.

No other nation or people was bound by that Law Covenant, as Moses said, *“The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us alive here this day. The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire”* (Deuteronomy 5:3,4; 6:1,2,7,20; Romans 9:4,5; Colossians 2:14,15; Galatians 4:4,5).

### Ye are Come unto Mount Sion

**12:22-24** The Hebrew people to whom the epistle was written and to whom the gospel was being made known had now come face to face with something else. They were to hear a different 'voice' from a different 'mount'. They should recognise a change in their relationship to the Law, and observe the opening up of a New Covenant different from the Law Covenant. "*Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ*", is the positive statement of scripture, written by the same apostle to the Jews at Rome (Romans 7:4).

The Hebrew Christians and the Gentile converts who were accepted by God on equal terms as heirs of the promises (Romans 15:8-12; Ephesians 2:11-18; 3:3-6), making "*no difference*" between them on the ground of nationality or previous condition (Acts 15:9; 10:15; Romans 10:11-13), were not accepted without a law and without a covenant, and thus outside responsibility. On the contrary, before the promises of God in Christ could be entered into by either Jew or Gentile it was necessary for a New Covenant to be promulgated and its terms accepted by a definite contract.

Moreover, as we saw in 9:16-20, it was necessary for this New Covenant to be ratified by the blood of Jesus, as the Law Covenant had been ratified by the blood of animals. Hence the apostle now proceeds to show, by a concrete description, what are the antitypes of the mount, the assemblage, the mediator, and the covenant to which the Israelites 'came' at Sinai.

*"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, 'tho heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written [or, enrolled] in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."* (Hebrews 12:22-24).

We quote this passage in full, and wish to lay special stress upon it, because some false teachers of our day are grossly misusing it, even to the extent of altering the tense of the verb "*are come*" in verse 22. They claim that the Christian believer has not approached those things, but is only on the way toward them. They claim that no one can come to these things until the second advent of Christ, and that therefore they have not come and do not need to come to Jesus as their mediator. Such a position is a denial of fundamental principles of the doctrine of Christ, because it is clearly taught elsewhere that it is only through Jesus as our Mediator that any of us dare approach to God or can be reconciled to Him (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 10:19-22; Ephesians 2:16-18; Colossians 1:20-22).

The apostle does not say: ye will come to Sion, to God, to Jesus as Mediator at some future time, but "*ye are come*". In the Greek the present perfect tense is used, "*ye have come*", and is rendered by the Emphatic Diaglott, "*ye have approached*".

The comparison instituted is not between Israel on the way to the mount and to the Law Covenant and the Church on the way to Mount Sion and to the New Covenant. The comparison is between the Israelites who had come to Mount Sinai and the Christians who have come to Mount Sion.

Though not seen by the natural eye, Mount Sion is as much a reality as was Mount Sinai. Mount Sion stands for the sovereignty of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He was the heir of David's throne, which was in reality "*the throne of the LORD*". In addition the nations also would be given Him for His inheritance (Psalm 2:6-8; 45:2-7; 1 Chronicles 29:23; Luke 1:32,33).

That sovereignty over all nations, peoples, and tongues, and to the uttermost parts of the earth, began when He was exalted after His resurrection to the Father's right hand and given a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. The disciples preached "*another king, one Jesus*", and to Him they gave allegiance, as do we also (Acts 4:24-27; 17:7; Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:3,8,9).

From Mount Sinai the Law of the Old Covenant was issued, and there Israel entered into that Covenant. So from our Mount Sion the New Covenant issues, with its law of love, and those who believe in Jesus are privileged to enter into it. What was true of the Hebrew Christians in Paul's day has been true of believers right down the age.

At Sinai all Israel, en masse, gathered at the foot of the mount, and with one voice entered into the covenant, saying, "*All the words which the LORD hath said will we do*" (Exodus 24:3). In the case of Mount Sion, the gathering to it (and the entering into the New Covenant) is an individual matter. We are received now, not as a nation, but as individuals out of all nations, each believer entering separately into the covenant with God through Jesus its Mediator.

Instead of all being gathered to one particular spot on the earth's surface, as was the case with the Jews at Sinai, the messengers of the New Covenant travel about among the people and bring to them the glad tidings that they may enter into covenant relation with God *"in every land, in every clime"*, for God is accessible anywhere, if only the suppliant come in the name of Jesus (John 4:21-24; Acts 2:39; 10:34-43; 13: 26,47,48; Romans 16:19-21).

### **Unto the City of the Living God**

We are also come *"unto the city of the living God."* We have seen that in scripture 'city' stands for government. (See comment on 11:10.) The government to which we have come is the 'city' or government of the living God, for our Lord Jesus Christ occupies His position as Prince and ruler in accordance with the Father's will. Although the vast majority of mankind do not recognise the Lord Jesus Christ in that capacity, He occupies the position nevertheless, and we who believe have come to Him, and have submitted to His government with a deep appreciation of His great love for us as shown in His suffering and death on our behalf, and we joy to honour Him as our Lord and King (Ephesians 1:20,21; Revelation 1:5).

The one God, ever living, is in strong contrast with the kings and governments of the past, all now dead.

### **The Heavenly Jerusalem**

We are come to *"the heavenly Jerusalem"*, that is the name given to the *"city of the living God"* just previously mentioned. In Galatians 4:26 this New Jerusalem is called the *"Jerusalem which is above"*, which is *"the mother of us all"*, consequently we must have 'come' to it. We cannot say that our fleshly mother is someone that does not exist or has not yet been born. By the same token, we cannot say that we are children of a covenant which is not yet in operation.

In the allegory of Galatians 4 the apostle contrasts the New Covenant with the Law Covenant: the latter represented by Hagar, the bondwoman, and the former by Sarah, the freewoman. In Galatians 5:1 the apostle identifies the heavenly Jerusalem as the New Covenant, when he exhorts the Jewish converts to *"stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free"*. The New Covenant is our *"mother"*, that is, the New Covenant is the arrangement by which God grants the forgiveness of sins, and adopts us as His children, with a promise of life everlasting.

The description of God in this connection as *"the living God"* is significant. The city of Zion is emblematic of kingly authority, while the name, New Jerusalem, is figurative of the New Covenant, in which God's mercy and love are shown. These are great spiritual realities to which we are now come, though unseen by the natural eye. God reveals them unto us by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-14). In the Kingdom Age they will come down to earth for the benefit of all mankind (Revelation 21:2-4), but as yet their functions are exercised mainly in the development of the Church of the firstborn.

### **To Angels**

We are come *"to an innumerable company of angels"*. Some commentators render this *"innumerable hosts of angels"*. Literally the phrase is *"tens of thousands"*. The reference is to the heavenly messengers who are often in scripture associated with God and His throne. *"The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the LORD is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place."* *"Thousand thousands ministered unto him [the Ancient of days], and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him"* (Psalm 68:17; Daniel 7:10). The angels are also pictured as deeply interested in the success of God's great plan of salvation (Luke 2:10-14; Matthew 25:31; Acts 1:10,11; 1 Peter 1:12; Revelation 5:11; 7:11).

The heavenly angels are of a higher order of being than man, who was created *"a little lower than the angels"* (Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 2:7). They were among the earliest of God's creation (Job 38:7), and from the beginning God used them to carry messages to men. On such occasions they garbed themselves in human flesh, and were able to appear as men (Genesis 18:2; 19:1; Judges 13:9-20). Angels were sent to minister to our Lord after the temptation in the wilderness, and during His agony in the garden, to loose Peter from his prison chains, and to encourage Paul in the night (Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:43; Acts 12:4-8; 23:11). Yea, we read in 1:14, *"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"*

Jude says that Enoch prophesied of them, saying, *"Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints [literally, 'holy ones']"*. The faithful angels are entitled to the description *"holy"* for they have proved themselves loyal and obedient notwithstanding two

defections among their number, the first by Satan, manifested by his temptation of our first parents in Eden and by persistent opposition to God through all the ages since (Genesis 3; John 8:4; Jude 9; Matthew 4), and the second when a considerable number of their companions sinned in the days of Noah, as related in Genesis 6:1,2; 1 Peter 3:19,20; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6.

Since we have come to God and to Mount Sion, and to the heavenly Jerusalem, we have come also to the holy angels or messengers who serve as God's servants and are sent by Him on missions to earth, including ministering to the "*heirs of salvation*" (Hebrews 1:14).

### **To the Church of the Firstborn**

**12:23** We are come, "*To the general assembly and church of the firstborn*". The Revised Version margin joins "*the general assembly*" to the hosts of angels: "*and to innumerable hosts, the general assembly of angels, and the church*". Whether "*the general assembly*" refers to the angels or to the church, it is true in either case, if we take the words to mean a gathering together around Mount Sion, whence God now speaks. The two words "*general assembly*" are given in our Bibles as the nearest equivalent to one Greek word which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, 'paneguris', defined by Strong as meaning 'a mass meeting, that is, (figuratively) universal companionship'.

As believers in Jesus and sons of God we are most certainly come to the universal companionship which God ordained should exist among his loyal subjects, both angels and men. We have come to the Church as an institution, and so had the believers in the apostle's day, and coming to the Church as an institution meant then and still means companionship, fellowship with all other members of the true Church founded by Christ on the rock-confession made by Peter, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*". Some commentators render 'paneguris' 'festival assembly', the idea of a joyful assembly being contrasted with the mournful assemblage at the foot of Sinai.

The title "*church of the firstborn*" indicates a resemblance between the Church or 'ekklesia' (called-out-ones) and the firstborn of Israel, whom God took to be specially His, and for whom He afterward substituted the tribe of Levi, setting them apart for special service in connection with the worship established at the tabernacle and temple. So the church of the firstborn has been called out by the Lord during the present age for special service in connection with the true worship established in Jesus Christ, who is called the corner-stone of the temple (Ephesians 2:20).

The name church of the firstborn is appropriate for another reason. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church, was the first that should rise from the dead. In Acts 13:33 the apostle speaks of His resurrection as a birth, "*Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee*". Jesus is therefore the firstborn, and the reason is given, "*that in all things He might have the pre-eminence*" (Colossians 1:18). The Church being founded and built by Him, and its individual members being chosen by Him, the title Church of the Firstborn is equivalent to 'the Firstborn's Church', or 'the Church of Christ'.

Christ is the firstborn, and we are joint heirs with Christ, but it does not follow that every office which Christ holds belongs to us. An estate may be left by will to a number of persons, all of whom are properly called joint heirs, and yet one of their number may have a larger share than the others. We have already mentioned that in ancient times the eldest son received the largest share of the estate, together with the birthright promises. So our Lord Jesus is now "*heir of all things*", not in expectation but in fact, for His name is above every name.

As joint heirs we are promised the privilege of ruling with Him during the thousand years of the Kingdom reign, yet even then our position will be a subordinate one, for He tells us in the parable of the pounds how His faithful ones will be apportioned their rewards by Himself. He will not deliver up His authority to us, but will appoint a portion to each for definite purposes (Luke 19:11-19). Let us ever remember the honour due to His name alone, and thus be preserved from presumption when considering the great honour done to us by the title "*church of the firstborn*".

In another sense also the title is appropriate to the Church, for, after Christ their Lord, the members of the Church will be the first to rise from the dead. They will be the first born from among fallen humanity, the first to be resurrected, as we read in Revelation 20:4-6 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.

In still another sense the title *"firstborn"* is appropriate to the Church, in that those who believe during the present age are *"born again"* by the Word of God, and grow from babes to full manhood as *"new creatures"* in Christ (1 Peter 1:23; 2:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17). James (1:18) states, *"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures"*; and in Revelation 14:4 those who *"follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth"* are called *"the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb"*.

Here (Hebrews 12:23) it is stated that the Church of the firstborn are *"written in heaven"*. The Revised Version and the margin have *"enrolled"*. That is, the names and persons of the members of the Church are known to God. That God requires to keep a written record of names as finite men are obliged to do is unlikely. But God's attributes and acts are described to us in terms we can understand.

That God knows each and every one of us intimately is stated in 2 Timothy 2:19, *"The LORD knoweth them that are his"*. Our Lord said that *"the very hairs of your head are all numbered"*; and when the seventy rejoiced because even the demons were subject unto them, He said, *"rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven"* (Matthew 10:30; Luke 10:20). The names of the members of the church are said to be written in *"the book of life of the Lamb"* (Revelation 13:8), which *"book of life"* is also mentioned in Revelation 3:5 as containing the names of the *"overcomers"*, which shall not be blotted out.

The 'recording angel' of whom we read so much in religious works is nowhere to be found in the scriptures. At best the tradition is a method of warning the thoughtless that God knows what we are doing and that we shall be held accountable for our acts. But the fiction rather detracts from God's omniscience, by which He knows all things. One cannot conceive of a God who can read the heart requiring such records as finite men might need to assist their memories.

Some Christians argue from John 10: 28,29 that when once a believer's name has been 'enrolled in heaven' it is impossible for him to be lost. But Revelation 3:5 teaches that it is possible to have the name erased. The statement, *"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels"*, gives us to understand that God will blot out of the book of life those in this age who have been enlightened but who refuse to be *"overcomers"*.

No man can pluck us out of our Father's hand, or out of our Saviour's hand, but we can by reprehensible conduct so try God's patience that He will cast us out. Several of our Lord's parables teach that some once recognised by Him as His disciples and given a place in His service are later cast out for unfaithfulness wholly their own fault (Matthew 24:45-51; 25:24-30; Luke 19:12-26). This very book of Hebrews tells of those who *"draw back unto perdition"*, while Peter and Jude speak of reprobates beyond reform (Hebrews 10:38,39; 2 Peter 2:9-22; Jude 12-16).

The apostle Paul, greatly honoured as a servant of the Lord, realised the necessity of walking carefully, lest after having preached to others he might himself become a castaway, an unnecessary saying if he did not mean us to understand that it is possible for us to 'fall away' (1 Corinthians 9:27). Another warning is given through the Revelator, *"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"*. Anyone may be said to take our *"crown"* who induces in us a spirit of indifference or rebellion, by reason of which God's anger would be incurred (Revelation 3:11; Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31).

### **To God the Judge of All**

We are come, or we have approached, *"to God the Judge of all"*. At Sinai, Israel stood in the presence of God, their Law-giver and Judge. To-day we stand in the presence of the same God, but on a new footing, both the 'Mount' and the Covenant being different. We have been *"made nigh by the blood of Christ"* (Ephesians 2:13). And though God has committed all judgment unto the Son, yet in the final analysis God Himself is the Judge, the Supreme Ruler, as we saw in Hebrews 10:30,31, where those who sin wilfully are said to *"fall into the hands of the living God"*. Our Lord Jesus Christ as King and Judge since His resurrection occupies those offices for a particular service, in which offices He is to be honoured, even as we honour the Father, but behind Him stands the Father, and it is He who pronounced the terms of the New Covenant for us to accept and enter into (Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12).

To give account of our daily deeds, 'whether good or bad', "*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*", for He has supervision over us (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 4:17-19). In fact, we may say we are standing continually before Him to answer for our deeds, inasmuch as He is our Intercessor with God, and all our trespasses must be confessed and forgiveness applied for in His name.

In Ephesians 5, 26 and 27, He is represented as sanctifying and cleansing us with the washing of water by the Word, implying that He has taken note of and judged our imperfections and faults, and applies the correction required. This is done in order "*that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish*". Thus by the end of the life of each member of the probationary Church his or her fitness or unfitness for a place in the glorified Church will have been already determined, and there will be no need for another 'judgment' after being glorified (John 5: 24; RV).

Accordingly, the apostle Paul was able to say without boasting, yet with confidence, "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day*" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

The same truth, that believers are being judged in the present life, is set forth in 1 Corinthians 11 31 and 32, where the brethren are urged to correct their own faults and thus escape chastisement and condemnation, "*For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the LORD, that we should not be condemned with the world*". To be condemned with the world would mean that one has lost his place among the believers and fallen back into his old life of worldliness, and as the world (that is, this present evil 'order of things') with all its works is to be destroyed, the unfaithful would in the end gain nothing by their venture back into the world (1 John 3:3-8; 2 Peter 3:7-12).

Yet just after saying that "*we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*", the apostle adds, "*For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God*." Thus again is emphasised the fact that Christ as judge is acting for God; all the authority of God supports, and is prepared to execute, the decisions of Christ, who is now, by virtue of His death and resurrection, the Lord or owner of both dead and living (Romans 14:9-12).

### **To the Spirits of Just Men made Perfect**

Another of the realities to which we, the Gospel Age Church, 'have come' is now mentioned, namely, "*to the spirits of just men made perfect*". Who are these "*spirits of just men*"? Let us look first at persons besides Moses connected with the giving of the Law.

At Sinai there went up with Moses and Aaron into the mount the two sons of Aaron and seventy elders and leaders of the twelve tribes with whom the Law Covenant was to be made. These seventy were imperfect men, but they occupied positions of authority in Israel. They accompanied Moses part way up the mount when he went to receive the Law (Exodus 24:1,2,9,14), and it was through them that Moses communicated God's commands to the assembled tribes. These "*elders*" were the "*angels*" or messengers referred to in Galatians 3:19 as being "*in the hand*" of Moses when he received the Law. That is, they were under his authority and were co-operating with him, though they were not allowed to see and hear all that Moses saw and heard.

We read further that later, in the wilderness, when Moses required help, seventy men were carefully selected for this service, and were given the aid of God's spirit. This we read in Numbers 11:16,17. "*And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.*" From this we can readily see that these just men had their minds made perfect or adequate for the task before them of judging and instructing the Israelites in all their affairs, thus relieving Moses of many of the routine details of leadership. Having been given the same spirit, their judgment would be the same as Moses' judgment in any and all cases coming before them. Some of these heads of tribes might have been among the individuals previously called up into the mount.

Now we who have come to "*Mount Zion*" are not come to those ancient elders. They were part of the Mount Sinai arrangements for the giving of the Law to the children of Israel. And with them must be classed all the elders, leaders, and teachers under the Mosaic Law. So that we are not to look to the ancients as in any way answering to this to which we have come. What we 'have come to', answering to the description "*the spirits of just men made perfect*", must be something suitably associated with Mount Zion, the city, the Jerusalem, the angels, the firstborn, with God the Judge of all (verse 23), with Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and with the blood of sprinkling (verse 24).

This separateness from the ancients associated with the Law is emphasised throughout the epistle to the Hebrews, beginning with the very first statement, namely, that "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*". Our duty then is to hearken to the Son and fall in line with the New Covenant and other arrangements He has made, including "*the spirits of just men made perfect*", whom the Lord associated with that New Covenant. Who then are those "*just men*" to whom we have come?

We, believers during the Gospel Age, have come to certain ones of authority, whom God is pleased to use to communicate His will to us. These are the apostles and prophets who were the historians of our Lord's life and ministry, the custodians of His teachings, and the pioneers in spreading abroad the gospel or good news of the New Covenant. So the apostle Paul describes himself as a minister of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:3,6). In that capacity he served to the Corinthian brethren the New Covenant truths (for example 2 Corinthians 3), and to the Hebrew brethren the illuminating teaching of the present epistle, in addition to his personal teaching on the subject during his wide travels as missionary to both Jew and Gentile. The other apostles were likewise ministers or servants of the New Covenant.

To these we come when we, as believers in Jesus, stand at the foot of Mount Zion for the purpose of entering into the New Covenant. From them we receive the necessary instruction, not by audible words from heaven, but from their writings. As the elders of Israel were commanded to receive the words of God through Moses and pass them on to the people (Exodus 19:7; 24:1,2,9-18), so were the apostles commanded to receive God's words through our Lord Jesus Christ and pass them on to us.

These apostles are the "*just men*" whose "*spirits*" are spoken of as "*made perfect*". They are called "*just men*" in accordance with God's purpose to accept as perfect or blameless those who are being sanctified.

This is one of the arrangements, one of the greatest of the blessings, under the New Covenant, based on the all-sufficient sacrifice of the body of Christ on the cross, "*For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are being sanctified*" (Hebrews 10:14). In harmony with this are the many passages on justification and sanctification, which declare that the believers are "*justified from all things*", "*justified freely by his grace*"; "*ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*" "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*" (Acts 13:39; Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 8:1).

The next question is, How were the "*spirits*" of these "*just men*", the apostles, "*made perfect*"? Was it at their death, or in another world? No: the elders of Israel did not die before they assisted Moses. Neither did the apostles die before the Lord chose them to be His mouthpieces. The difficulty (if any) is caused by the use of the word "*spirits*", which has for one of its meanings 'spirit beings'. God is a spirit, that is a Spirit being. But in the present instance "*spirits*" is used in the sense of 'mind', as in 1 Corinthians 2:16; where, after saying that we have received the spirit of God, the apostle adds the explanatory statement, "*we have the mind of Christ*". As those elders were qualified for their work, God giving them the same mind that He had given Moses, so were the apostles qualified for their great work as messengers of the New Covenant, being endowed with the mind of Christ. "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 2:6).

### **Endued with the Spirit**

When our Lord chose twelve, and afterward seventy, and sent them two and two before His face, He gave them some of His own mind and power, enabling them both to preach "*the gospel of the kingdom*" and to work miracles in His name (Matthew 10:1,7, 8; Luke 10:1-20). But this was only a temporary measure. The great moment when they were endued with power from on high was at Pentecost. There the spirits or minds of these just men, the



apostles, were made perfect, that is, perfectly qualified for the oversight of the church and for the carrying out of their great commission to go into all nations and make disciples of them, preaching the forgiveness of sins, and teaching whatsoever the Lord had commanded them, but beginning at Jerusalem (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 2:1-14).

Others besides the apostles received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: all of the little band of perhaps 120 persons gathered in the upper room, all of whom received gifts of the Spirit enabling them to speak in foreign languages and do miracles. All these believers, justified by faith in Christ, are included among the *"just men"* whose minds were *"made perfect"* or completely qualified for their work as ambassadors for Christ. But the apostles were chief spokesmen and had special powers in various directions.

One of the particular endowments of the apostles was the ability to confer gifts of the Spirit by the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:14-17; 19:6). They were favoured with dreams and visions for the oversight of the work, as well as to give them a clearer understanding of our Lord's words and the writings of Moses and the prophets. In addition to all this, the Holy Spirit inspired their writings, so that the gospels and the epistles have come down to us as the very word of God, and we can say of them, as of the ancient prophets, that *"holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:21).

Furthermore, as the elders at Sinai included the heads of the twelve tribes, with special authority each over his own tribe, so now at Mount Sion. The twelve apostles were constituted heads of the twelve tribes of Spiritual Israel, the *"Israel of God"*, as the Church is called in Galatians 6:16. (See also Romans 2:29.)

The Church of the Gospel Age is described as *"built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone"*, and our *"citizenship"* is in heaven (Ephesians 2:20; Philippians 3:20; RV); while in a vision given to John (Revelation 21:14) the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are seen written in the foundations of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, come down to earth in the Kingdom Age.

Moreover, every member of the *"royal priesthood"* of this age, every sincere believer justified by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, is given the Holy Spirit in token of sins forgiven and as a power to quicken the mind, bring the Lord's words to remembrance, and energise our mortal bodies in His service (Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1:13; John 16:13; Romans 8:11).

This is that to which we have come when we come to Mount Sion, namely, justification by faith, the outpouring of the Spirit, an enlightened and established mind qualifying all, but more especially the twelve apostles of the Lamb, for efficient service in the work of the Gospel Age, which is, briefly, the call and preparation of the *"church of the firstborn"* for eternal life and joint heir-ship with Christ in His Kingdom.

### **Ye are Come to Jesus the Mediator**

**12:24** We are come *"to Jesus the mediator of the new Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel"*. As verses 22 and 23 declare, we have come to Mount Sion and all it stands for, to the new heavenly Jerusalem, to the angels, to the church of the firstborn, to God the Judge, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. We stand face to face with these as realities in our age and experience, just as Israel stood face to face with the realities of Sinai.

Now the apostle mentions three other things to which we 'have come', and concerning which we must adopt the correct attitude. These three realities are the New Covenant, Jesus the Mediator of that new covenant, and *"the blood of sprinkling"*. The Variorum editor interprets, *"we are come to Jesus as mediator"*. The teaching clearly is that at Sinai the children of Israel were not permitted to approach God directly, but only through Moses, and God communicated His will to them only through Moses.

Similarly, we must recognise the one whom God appointed as Mediator between Himself and us. God will not communicate with us except through His Son, and we cannot communicate with God except through His Son, for He said, *"No man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6). Of the elders who accompanied Moses part way up the mount, none was called a mediator. They were only servants in the hand, or under the authority, of the one mediator, Moses. God's messages were not given to them, but to Moses, and Moses gave them out to the elders and to the people.

So in connection with the Mediator of the New Covenant. We read, *"There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"* (1 Timothy. 2:4). Our Lord's mediator-ship is not limited to the service of one nation, as was that of Moses. He is the one Mediator whom God has set between Himself and men, that is, the whole race of mankind irrespective of colour, nationality, or tongue. *"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself"*, as He was in Moses providing deliverance for the children of Israel (2 Corinthians 5:19). [For other comments on Jesus as our Mediator, see 8:6; 9:15.]

### **Ye are Come to the New Covenant**

Addressing Christian believers Paul said, *"Ye are come to the new covenant"*. Was it in the sense of only hearing that there was to be a New Covenant at some future date? No: for all the other things named to which they had come (verses 22 and 23) were realities they had experienced when and since becoming Christians. The very objective for which the Israelites were gathered to Sinai, with Moses serving as leader and mediator, was that God might propound and the people might accept the Law Covenant, whose terms were announced to them by Moses the mediator.

So the objective in commissioning Jesus Christ as Mediator was that God might through Him propose a New Covenant. The terms of that New Covenant Jesus duly set forth in the Sermon on the Mount and in other discourses public and private. After His death and resurrection He used the apostles to declare the terms and requirements in still more ample form, so that they might be thoroughly understood. Whenever they *"preached peace by Jesus Christ"* they expounded the New Covenant terms of forgiveness of sins and the writing of the law of God on the mind and heart, not the Jewish Law, but the law of love and mercy associated with the New Covenant. Paul preached the New Covenant to the Corinthians, calling himself a minister or servant of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:2-11).

All who have experienced the mercy of forgiveness of sins under the New Covenant, and reconciliation with God through Jesus as its Mediator, agree with the apostle that while the Law Covenant was glorious in many ways, the New Covenant excels in glory, and the New Covenant is *"that which remaineth"*, it remains to give life, whereas the Law Covenant gave death (2 Corinthians 3:11). In 2 Corinthians 4:1 Paul speaks of himself as having personally experienced the mercy provided for in the New Covenant, *"Therefore seeing we have this ministry [of the New Covenant he had just described], as we have received mercy [under the New Covenant], we faint not"*.

### **Ye are Come to the Blood of Sprinkling**

Among the other things associated with the giving of the Law at Sinai was the formal ratification of the covenant. Moses, as God's spokesman, declared the covenant and God's desire for a binding contract, and the people freely assented to the same. But the verbal agreement was not considered sufficient. The custom in those days was to seal or ratify a covenant over sacrifices of animals. This had been done in the case of the covenant with Abraham concerning the land, as it was done between man and man on other occasions mentioned in scripture.

In the present epistle the Law Covenant is described as having been so ratified (9:18-20), *"Whereupon neither the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God hath enjoined unto you."* The historical account of this momentous ceremony is found in Exodus 24:1-8.

To that *"blood of sprinkling"* we have not come. That was for Israel only. But we have come to another *"blood of sprinkling"*. This blood of sprinkling which here the apostle associates clearly with the other things to which we have come, is the ratifying blood of the New Covenant. Whose blood is this? Not the blood of animals, but the blood of Jesus, who was slain on Calvary. This the apostle had already made clear in 9, 16 and 17, where Jesus is shown to be the *"covenant victim"*.

When the Law Covenant was ratified Moses sprinkled of the blood on both the book of the Law and on the people. Thus the blood became the seal binding God to carry out His agreements and promises as contained in the covenant, as well as the seal binding the people to carry out their part of the contract. What is the antitype of this?

Manifestly the antitype, the *"blood of sprinkling"* to which we have come, is that which Jesus our Mediator sprinkled on the New Covenant, thus sealing it and becoming surety for it (7:22), and upon the people who enter into the New Covenant, accepting its terms of mercy and forgiveness.

There is this difference, however. Whereas in the type the blood was sprinkled upon all the people together on one occasion, His blood, which our Lord Jesus symbolically sprinkles on those who come to and acknowledge Him and His covenant, is sprinkled on each believer individually at the moment when he acknowledges his sins and accepts the New Covenant terms of mercy and forgiveness. Being thus bound under the New Covenant, the believer in Jesus receives all the benefits detailed in the covenant, Jesus standing surety to see that he does receive them. These benefits have been already described in our comments on 8 and 10 to 12.

Furthermore, believers are bound to render to God all the New Covenant requires of them. And when we look into the covenant we find that surprisingly little is required, and that little is so simple that the poorest and weakest and most ignorant can easily render it. That is one of the reasons why the New Covenant is so much better than the Law Covenant was (Hebrews 8:6).

But the apostle now goes on to say that the blood of sprinkling which binds us to the New Covenant speaks better things than that of Abel, going back, some commentators suppose, to a time long before the Law Covenant was promulgated, with its elaborate ritual and innumerable 'shalts' and 'shalt nots', to a day when the worshipper lived under a far simpler code, yet not so simple but that a sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood were required (Genesis 4:4).

### **Abel's Blood that Speaketh**

Exactly the sense in which the apostle here contrasts the blood of Abel with the blood of Christ the passage itself does not explain, except to say that the one speaks 'better things' than the other.

Some versions read, *"better than Abel"*, as though the contrast is not so much between two 'sprinklings' as between two individuals, Jesus as Mediator of the New Covenant, who was slain by treacherous Jews, and Abel, a sincere worshipper in the beginning, who was slain by his envious brother Cain. If this be the comparison intended, we look back and see that Abel's blood cried out to God from the ground for punishment upon his slayer, for God immediately pronounced a curse and executed a punishment upon Cain for his evil deed (Genesis 4:9-12). On the other hand, the blood of Christ, while its unjust shedding also brought upon His murderers a severe punishment, *"wrath to the uttermost"* (1 Thessalonians 2:16), calls out for mercy, His blood being in itself a propitiatory offering for and the purchase price of His slayers, who, or the majority, shall yet be led to see their error and repent of their sin (Matthew 23:39; Revelation 1:7).

The death of Abel is referred to by our Lord in His denunciations of the Pharisees and scribes as in some respects being avenged upon them, since they were so thoroughly of the spirit of Cain and of other assassins of the righteous of previous times (Matthew 23:35; 1 John 3:12).

This explanation undoubtedly has much to recommend it. Another explanation, that the contrast is between the blood of sprinkling which our Lord Jesus administers and the blood of sprinkling which Abel offered, has also much in its favour. Abel, by faith, offered an acceptable sacrifice, acknowledging that the requirement of an animal sacrifice and the shedding of blood was reasonable as an offering for sin. Where the blood of Abel's offering was sprinkled is not explained, but very likely it was upon the altar and upon or before the cherubim which stood at the gate of the garden, for the worship of the true God. On this point more is said in Chapter 15. This sprinkled blood spoke peace and blessing, but did not take away the condemnation of the Adamic sin. The blood of Jesus, which does take away Adamic sin, therefore speaks 'better', or 'more mightily', than the blood of Abel's sacrifice.

Further, by this exhibition of faith, which led him to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice before God, Abel *"yet speaketh"* (Hebrews 11:4) of the value and valour of faith, though he is himself dead. On the other hand, Christ, who also, by the demonstration of His perfect trust in God, speaks to us of the value of faith, speaks to us of much more, for He, though He died for our sins, did not remain dead. The third day He was raised from death, and later He sat down at God's right hand as Mediator, to speak of a better covenant than Abel knew. His *"blood of sprinkling"*, offered before God, *"made a purification for sins"* and is efficacious to purge the sins of every member of the race, including Abel, the dead as well as the living (Hebrews 1:3; 1 John 2:2), on their responding to the reasonable terms of this better covenant when made known to them.

### Hebel: Transitoriness

There is, however, a third explanation, which commends itself to our judgment perhaps even more than does either of the other two. It is this: The name “*Abel*” is in Hebrew ‘Hebel’, from ‘hebel’ or ‘habel’, which is defined by Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance as ‘emptiness or vanity; figuratively, something transitory and unsatisfactory’. Young’s Analytical Concordance defines ‘Hebel’ as meaning ‘transitoriness’.

Now if we look again at our text and context we find two groups of ‘things’. To one group Israel came. To the other group we have come. There are points of comparison or similarity between these two groups, and also points of dissimilarity or contrast, as follows.

#### Type

1. Mount Sinai.
2. Moses the mediator.
3. The Law Covenant.
4. Abel (vs. 24).
5. Abel speaks, or spoke (vs. 24).
6. Him that spake on earth (vs. 25).
7. Whose voice then shook the earth (vs. 26).
8. A kingdom that can be shaken (vs. 27).
9. Israel’s God a consuming fire at Sinai (vss. 18-20).

#### Antitype

1. Mount Sion.
2. Jesus the Mediator.
3. The New Covenant.
4. The ratifying blood of sprinkling (vs. 24).
5. The blood of Jesus speaks (vs. 24).
6. Him that now speaks from heaven (vs. 25).
7. Whose voice now shakes both heaven and earth (vs. 26).
8. A kingdom that cannot be shaken (vs. 28).
9. Our God a consuming fire at Sion (vs. 29).

From these lists it will be seen that everything in the type was associated with the giving of the Law at Sinai, except Abel and his speaking, if we take these as a reference to faithful Abel the son of Adam. The question readily occurs, might the apostle have used the name Abel as a descriptive term rather than as the name of a character living so many centuries before Sinai? That he did so use it is suggested by the meaning of the Hebrew name ‘Hebel’ as above defined, ‘transitory and unsatisfactory’, or ‘transitoriness’.

At Sinai, Moses, the mediator of the Law Covenant, stood for something unsatisfactory and transitory, though the people at the time did not realise it. The blood which he sprinkled on the book of the Law and on the people in ratification of the agreement was of value only for a time, because the covenant itself was but a temporary one, to endure only until the “*prophet like unto Moses*” should arise with a better covenant. Speaking more mightily than these, we have the New Covenant (with its blood of sprinkling), and we have Jesus, the Mediator of that New Covenant.

With this thought in mind we may paraphrase verse 24 as follows, ‘And to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than the blood sprinkled on the transitory and unsatisfactory and temporary Law Covenant could do’. This interpretation is in harmony with the contrast set out by the apostle in his letter to the Corinthians, concluding with the words, “*For if that which is done away [hence temporary] was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious*” (2 Corinthians 3:6-11).

### See that Ye Refuse Not

**12:25** “*See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.*” Here, instead of repeating that the blood speaketh (verse 24), the apostle says “*Him that speaketh*”. Going back of all the associations of Sinai to God himself, the Master of ceremonies and terrifyer of the assembled multitudes (12:19), we are now warned that, standing back of Mt. Sion and Jesus our Mediator, is God Himself, the great Judge and Law-giver and Master of Ceremonies, who has laid His work upon His Son, who must now be heard as Mediator instead of Moses. “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*” “*God ... hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*” (Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 1:1,2).

The Father and the Son speak with one united voice of authority. “*For if they escaped not who refused [or, when they refused] him that spake [or admonished, same word as in 8:5] on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.*” This statement is similar to 2:2,3, “*For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord*”.

Manifestly, if obedience was required under an inferior covenant and mediator, it is still more to be expected under a better covenant and Mediator, and punishment for disobedience should be correspondingly more severe. We are seriously warned and admonished in the gospels and epistles of the consequences of carelessness and coldness as well as of open rebellion against God. [See also Revelation 3:15-19.]

Stephen rehearses how the Israelites in Egypt first spurned Moses' offers of assistance, and how they made things difficult for him in the wilderness, for all of which they were duly punished, and many who left Egypt fell in the wilderness, not being allowed to enter the promised land (Acts 7:35,39-42). They as a nation also refused Moses in his writings, as our Lord said, *"Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"* (John 5:45-47).

Again, in the parable recorded in Matthew 21:33-44, the Lord showed how they had despised God and His messengers all through their age, and finally were guilty of rejecting the Son when He came to gather the fruits from His vineyard. And the chief priests and elders voiced their own condemnation when they said the unfaithful husbandmen should be destroyed as their just deserts.

Moses had told of Christ, being used as a prophet to foretell things to come. He said, as quoted by Peter in his address to the Jews, *"A prophet shall the LORD your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people"* (Acts 3:22,23). Here it is plainly stated that whosoever of Israel refused to hear our Lord Jesus would lose his place among the people of God. And that is exactly what occurred when they rejected the Lord Jesus and His gospel message, they were rejected from participation in the high calling opened up before those who did hearken to the voice of the greater Prophet than Moses.

God spoke from Mount Sinai to the Jews, and the Jews could not get away from the sound of His voice through His messengers, who travelled the then known world searching them out from among the Gentiles (Romans 10:16-21; James 1:1). When the voice of God speaks from Mount Sion it is the duty of all who hear to obey. And since the gospel has gone to the Gentiles, it is the duty of all Gentiles who hear to render obedience. Especially true is it of the believers who *"have come to"* the Mount and who acknowledge that the one speaking to them is prophet and Mediator in succession to Moses, and has the authority of Almighty God the Father to punish those who refuse to submit themselves to Him. *"Much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."* We shall not escape punishment if we turn away from Him, but shall be cast out in the general shaking, of which the apostle now warns us.

**12:26** *"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now hath he promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven."* God's voice at Sinai is here stated to have shaken the earth, a reference to Exodus 19:18. It is significant of the figurative use of *"earth"* that the Septuagint and the Revised Version margin render *"mount"* in Exodus 19:18 as *"all the people"*, that is, all the people quaked. Undoubtedly earth is used in many passages of scripture in a figurative sense to represent the social order, either limited or in general; for example, Psalm 96:11 and Isaiah 14:16; 24:19,20. It is certain that both the literal earth and the figurative earth (the people) quaked at Sinai.

But just as the Law Covenant and its mediator Moses were inferior to the New Covenant and our Mediator the Lord Jesus, so the quaking at Sinai was a mere circumstance compared with the quaking and shaking that accompany the institution, ratification, and extension of the authority of Mount Sion. The prophet had foretold this greater shaking, and the apostle here quotes and applies it for our edification, *"Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven"*. [Compare with Haggai 2:6.]

Many students apply this prophecy to the end of the Gospel Age as the time when this shaking of heaven as well as of earth would begin. But the apostle applies it as beginning in apostolic times, when the risen Lord spoke as Mediator from heaven, having been given *"all authority in heaven and in earth"* (Matthew 28:18).

One of the things then being severely shaken was the Jewish order of things, not only in its aspect as a social community (earth), but also in its aspect as a religious and political

institution (heaven). In other words, the Jewish nation as stewards of the kingdom of God was being shaken so effectually that a few years later the temple was overthrown and the people scattered to the four corners of the earth, while the 'kingdom' was taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof, namely, the "*holy nation*" composed of Christian believers chosen out from both Jews and Gentiles (Mathew 21:42-45; 1 Peter 2:9). Our Lord said the undesirable things were not only being shaken and broken, but also "*ground to powder*". And the chief priests and Pharisees "*perceived that he spoke of them*".

Early the shaking was extended to the "*heavens*", or political and religious ruling powers, over the Gentiles. The Ephesian silversmiths soon realised that the reign of the goddess Diana was threatened, and both the Grecian and the Roman civilizations were shaken to their foundations. In Acts 4, 24 to 28, is recorded the beginning of the fulfilment of the second psalm, both Jews and Gentiles being described as standing up against God and against Christ who were speaking from heaven (through the inspired apostles), demanding reformation and repentance. God now "*calls on all men everywhere to repent*" (Acts 17:30). Such a worldwide movement could hardly fail to 'shake' all the political, religious, and social institutions of the time. As one observer remarked, 'These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also' (Acts 17:6,30; 19:17-20,24-28,34,35).

Even while on earth our Lord accomplished some shaking, for the empire of Beelzebub felt a new power raised against it when our Lord "*by the finger of God*" cast out devils, and when the seventy returned rejoicing because "*even the devils [demons] are subject unto us through thy name*", Jesus replied, "*I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven*" (Matthew 12:24-29; Luke 11:20; 10:17-19). The "*god of this world*" has still much power, for it is still true that "*the whole world lieth in wickedness [or, in the wicked one]*" but it is also true that a stronger than he has been spoiling some of his 'goods'. During the Gospel Age the Lord has delivered some from slavery to him, turning them "*from the power of Satan unto God*" (Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13; Luke 11:21,22).

In the near future the all-powerful God will completely chain Satan for a thousand years, while Christ's glorious Kingdom holds sway over the earth in place of the kingdoms of this world, or, literally, the kingdom of the world (Revelation 11:15; RV). The world at present seems to be developing along the line of alliances, leagues, and 'understandings', but the scriptures say, "*when they shall say, peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape*" (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

**12:27** "*And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken [or, margin, "that may be shaken"], as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*" The word "*yet once more*" signifies that this is God's final dealing with 'the powers that be', for the shaking has been and will be so severe that everything that can possibly be shaken will be removed, and only the things which God deems worthy will remain.

We have already seen that the Jewish Law and Covenant were completely removed, being nailed to the cross of Christ. The Jewish nation was removed from Palestine, and has not regained full possession.

The western Roman empire went down as a mountain into the sea. The papacy has been shaken out of its overlord-ship of Europe, two popes having been taken prisoner and the Holy Roman empire overturned by Napoleon, and though the papacy was afterward to an extent rehabilitated, the last vestige of the pope's temporal power was taken away in 1870 by the Italian conquest, and the remnants of the Holy Roman Empire were forever buried in the great world war when Austria and Hungary, its last strongholds, became republics and deposed the Hapsburg dynasty which had ruled for centuries as faithful retainers of the papacy. Things that could be shaken were not only shaken, but removed.

Russia, the once impregnable autocracy, had been shaken for more than a century, was badly bruised in the war with Japan, and finally went down in the great earthquake of revolution, the sound of which still reverberates in our ears. Royalty, aristocracy, political great ones, and the religious hierarchy of the Holy Orthodox Church, all were not only shaken, but removed.

Germany, one of the greatest military monarchies of the age, if not the greatest, has also been removed as such, the people having formed themselves into a Republic, with a free and liberal constitution.

The shaking and the removing will continue to go on until all the things which can be shaken will be shown up for what they are, “as of things that are made,” that is, man’s devices rather than God’s appointments. Likewise those things which cannot be shaken will be demonstrated before the eyes of all, for they will remain.

Nevertheless, some of the things shaken have recovered themselves somewhat, or think they have, as, for example, the papacy congratulates itself on the new treaty with Italy granting the pope sovereignty over the Vatican and a few surrounding acres. But this arrangement also will, nay, must, be shaken ere long, that this prophecy may be fulfilled. A treaty of that kind is a very unstable and shakeable proposition at any time, as past treaties have proved, much more so now, when the entire heavens and earth are being shaken preparatory to final removal.

**12:28** “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved [or, “shaken,” same word as in verse 27], let us have grace [or, let us hold fast the grace], whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” The suggestion is that the only thing that cannot be shaken is the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ as it has existed during the age in His Church, the guarantors of which are Mount Sion, the New Covenant, Jesus our Mediator, and God the Judge of all.

The Church stands firm as a rock. When our Saviour said to the disciples, “*But whom say ye that I am?*”, Simon Peter “*answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock [Peter’s confession that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God] I will build my church; and the gates of hell [hades] shall not prevail against it*” (Matthew 16:15-18).

The individual members of the Church have passed away, from generation to generation, but the Church itself has been a living institution, as the apostle prayed (1 Thessalonians 5:23; RV), “*may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the presence [RV margin] of our Lord Jesus Christ*”.

The Spirit of the Church has been the Holy Spirit animating and directing; the soul of the church has been its life of righteousness in a world dead in sin; the body of the church has been that organisation or series of organisations whereby the believers have been kept together in larger or smaller congregations, each believer having his place to fill and his work to do (Ephesians 4:11,12).

Again, we read of martyrs who sealed their faith with their lives. Concerning such we have the familiar saying, ‘The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church’. In vain have the papacy and others sought to exterminate the true believers. There has been no time when God lacked witnesses for the truth, even though few and widely scattered, and often unknown to one another. During the darkest days of her history, the 1260 years hid in the ‘wilderness’, the Lord has nourished His Church (Revelation 12:14).

Again, we have our Lord’s saying that the one who hears His words and keeps them is like a man who built his house on a rock. The rain and the floods and the wind beat upon that house, but it was unmoved, for it was built upon a rock (Matthew 7:24-27). How easily the Israelitish kingdom was shaken and moved is recorded in the books of the Judges, Kings, and Chronicles.

The Kingdom which we have received is more stable because our Covenant, our Mediator, and our King are better able to preserve those who enter into this Kingdom. But we also must have a care, for those not built on the rock, or building wrongly, shall suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:9-15).

### **Let Us Have Grace**

The Greek word ‘charis’, here rendered “*grace*”, has in general the meaning of ‘favour’. God’s grace extended to us, for example, is His favour, totally unmerited on our part. The KJV margin and the Emphatic Diaglott read, “*hold fast the favour*”, that is, the favour of God extended to us in this unshakable, immovable Kingdom. The favour of God granted by giving us an unshakeable Kingdom should be held fast to, as something most extraordinary and desirable.

Taking the KJV and RV renderings, “*let us have grace*”, the ‘charis’ would refer to a gracious and grateful inward state of mind which we are to exercise and a graciousness of conduct, or as the RV margin and some other translators express it, “*thankfulness*”. A

gracious state of mind, with gratitude for and appreciation of the Kingdom, unshaken and unshakeable, which we have received will assist us to “*serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*”, or “*reverence and piety*” or “*reverence and awe*”.

The love of God toward us in Christ Jesus has drawn out our love to Him. We may draw near as children to a parent, and find a sympathetic ear. The scripture now being studied reminds us that, nevertheless, sentiments of godly fear, reverence, piety, and awe must not be allowed to lapse. Without these qualities we cannot serve God acceptably. We must remember that a Great Voice speaks to us from our Mount Sion, to which we must ever give due respect. We must not presume upon God’s love, not consciously practise sin because of the ease with which, under the New Covenant, forgiveness may be obtained in the name of Jesus. Our attitude must always be that of devout worshippers and suppliants.

**12:29** “*For our God is a consuming fire.*” The LORD God of Israel displayed to the Israelites His majesty and power, thus impressing them with the danger of physical punishment for infraction of His commands.

Our God, though now we know more of His love, is the same God, with majesty and power unimpaired, and with every ability to inflict dire physical penalties upon us. “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (10:31), as would be the case were we to repudiate Jesus as our Mediator and turn our backs on the New Covenant through which we have received forgiveness and reconciliation. Outside Mount Sion and the New Jerusalem is seen the “*lake of fire*” for the destruction of Satan and all his servants, those who know God but despise His voice of authority (Matthew 25:41,46; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 21:27,8). Let us not therefore refuse or ignore Him that speaketh, but, “*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*” (Matthew 11:15; 13:9; Revelation 2:22).



## Chapter 13

### LET US GO FORTH UNTO HIM

The conclusion of chapter 12 was that, while certain things that could be shaken would be removed, there were other things that could not be shaken, and would not be removed.

The Christian realities are unshakeable. God is over all, to be served with reverence and godly fear. Jesus, our Mediator, is established in that position, and speaks from heaven with the voice of authority. He has given to His people a Kingdom, which they now receive by faith, and which in due time they shall inherit. This Kingdom also is unshakeable, and God's people consequently need have no fear when they see the shaking of kingdoms and their removal. Yet will not we fear, *"though the earth [social order] be removed, and though the mountains [kingdoms] be carried into the midst of the sea"* (Psalm 46:1-7). Whatever is good continues.

**13:1** This leads naturally to the opening verse of chapter 13, *"Let brotherly love continue"*, as much as to say that brotherly love is not one of the things to be shaken or removed by the denouncing voice from heaven, and yet that there is a certain precariousness about it. *"Let brotherly love continue."* Its continuance is somewhat dependent upon the brethren themselves.

As we all know, there is a sort of love in the world which cannot endure, because it is really selfishness in disguise. Our Lord referred to this when He said, *"If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?" "For sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again"* (Matthew 5:46; Luke 6:30-34).

If a kind action is done, often it is to put the recipient under an obligation, and thus make an opening to get something of equal or even greater value in return. That sort of love is sooner or later exposed for what it is, as all can say who have fallen from a position of affluence to one of poverty and been deserted by the crowds who previously were enthusiastic recipients of hospitality. When they find there is no more to be got, they gradually drop away. They do not remain to show gratitude for past favours by good deeds in the hour of illness and loss.

Brotherly love, the kind that remains, is not of this shallow and selfish sort. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit, a product of the grace and love of God shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:22; 2 Peter 1:7; 1 John 3:16-18). The same apostle wrote, *"Be kindly affectioned [or tenderly affectionate] one to another with brotherly love"*, or, as the margin has it, *"in the love of the brethren"*. There is to be genuine affection, a deep emotion, that finds outlet in kind acts, as he proceeds to say, *"Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality"* (Romans 12:10-13). So here, in Hebrews 13:1, the continuance of brotherly love immediately suggests hospitality.

#### Entertaining Strangers

**13:2** *"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."* It is a hospitality that goes beyond that exchange of visits common in the world and among relatives, where each looks to receive in a return visit all the entertainment given. This kind of hospitality is also well known among professed Christians, as it was among the Jews, and concerning which our Lord said, *"When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren [Hebrew usage for near relatives], nor thy kinsmen [relatives more remote], nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee"* (Luke 14:12). The brotherly love which was to continue among the brethren was to be deep and broad enough to entertain 'strangers'.

The example given from Old Testament history is found in Genesis 18:1-5. Abraham sat in the door of his tent, and saw three strangers. They afterward proved to be angels with a special message from God, but Abraham at first saw in them only three weary passers-by, to whom a rest and food would be welcome. And he washed their feet, as was the custom in that hot and dusty climate. 'No pains were spared', as we would say nowadays, to make them 'feel at home'. The *"morsel of bread"* Abraham proposed to set before them while they rested under the tree at the door of the tent developed into a hearty meal of the best his camp afforded, *"a calf tender and good"*, with butter and milk, and pancakes made upon the hearth. This illustrates how Abraham's heart warmed to them as he thought of their long journey, the heat, their hunger and fatigue. Although he had many servants, both he and Sarah personally gave attention to the details. And all without thought of return. This is indeed an example well worthy of imitation.

But the apostle says “*some*”; others besides Abraham, practised hospitality. There were doubtless other occasions on which guests brought a blessing. But the inference is that one may be hospitable many times without entertaining “*angels unawares*”. As those given to hospitality have experienced, there are many guests who are not ‘angels’, or godly messengers, but the reverse. Guests, whether friends or strangers, are sometimes rude and ungrateful, sometimes enemies posing as friends, sometimes busybodies who make trouble in the household, and traduce the characters of their hosts.

The lesson the scriptures impart is that hospitality should be persisted in as an exercise of Christian virtue regardless of the lack of gratitude often experienced. David said, “*Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me*” (Psalm 41:9). There was one Judas among the Twelve (Matthew 26:23-25). Many ‘strangers’ entertained pass on their way and are not seen or heard of again. But the large-hearted hospitality of the brethren continues. If one or another proves to be a helpful and encouraging messenger of God, well and good. In any event, the exercise of hospitality will have developed a larger and more sympathetic heart, a joy in serving others, an overflow of goodness that asks no more reward than God’s blessing and approval. “*Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just*” (Luke 14:14).

To be “*given to hospitality*” was listed as a necessary qualification in a “*bishop*” or “*overseer*” (1 Timothy 3:2). The apostle Peter referred to hospitality among the brethren as a duty, to be discharged cheerfully and bountifully. “*Use hospitality one to another without grudging*” (1 Peter 4:9; compare with 3 John 5,6).

### **One Body in Adversity**

**13:3** Brotherly love will also cause us to “*Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity [or, are ill treated], as being yourselves also in the body*”.

When the apostle wrote these words he was himself a prisoner; he called himself “*an ambassador in bonds*” (Ephesians 6:20). Those who “remembered him” did more than just think about him and how unpleasant his lot must be. Their remembrance led them to send food and clothing and other comforts to him and his companions in bonds. This was practical love, or love in operation, which Peter describes as pitying the unfortunate (1 Peter 3:8).

There were also other kinds of adversity in those days, as there are to-day, for “*all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Timothy 3:12; 2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 11:23-33). There are in addition adversities of all sorts connected with daily life, business and family worries, sickness, death, disappointment. There are adversities in our spiritual life, circumstances adverse to progress in faith and godliness and hindrances to assembling together.

As “*being yourselves also in the body*”, we should sympathise with and help all our fellow members so far as time, strength, and means will permit, just as the various members of our human body fly to the aid of other members when injured or in distress (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The golden rule is a good one here: do unto others as we would that they should do to us were positions reversed. We have heard the well say that if they were sick they would not care to be visited, and therefore doing to others as they would be done by constrained them to stay away from the sick. But when such have been overtaken with a long illness they have been glad when someone came to brighten their days. Doing unto others means doing the kind, gentle, helpful thing, not the hard, indifferent abstention from doing (Luke 6:31-36).

### **Marriage is Honourable**

**13:4** Now comes the consideration of another kind of love: that love which finds its expression in marriage. It may be that some who attached themselves to the believers in those days claimed that the spiritual love of the brethren was the only love permitted to the saints, that somehow or other there was something unworthy or defiling in marriage. There may have been some then, as in later times, who decried formal marriage but indulged the flesh, since the apostle here refers to whoremongers and adulterers as transgressors whom God would judge.

Again, the apostle may have been guided by the Holy Spirit to write these words as a guide and warning to Christians living under the rule of the papacy and other religious systems, which teach that the celibate is holier than the married man or woman, even though that professed celibate be secretly a fornicator.

These words of verse 4 have, in fact, been a help to God's children all down the age, balancing their judgment as between 1 Corinthians 7, where the advantages of single life are referred to in the case of evangelists and others who will spend their time in special service, and those passages which show many of the apostles and disciples to have been married persons, yet as acceptable to God as the unmarried. Directions to the married in their mutual relationships and in their instruction of their children abound in the epistles, and the Lord sanctioned marriage by His presence at the marriage feast as well as later on through His apostles' teachings, as in the passage now under consideration.

Some commentators render verse 4, "*Let marriage be held in honour among all*", instead of "*marriage is honourable in all*". In either case the meaning is that marriage, as God designed it, is an honourable institution, and its purity should be upheld and maintained by His people by both precept and example.

Professedly Christian communities of lax morals have done much harm to the cause of Christ. How they can justify themselves in the face of this threat against them is inexplicable. It shows the power of "*the god of this world*" to influence by subtlety and to make black appear white. Being deceived or misled is no valid excuse for immorality, but God is willing to forgive all such who truly repent, acknowledge their fault, and pledge themselves to a pure life thereafter. The grace of God is abundant to help all to turn from wickedness, however base, as proven by the bright and pure life of reformed sinners, of whom examples were found among the Corinthian brethren (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Some who had been "*washed*" seemed to think they could sin again and again and be cleansed as often as required. Such tempt God, and harden themselves in sin, and can only expect the extreme penalty reserved for the devil and his angels, the chief characteristic of whom is that they know better but still persist in their wrong course (Matthew 25:41; Hebrews 10:26-31).

**13:5** "*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" The word "*conversation*" has altered its meaning since the KJV was made, being now limited to talk or interchange of ideas. The thought in the verse is conduct or walk, manner of life.

Covetousness is one of the meanest of everyday faults, and was forbidden in the tenth commandment of the Mosaic Law. Covetousness is desire for what others have. It sours the mind and prevents it enjoying the happiness of those who own the thing coveted. Covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5), for if the desire be strong enough the object becomes a god and claims all the powers of the covetous one, leading to hatred, envy, theft, immorality, and murder.

Covetousness proceeds out of the heart, and the Lord admonished the disciples to beware of it (Mark 7:22; Luke 12:15). The Pharisees were covetous (Luke 16:14), the nations who left God were "*filled with all covetousness*" (Romans 1:29), and one of the signs of the last times is that "*men shall be covetous*", having a heart "*exercised with covetous practices*" (2 Timothy 3:2; 2 Peter 2:14). The covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10; Ephesians 5:5), hence it behoves us to rid ourselves at once of any covetous thoughts that may arise from day to day. Covetousness must be mortified, or put to death; no half measures will do, if we desire to live the new life of holiness (Colossians 3:5).

The opposite to covetousness is expressed in the next clause, "*be content with such things as ye have*". Where this contented mind is found there is no temptation to covet riches, ease, or anything else neighbours or friends possess. Much less should we covet the possessions of the brethren, for there are "*not many rich, or noble called*", and what God has given to them we may well be pleased to let them enjoy.

Paul advises the brethren to "*covet earnestly the best gifts*", using a different word from the one rendered "*covet*" in Romans 13:9, which says, "*Thou shalt not covet*". Zealously desiring the best gifts is the thought. And he adds that the greatest gift of the Spirit is love, the loving, generous disposition like to that of our blessed Saviour.

Elsewhere Paul advised the rich to use their wealth in God's service, and not to gratify themselves (1 Timothy 6:17-19). The will to be rich on the part of those not so favoured brings a snare (1 Timothy 6:9,10). The Lord's advice is the best, "*Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven*", "*for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (Matthew 6:19-21). With the heart centred in heaven, we shall not covet what others have on earth. Paul said, "*I have*

*learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”, and “Godliness with contentment is great gain, ... and having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (Philippians 4:10-13; 1 Timothy 6:6-8).*

The reason and justification for this contentment is, *“for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”*. The Greek is emphatic, *“he himself hath said”*. The RV translates, *“I will in no wise leave thee”*. The Diaglott beautifully renders it, *“No. I will not leave thee; no, no, I will not forsake thee”*. What a tender assurance is this of God’s love and care!

There is no need for an avaricious disposition, or that worldly contentiousness that fights for the last cent, and is unhappy if someone else gets the best of the bargain. Thrift and good management are desirable; economy must be practised in times like these, but God’s children should not descend to mean squabbling. With such an assurance that God will never leave; no, no, never forsake us, we may well give our attention to Matthew 6:33, *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”*. This is most conducive to a contented mind and the abolition of covetousness (Psalm 37:25).

If in conjunction with these scriptures we read Genesis 28, verses 10 to 15, we will see that similar words were spoken to Jacob after he had left all for the sake of peace, still retaining, however, his hope in the promise. So when we forsake all, we still rejoice in the promises.

### **The LORD is My Helper**

**13:6** This thought of God’s compact not to leave or forsake His people gives us courage to meet all contingencies in life. *“So that we may boldly say [or, taking courage we may say], The LORD is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me”*.

Many psalms give us encouragement along these lines. The ancient prophets were exhorted not to be afraid of the faces of those to whom they were sent with God’s messages, and our Saviour spoke these important words, *“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul [after that have no more that they can do, Luke 12:4]: but rather fear him [that is, God] which is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Psalm 27:1,14; 31:14-20; 91; Jeremiah 1:8; Ezekiel 2:6; Matthew 10:28).*

Men can do nothing detrimental to our spiritual welfare unless we allow them to do so. The very hairs of our heads are numbered, and God’s providence is all around us, His angels are ministering spirits to care for us. Let us not therefore fear to take an upright and bold stand for the truth. All the things of this world are at best only vanity; they fall upon us after we have struggled to obtain them. In God alone is there complete satisfaction, and as long as we say confidently, *“the LORD is my helper”*, that long shall we be able to overcome all opposition and temptation, however subtle, and dismiss all fear of man, that bringeth a snare, as the proverb says (Proverbs 29:25).

### **Whose Faith Follow**

**13:7** *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation [or, conduct].”* Verse 2 exhorted to remember those in bonds and those who suffered adversity. Now the brethren are exhorted to *“Remember them which have the rule over you”*. Rule suggests lordship and slavery, or at least dependency. The Diaglott rendering, *“Remember your leaders”*, is more in line with the context, which describes the manner in which these leaders had exercised leadership, namely, *“who have spoken unto you the word of God”*. These would be the apostles and evangelists and other brethren who had expounded to them the gospel truths.

As in verse 2 this remembrance was to take a practical form. If these leaders were travelling they required hospitality. Paul himself was ministered to in this way and in many others in the course of his journeying and when in prison. Local leaders were also to be remembered, because the position of leader involves responsibility and care, and the love and co-operation of the brethren are always in order. This is referred to again in verse 17.

Those leaders who were faithful were to be taken as patterns or examples, *“viewing attentively the result of their conduct, imitate their faith”*. Their conduct was a reflex of their faith, for, as James says, faith is manifested by works, and without works faith is dead. At the same time it is not necessarily individual acts that are to be imitated, for circumstances might differ, but the faith, the steadfast faith, or the state of mind, the confidence in God, of the leaders was to be imitated.

Thus the Holy Spirit would operate in the minds of both leaders and congregations, and so they would be kept in peace and harmony while all other things were being disturbed and shaken. Paul said, *“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).*

To the extent that a leader is a follower of Christ, he may with profit be followed by the brethren. Christ is the supreme leader and teacher of His Church, but often uses sub-leaders and assistant teachers, as stated in 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 5:23; 4:8,11-16. Where a leader lives and teaches contrary to Christ, the brethren are told to deal with him (Romans 16:17,18; 2 Timothy 3:5; Titus 1:10,11; 3 John 5-11; 1 Timothy 5:17-19).

**13:8** “*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.*” The KJV makes verse 8 an explanation of “*end*” in verse 7, the “*end*” or objective of the faith and conduct of faithful leaders is Jesus Christ. Their objective is to glorify Him by exhibiting in their own lives those virtues which were and are conspicuous in the character of Christ.

Other versions make a separate sentence of verse 8 and add the verb “*is*”, “*Jesus Christ is the same*”. But whether the two verses should be joined or not, we do well to get all the good we can out of them considered both jointly and separately.

### **Jesus Christ the Same**

The character of Jesus is always the same. The standard of righteousness He set up for His followers in His life on earth is the same as that which He recognised in His pre-human existence, “*yesterday*”, it is the same as that which He adheres to in His present glorious estate at the Father’s right hand, “*forever*”, and it is the same each moment of the present, “*to-day*”. Righteousness has but one standard, set by God Himself, and every departure from that standard is unrighteousness.

We are admonished to have in us the same mind as was in Christ Jesus when He did not meditate a usurpation to be equal with God, but humbled Himself (Philippians 2:5-8). This shows that in His pre-human life Jesus had the truly humble mind, and was in full harmony with the Father’s will. In this we should imitate Him.

We are also admonished to follow His steps as He took them while on earth, “*who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth*” (1 Peter 2:22). We are told that on earth He did always those things which were pleasing in His Father’s sight (John 8:29). If we imitate Him, we also shall be pleasing to the Father, provided, of course, that we acknowledge Him as the one through whom alone we may approach God (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5). And since we are told that while on earth Jesus exhibited God’s character, that He was God manifest in the flesh, we may know that God’s character is the same now as our Lord’s was then.

Both God and Christ are unchangeable in character. James says that with God there is “*no variableness, neither shadow of turning*”, and Jesus said, “*I and my Father are one*,” meaning one in character and purpose (James 1:17; John 10:30). Since these things are true, we see that the Church right through the age has had an unvarying standard of holiness set before it. If a leader is seen to conform his life to this standard, the brethren do well to ‘imitate’ the ‘faith’ which brings such a result.

Verse 8 is sometimes quoted to support the theory that Jesus Christ while on earth was “*the same*” as in His pre-human estate as regards His nature and substance. But such a thought would be out of harmony with verse 7, where the apostle is speaking of conduct and faith.

The scriptures show that our Lord occupied three separate and distinct positions. The first when He was with the Father “*before the world was*” and until He came to earth. The second is called “*the days of his flesh*”, having been born of a virgin, yet the Son of God, and consequently not sinful like the race of mankind into which He came; nevertheless days when He was a fleshly or human being. And third, that highly exalted position at God’s right hand, when He was raised a spirit being, made “*the exact impress*” of the Father’s substance, and given a name even higher than He possessed at the beginning (Revelation 3:14; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 5:7,8; 2:9; 1:3; Colossians 1:18,19; Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 1:20-22).

It would not therefore be correct to say that Jesus was “*the same*” in nature and substance “*yesterday, and to-day, and forever*”. But we can truthfully say that He was the same personality, and that in character and disposition, in loving interest in mankind, in obedience and devotion to the Father He was the same from the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.

### **The Heart Established with Grace**

**13:9** “*Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.*” In view of this fact, that Jesus Christ is the same, “*Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines [or teachings]*”.

If Jesus is the same, the truth Jesus taught is the same, and we must not expect it to change from day to day or year to year. All the fundamentals of the faith are the same to-day as they were in apostolic times. The truth that Paul preached to the Hebrews was the same as that preached by him and the other apostles elsewhere. And the standard of righteousness and holiness was the same.

Hence anyone coming along with something different, *"divers and strange"*, was not to be allowed to draw one away. If the heart is *"established with grace," "it is a good thing"*. The character and judgment are stabilised, and one is able to 'see through' the false teachings. If all ideas presented were carefully compared with scripture, their falsity or truth would be discerned. That is the way to *"prove all things, and hold fast that which is good"* (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Again he refers to the grace mentioned in 12:28. The heart established with grace is settled, rooted, and grounded in those things which the favour of God through Christ has revealed (1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:23).

In the concluding clause of verse 9 the apostle reverts to the comparison and contrast method of previous chapters. In this instance he contrasts the grace which establishes the heart of the believer in Jesus with the *"meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein"*, referring to certain ritual under the law, which required the priest or the offerer to partake of a portion of the animal and other sacrifices. Details are given in Leviticus 6:16,29; 7:6-9,14-18. Of certain offerings the priest was to have the wave breast and the right shoulder (Leviticus 7:30-34). Also a portion of the 'meat' offerings of fine flour and oil went to the priest (Leviticus 2:1-3). Any Israelite who brought a sacrifice of thanksgiving was to eat it the same day (Leviticus 22:29,30). The firstling males of flock and herd were to be brought to God, and then eaten by the donor's household (Deuteronomy 15:19-23).

These meats did not profit those who were occupied therein beyond satisfying hunger, because the Law itself was inadequate to give life.

Under the New Covenant no animal or flour sacrifices are required, and consequently there are no such meats or foods to be ceremonially eaten. It is sufficient that *"the heart be established with grace"*. The 'profit' to the believers so established under the New Covenant is that they shall have life (John 10:10; 1 John 5:11-13). Our Lord said, *"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work"* (John 4:34).

### **Our Altar from which We Eat**

**13:10** *"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle."* It seems proper to take the meats of verse 9 to mean all that was ceremonially eaten under the Law by priests, Levites, and people. But verse 10 refers only to those meats partaken of by those *"which serve the tabernacle"*, namely, priests and Levites.

Turning to Leviticus 6:26,29 and Numbers 18:9,10, we find that of the ordinary trespass and sin offerings portions were to be kept by the priests and Levites for food. This was their living, *"Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?"* (1 Corinthians 9:13). Christians do not, however, partake of that altar which stood in the court of the temple at Jerusalem. We have something far better; we have the antitype. But neither can the servers at Jewish altars partake of our altar, *"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle"*.

The trespass and sin offerings allowed to be eaten under the Law consisted of those whose blood was not taken into the Most Holy, but, after certain applications, was poured out at the foot of the brazen altar in the court, upon which certain portions of the sacrifice were burned (Leviticus 4:6,7). After the allocation of a part to the priest (Leviticus 6:25-29), the remainder of the carcase was carried without the camp, and there destroyed by fire (Leviticus 4:11,12,21).

A different ordinance related to those animals whose blood was carried into the Most Holy. Of these no portion was to be eaten. The animal was to be wholly burnt by fire (Leviticus 6:30). This ordinance referred specially to the Day of Atonement offerings. Once a year only, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered into the Most Holy, to sprinkle upon the mercy seat the blood of atonement for the sins of the nation as a whole (Hebrews 9:6,7; Leviticus 16).

Yet, notwithstanding their great privileges in connection with the tabernacle and temple services, the Jewish priesthood has no right to eat of our altar. Manifestly, then, ours must be a different altar from theirs. And if a different altar, why not also a different sacrifice?

What sacrifice was offered upon our altar by our High Priest? The apostle has already explained this in chapter 10, verses 5 to 10. Our Lord's perfect human body was that special and ever efficacious sacrifice. He gave His flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). The only way the Jewish priests could partake of our altar would be by becoming believers in Jesus. As Jews they were excluded from our altar.

**13:11** *"For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp."* In the type the bodies of those beasts could not be eaten, nor any portion, because the whole of the carcase was consumed; only the fat of the sin offering was burned on the altar; the rest was burned outside the camp (Leviticus 16:25,27).

**13:12** *"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."* Our Lord Jesus, in order that He might fulfil all that was typified of Him in the Law as the atonement for sin, also *"suffered without the gate"*. Manifestly, Jesus was not offered upon the temple altar. He must have been offered upon some other altar.

And if God accepted an offering upon some other altar than the Levitical, it follows that the Levitical altar is superseded. Thus the apostle reinforces his statements of previous chapters, that Christ is High Priest after the Melchisedec order, and not after the order of Aaron, and that His one sacrifice for sin, *"once for all"*, is *"better"* than all the sacrifices offered under the law, as is also the New Covenant with which His High Priesthood is associated better than the Law Covenant.

What is the antitypical altar upon which our blessed Saviour was offered? We answer, the altar of the will of God. The will of God was that a sacrifice was required, before He could clear the guilty, and notwithstanding that He was a sin-offering we may eat of Him, as He said, *"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you"* (John 6:53-56). This was in strong contrast with the Law that forbade them to eat the Day of Atonement sin offerings.

Only those who believe in Jesus have a right to eat of this altar. Our Lord came offering priests and Levites deliverance from the bondage of the Law, as He offered it to the common people, but the majority refused. He offered them this new altar from which to eat, but they would have none of it. And one of the reasons for their refusal was that the same privilege was offered the common people whom they despised.

By the same apostle a similar contrast is drawn between the table of the Lord and the table of the demons to whom sacrifices were offered in the pagan temples (1 Corinthians 10:18-21). Those who had fellowship with the idols in their temples could not have fellowship with the Lord, and those who had fellowship with the Lord could not consistently visit the temples and partake of the food which had there been offered to the idols and through the idols to the demons.

Ours is a higher and better altar than that of the Jewish ritual, and the Hebrews to whom this epistle was written had realised this, though some had not made the progress they should have done in Christian knowledge (Hebrews 5:12-14). They, addressed as *"holy brethren"*, had accepted Christ as the High Priest of their confession, and thereby admitted the inadequacy of the Jewish priesthood, for Christ was not of the Levitical tribe, and could not have served as a priest under the Law (Hebrews 3:1; 7:12-14).

### **That He Might Sanctify the People**

Jesus *"suffered without the gate"*. He was led out of the city to Golgotha, and executed by the Roman authorities, to whom the Jews had turned him over, for the Sanhedrin had been deprived of its former right to inflict the death penalty on offenders against the Law. They desired His crucifixion, thinking that He would thus come under a special curse, and not knowing that in this very detail their wrath against Jesus was co-operating for the accomplishment of a portion of the divine plan essential to the redemption of their nation (Matthew 27:22-25,27-35; John 19:31,32; 12:32,33; Galatians 3:13). The reason Jesus was there slain was not only to fulfil the type, but *"that he might sanctify the people with his own blood"*. If, then, the blood of Jesus sanctified the people, this constitutes another reason for considering the Law obsolete.

On the Day of Atonement contrite Israelites followed in mind the ceremonies carried out by the high priest; for, though gathered about the tabernacle or temple, they could not see the rites performed. By faith they regarded the sacrifice as made for them, and accepted the forgiveness pronounced. So the believer in Jesus accepts by faith the assurances now made of sins forgiven under the New Covenant.

The statement concerning our Lord sanctifying *"the people"*, as being the antitype of the Day of Atonement sanctification of the Israelites, is proof that our Lord was the antitype of the *"LORD's goat"*, which was offered for the sins of **the people** as distinguished from the priests and Levites (Leviticus 16:15).

In this reference to the type, the apostle makes no mention of the sanctification of Aaron and his 'house' by the blood of the bullock. This he has done elsewhere. In Hebrews 9:11-14, for example, the blood of Christ is shown to be the antitype of the blood of both bulls and goats.

In the present passage he shows that the arbitrary division which God made between the Levites and the remainder of the nation of Israel when that tribe was separated to the tabernacle service, and which was accentuated by such ceremonies as those on the Day of Atonement, when a separate offering was made for them, is now obsolete.

Under the New Covenant Atonement no distinction is made between one nation and another, or between one class and another. By the cross of Christ the wall of division between Jew and Gentile was broken down, as was also the ceremonial wall separating priests and people. Jesus, during His ministry, and the apostles following, preached the same gospel, the same way of salvation, and the same terms of forgiveness to Jewish priests, Levites, and people, as well as to Gentiles.

Part of the difficulty in the minds of the Pharisees, priests, and doctors of the Law was that the Lord now placed them on the same level as the publicans and sinners, in the need for repentance, humility, and faith (Matthew 5:20; 9:9-13; 21:23-32; Luke 10:25-37; Acts 6:7).

What a significant light these apostolic comments on the altars and our Lord's sacrifice throw upon His answer to the Pharisees when they objected because His disciples plucked and ate corn as they walked through the fields on the sabbath day! *"But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple"* (Matthew 12:1-8).

#### **Let us Go Forth unto Him**

**13:13** This is borne out by verse 13, *"Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach"*. Let all Hebrews without distinction recognise this new sin offering, whose blood God has accepted in the Most Holy, *"even heaven itself"*, and whose body of flesh was nailed to the cross *"without the gate"*.

Let us now turn our thoughts to Him as He suffered on the tree. Nay, let us do more. Let us leave Judaism, represented by the 'camp', and go forth to Him, as did the faithful disciples who gathered round Him in His last trying hours, *"bearing his reproach"*.

A contrast is to be noted between the bodies of those beasts burned without the gate and our Lord's body nailed to the cross. In both cases life was sacrificed, but in the one case the carcasses were destroyed, while in the other our Lord's perfect body was preserved, given an honourable burial in the tomb of the rich (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60), and subsequently removed in demonstration of His resurrection.

In going forth to Christ *"without the camp"*, it is not to a dead Christ, but, thank God, to a living Saviour and Lord, with all power in heaven and on earth, and now able to *"save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"*, one who, by reason of His sufferings, is able to sympathise with us in our temptations and trials (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25). These passages indicate His work on our behalf as our High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, subsequent to His offering of Himself as the sacrifice.

#### **Bearing His Reproach**

Followers participate in both the honour and the ignominy of their leaders. The rich and titled would have many friends were all who are willing to share their riches admitted to their circle. The leaders of an unpopular cause, on the other hand, have usually few friends, and these necessarily share the rebuffs and taunts that fall to their lot.

God was the leader of the children of Israel, and at Sinai they were obliged to treat Him with respect. But when their foolish heart was darkened and they sought the gods of the heathen, turning their backs upon the LORD God, they justified their disloyalty by reproaching God for the method of His leadership. He had taken them from Egypt to die in the wilderness; He gave them manna of which they soon tired, desiring the fleshpots left behind. Whoever remained loyal to God and sought to obey His commands was correspondingly reproached and ridiculed. (Compare with Psalm 79:12.)



David was God's anointed in place of Saul, but for some years was prevented from occupying the throne by Saul's refusal to recognise a successor, and David's unwillingness to take by force what God had assured him would be his at the proper time. The language of Psalm 69:9 is applicable to him in this experience. He had a zeal for God's house, and those who had not respect for God let their reproaches fall on David.

But David wrote also as a prophet, and Psalm 69 is one of the clearest and most beautiful of the Messianic psalms. Verse 9 is quoted in connection with our Lord's zeal in casting out of the temple the moneychangers and merchants who defiled it. In doing so the reproaches which these apostate Jews heaped on God by their conduct fell also upon Jesus who espoused God's cause (Matthew 21:12-15; John 2:13-17). In Romans 15:3 also the psalm is shown to be Messianic, *"For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me"*. Another portion of Psalm 69, cited in the New Testament as applicable to Jesus Christ, is found in John 19:28-30.

We see, then, that reproaches were heaped on God, and upon the Son of God. They fell upon the Son because He was loyal to the Father, and sought always to do His will. Romans 15:33 intimates that this is the reason Jesus was reproached, *"For even Christ pleased not himself"*. Had He thought of worldly ease and popularity He would not have gone contrary to the scribes and Pharisees and others in authority who had made void the word of God by their traditions.

But since He sought to please God, and to please His fellow Jews only to their edification, He became a reproach and a byword; as it is written, *"He is despised and rejected of men"*, and *"The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me"* (Isaiah 53:3; Psalm 69:9). Psalm 22 foretold the reproaches heaped upon Jesus when He was nailed to the tree, how the people wagged their heads, and reviled Him because of His inability to save Himself (Matthew 27:39-44).

The invitation or command to go forth to Jesus *"without the camp, bearing his reproach"*, means, therefore, that those who do so thereby associate themselves with the Lord Jesus as the one whom God has sent. As Jesus, by His faithfulness, became a sharer of the reproaches heaped upon God, so we, by taking up our stand with Christ, acknowledging Him as God's Anointed and as the true Sacrifice for sin, associate ourselves with the reproaches heaped upon both God and Christ. In other words, we come into line to experience what our Lord foretold before His betrayal and death, *"The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. ... If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?"* (Matthew 10:24,25). *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you"* (John 15:18; 1 John 3:13).

In all this there is no suggestion whatever that the believers who go to Christ without the gate are carried there as part of the sin offering to be burned without the camp. *"Let us go forth"* is an appeal to our volition. We may or may not associate ourselves with Christ's reproaches. Were we in any sense to be considered as carcasses burned without the camp because we had been offered up as sacrifices or part of a sacrifice for sin, we should have no volition in the matter. Christ as the sacrifice for sin was literally carried out of the city by the Roman soldiers and executed on the tree. We are not thus carried to the tree. On the contrary, of our own free will and because of our love for Him, we go out to Him by faith, take upon us His name, and associate ourselves with His cause and by consequence with His reproaches.

The apostle Peter expresses it thus, *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified"* (1 Peter 4:14.) That is, we do not go out to Christ to join in the reproaches, but, contrariwise, to honour Him, and tell His virtues, and live before others the life of holiness as He set us an example that we should follow His steps, *"Who did no sin, neither was guile [or, deceit] found in his mouth"* (1 Peter 2:21-23).

### **No Continuing City**

**13:14** A reason is given why it is desirable to go forth out of the 'camp', or congregation of Israel, *"For [or, because] here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come"*. This carries us back to the hope of the fathers as explained in chapter 11: 3-16, and is an inspired declaration that Judaism was not that 'city'. Judaism was not one of the things to 'remain' during the 'shaking' spoken of in 12:27,28.

In the scriptures, 'city' is often used symbolically to represent a government. The kingdom of Judah was a God-founded government, but its duration and purpose were limited. After these had been served, that kingdom was 'overturned', and no advantage accrued to Jews who preferred to fancy themselves still under it. It was their duty and privilege to seek the city promised to the fathers, which city, or government, or Kingdom, Jesus preached, saying, "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand*", that is, the Kingdom "*which cannot be moved*" (12:28), and which, though we have received it by promise, is not as yet established in the earth. Consequently, the apostle says, "*we seek one to come*". By going to Jesus outside of Judaism and the Law Covenant, the Hebrews would place themselves in line with the aspirations of the fathers, to whom promises were given before the Law, and entirely independent of it (Romans 4:13). Jesus said, "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad*" (John 8:56; compare with Luke 13:24-30; Matthew 21:42,43).

### **The Sacrifice of Praise**

**13:15** "*By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*" After the atonement was effected by the application of the blood on the mercy seat and the carrying out of other formalities, the high priest blessed the people with an assurance of God's restored favour, saying, "*The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace*" (Numbers 6:24-26).

In the description of the ceremony given in Leviticus 16, this blessing of the people is not mentioned. It is, however, stated in chapter 9 that after the consecration of the priests was completed, and various sacrifices had been offered, "*And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them*" (Leviticus 9:22). Putting the two references together it seems reasonable to conclude that, as one of the functions of the high priest was to bless the people, an assurance of forgiveness would seem appropriate on the Day of Atonement, to relieve the tension of the waiting multitudes. On that day they were to afflict their souls, and while the offerings were being made (as evidenced by the smoke ascending from the altar), they were to prostrate themselves before God. In such an attitude of worship the devout would eagerly await the high priest's reappearance and the declaration that the atonement had been effected and that the people were now cleansed and free to return for another year to their everyday affairs (Leviticus 23:27-32).

But almost immediately following the Day of Atonement God required the Israelites to keep another seven days. The Day of Atonement was observed on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the fifteenth day of the seventh month began the Feast of Tabernacles, which was to be kept for seven days "*unto the LORD*". Numerous offerings were made daily, as described in Leviticus 23:33-43; Numbers 29:12-39. This was a feast of gladness, "*ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days*" (Leviticus 23:40), a great contrast to the mourning of the Atonement Day. They were to dwell in booths, the celebration being in memory of their deliverance from Egypt (Leviticus 23:43). Yet the fact of their reconciliation with God a few days previously, and their beginning a new year in the smile of His countenance, must have added greatly to the rejoicings of the feast. It was also a thanksgiving festival, for at that date they would have gathered in the fruit of the land (Leviticus 23:39).

It is not unreasonable to suppose that the apostle, in writing to the Hebrews of Jesus as the all-inclusive antitype of the Day of Atonement sin offerings, now extends his thoughts to this seven day feast of praise and thanksgiving, and shows that we, too, as Christians, have a feast of praise and thanksgiving, not based on the yearly atonement accomplished by the blood of bulls and of goats, but based on the ever-efficacious sacrifice of Jesus, who suffered without the gate in order to sanctify the people, all the people, who now, as soon as they hear and believe, may rejoice continually, and offer praise and thanks to God **by Him**. Not now do we offer so many bullocks, rams, lambs, and goats, with various meat offerings, on each of seven days. Now we offer "*the sacrifice of praise to God continually*". And this "*sacrifice of praise*" consists not of the fruits of our harvests, but of "*the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name* [or, confessing to his name]".

Of course, the apostle does not here mean lip service instead of heart devotion or acts acceptable to God. He is placing "*the fruit of the lips*" as a form of worship acceptable under the New Covenant as instead of the animal and other thank offerings required under the law, and this "*fruit of the lips*" should come from the heart in sincerity, as our Lord expressed it, "*in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:21-24). The prophet Hosea exhorted the Israelites to turn to God and

pledge themselves to render *"the calves of our lips"* (Hosea 14:2). And frequently, even while the Law was in force, God expressed His weariness of animal offerings which had come to mean little to the people, and His preference for the prayers of a contrite heart (Malachi 1:7-10; 3:13,14; Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 57:15).

So now, under the New Covenant, and in the name of Christ, the praises and thanksgivings of the true worshippers are acceptable. Let us be glad and thankful that we are not under the Law, but under grace (Hebrews 10:19-22; Romans 6:15).

Instead of *"giving thanks to his name"*, the Greek literally has it *"confessing to his name"*. This confession would include the giving of thanks for God's favours, but would also include a wide range of activities in His service, such as telling to others the wonderful words of life. In Romans 10:9,10 the open confession of the name of Christ is stated to be as essential to salvation as the belief in the heart. The one follows the other wherever the heart-belief is accompanied by a keen sense of gratitude and duty toward Him who has done so much for us. Ephesians 5:18-20 exhorts the saints that they *"be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the LORD; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"*.

In addition to 'praise' as a sacrifice acceptable to God under the New Covenant, prayer is spoken of as a sacrifice. Under the Law, prayer was offered by the devout at the hour when the smoke of the morning and evening sacrifice of lambs ascended. Now, as Christians, our prayers, as well as our praise, are acceptable at any hour when offered **through Him**. Prayer may include praise and thanksgiving, but is usually a form of petition, a presenting of requests, as in 'the Lord's prayer' (Matthew 6:9-13).

John's vision (Revelation 8:3,4) pictures the prayers of the saints as ascending with the incense offered by an angel with a golden censer. This, in harmony with Hebrews 13:15, we take to represent Christ Jesus, in His mediatorial capacity rendering our imperfect prayers acceptable to God. The 'incense' being burned upon coals from the 'altar' upon which His sacrifice of Himself was made represents the importance attached by both God and Christ to the sacrifice on the cross as the basis upon which alone worship is acceptable.

### **To Do Good and to Communicate**

**13:16** *"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."* Here another form of acceptable sacrifice is brought to our attention. Praise and prayer, the fruit of the lips, are good, but not the only desirable form of worship. Doing good to others is also an acceptable 'sacrifice' to God. Sometimes doing good to others involves self denial and other forms of self-sacrifice, but not always. Often it is a pleasure to serve the brethren, for *"it is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 8:9-15). But that makes the service no less a 'sacrifice'.

We have to remember that 'sacrifice' is here used of offerings brought to God as worship. This passage therefore teaches that God accepts kindnesses shown to others in Jesus' name as worship towards Himself. (Compare with Matthew 10:40-42.) When our Lord Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us, that service ascended to God *"for a sweet-smelling savour"* (Ephesians 5:2). Done in His name, and with the same spirit of love, our kind acts also ascend as a sweet-smelling savour to God.

The good we are to do is limited only by our time and opportunities, Paul tells us, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Galatians 6:10). The *"household of faith"* have first claim upon our time and means; after that the calls of others should be acceded to as far as possible. *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world"* (James 1:27).

The communication mentioned may refer to either temporal or spiritual aid, *"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things"* (Galatians 6:6). The apostle considered it only reasonable that those who spent their lives in giving out spiritual good things should receive in return temporal things, at least to the extent of their necessities (1 Corinthians 9:11-14).

Nevertheless, he did not permit their carelessness or indifference to discourage him from going on with his preaching and travelling. That he carried on as his commission from God. Yet we may surmise that some day the Corinthians and others who allowed the apostle to suffer

hunger and other hardships while they had the means to supply him will feel very much ashamed. His tender feeling for the Philippians was partly due to the fact that they frequently sent supplies when others nearer at hand failed to do so. This kindness of theirs he described as *“an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God”*, and he was confident that God, who appreciated their action, would richly supply all their need (Philippians 4:15-19).

Communicating in spiritual things is also important, in some respects even more important than relieving physical distress. The latter aid is at best of temporary benefit, while the communicating of spiritual things may prove of everlasting worth, inasmuch as eternal life and even joint heir-ship with Christ are brought within reach by the preaching of the gospel (Acts 10:22; 11:14; Romans 1:16,17; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). Brethren already established upon the one foundation have the privilege of building one another up on the most holy faith by conversation and Bible study, and a leader (of humble mind) may learn from the less eloquent members should the latter chance to be the better informed on some points (as was the case with Apollos) (Acts 18:24-28).

Paul, when he had something to communicate to those who were apostles before him, did so privately out of consideration for their feelings, and in order that all might the more effectively co-operate together in the great work which they recognised to be God's and not their own (Galatians 2:2,9; Acts 15).

### **They Watch for Your Souls**

**13:17** *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”* One method of doing good was to act considerately toward *“them that have the rule over you”*. Twice within a few paragraphs Paul reminds the Hebrew Christians of the correct attitude toward their leaders or guides in the Christian way. In verse 7 it was to *“remember”* them; here it is to *“obey them”*, and *“submit yourselves”*.

Under the Law they yielded obedience to Moses and to the scribes and Pharisees who sat in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2,3). But now they were to recognise new teachers, Christ the great Teacher, and after Him the apostles and disciples whom He sent out as His messengers. The Hebrew Christians were in some danger of being subverted by false teachers, who insisted they should still keep the Law, besides which there were other *“divers and strange doctrines”* being circulated, of which they should beware (verse 9). Confidence in the brethren who had taught them the truth, and who were still serving them with *“meat in due season”*, was essential to their safety. Among these faithful teachers Paul would include himself, Timothy, Titus, and others who had demonstrated by years of devotion that they were not self-seekers, but truly self-sacrificing in the interest of the various churches they visited (1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 8:22-24).

The obedience and submission to leaders here enjoined are not abject slavery and blind surrender of the mind and reason, such as false teachers exact from their followers (2 Corinthians 11:13,20; 2 Peter 2:18,19), but rather a giving of intelligent adherence to them as God's spokesmen. Every believer is confronted sooner or later with the necessity of choosing between one and another public exponent of scripture. No one rises up and says, I am a teacher of error, therefore follow me. On the contrary, each presents his teaching as the truth, and it is for those who hear to decide whether it is truth or not.

When the apostle wrote, he and others had been demonstrated by infallible signs to be God's mouthpieces. The brethren had recognised them as such, and had accepted their teaching as of God. The apostles therefore were worthy of their utmost confidence as inspired leaders.

But there were also local leaders who had been set over them by the apostles and evangelists (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). When these had been proved as loyal and faithful, they also were to be accepted as God's mouthpieces, and when it came to a question as between one of these and the teachers of *“another gospel”*, of *“divers and strange doctrines”* (verse 9; Galatians 1:6-9), the brethren should stand by the proved teacher who was in harmony with the inspired apostles.

This would constitute obedience and submission, and a willingness to be led, and is the safe course, particularly for the young and inexperienced who might otherwise be deceived by the *“good words and fair speeches”* of those wolves in sheep's clothing, or emissaries of Satan appearing as angels of light (Matthew 7:16; 2 Corinthians 11:14,15). To set aside leaders who fulfil the requirements of 1 Timothy 3:1-13 in favour of untried strangers, however

plausible, would be folly indeed. Yet that is exactly what some of the brethren in the early church did. They despised Paul and ran after the enemies of the cross. The lesson is there for the Church all down the age. Let us be true to the apostles and to those who hold the true apostolic teaching (1 Timothy 4:15,16; 6:3-5).

Such true teachers “*watch for your souls*”. Their motive is your welfare. They want you to run with patience and gain the prize. Whether you like it or not, they feel toward you as a father, or mother, or nurse (1 Corinthians 4:14,15; 2 Corinthians 6:11-18; 12:14,15). They have a responsibility they cannot (and would not) shirk, and all they ask is that their loving care be appreciated. They are like stewards who must give an account. What joy to be able to point to this one and that one as faithful and reliable. What grief (Greek, ‘groaning’) when a loved brother or sister grows cold and drifts away, or is ensnared in the net of false guides. To give a leader grief, or cause for groaning, is “*unprofitable for you*”. It is your loss if you spurn the helping hand of a leader worthy of the name. (Compare with 2 Corinthians 12:20,21.)

### **Pray for One Another**

**13:18** “*Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.*” Yes, Paul was thinking of himself, as well as of the tried and true local leaders or guides, “*Pray for us*”. With what yearning had he written this wonderful epistle, giving the brethren everywhere unmistakable landmarks and guide posts in his comparisons and contrasts concerning the Law and the gospel. With what patience had he referred to countless details as well as the great outstanding features which would enable them to abide by the teaching, received indeed from him, but sent out by the Son of God from heaven (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Their sympathetic interest would be shown by their prayers for him, and he would be comforted thereby. His most earnest wish was for utterance, that he might speak the word with holy boldness and power, and such a prayer for him would be the delight of the Church in every place (Colossians 4:3,4).

So greatly had his character and motives been mis- represented, however, that Paul felt continually the necessity for commending himself to the goodwill of the brethren. Yet he always spoke of himself in a modest way, “*for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly*”. Their prayers were not asked because of vainglorious achievements, but because he was honest and faithful. The Greek word here rendered “*honestly*” is in several places rendered ‘well’, for example, 1 Timothy 3:4,12,13; 5:17; James 2:8,19; 2 Peter 1:19.

Paul’s conscience was “*good*” because he was instructed by the Lord and sincerely sought to regulate his life by the divine will, hence was incapable of the craftiness and deceit which characterised the enemies of the cross. He was worthy of their confidence and deserving of their prayers.

A somewhat similar defence was made to the Thessalonians, “*For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts*” (1 Thessalonians 2:3,4). Absence of guile was characteristic of our blessed Lord, in whose footsteps the Church are called to walk. All malice and guile are to be laid aside when we become His followers (1 Peter 2:1,22).

In this respect God’s requirements have not changed from those issued under the Jewish Law (Psalm 34:12; 1 Peter 3:10). By guile is meant deceit and treachery, and the corresponding verb means to decoy, deceive, entrap.

How does this agree with 2 Corinthians 12:16, “*being crafty, I caught you with guile*”? Some translators insert “*it is said*” to clarify the meaning, “*But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless [it is said] being crafty [or cunning] I caught you with guile [or, by artifice]*”. (See Variorum and Diaglott.) This is Paul’s answer to critics (2 Corinthians 10:2), “*some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh*”. The “*flesh*” represents selfishness and greed.

But Paul did not so walk among them. Neither directly, nor indirectly through Titus or other helpers, did he practise deceit or make gain of them (2 Corinthians 12:14-19). He says, “*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, in wonders, in mighty deeds*” (2 Corinthians 10:12). No craft, cunning, or guile in these open manifestations of divine power, or in his 18 months’ ministry among them, working with his own hands (Acts 18:1-6,11; 20:33-35). “*For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward*” (2 Corinthians 1:12).

**13:19** The 'Emphatic Diaglott' rendering, "*But more especially I entreat you to do this* [that is, 'pray for us'], *so that I may more speedily be restored to you*", is clearer than the KJV. The apostle desired their prayers in general, but he felt the limitations of his imprisonment, his inability to travel about from place to place instructing and encouraging the believers. Doubtless he would feel a desire to declare to them by word of mouth the great truths set forth in this epistle. To be "*restored to them the sooner*" would mean that God would answer their prayers to the extent of shortening his term of detention at Rome.

By the Roman authorities he was permitted to live "*two whole years in his own hired house*", with the privilege of receiving "*all that came in unto him*" (Acts 28:30,31), but there is no scriptural record of his being set at liberty. It is thought by some commentators that he was released at the close of the two years, and that he spent several years visiting the various churches, after which he was again apprehended and suffered martyrdom under Nero. Other commentators place his martyrdom at the close of the two years referred to in Acts 28. There seems to be no way of determining beyond doubt which of these views is correct.

At any rate, whatever may have been the inconvenience to Paul, and the deprivation of the churches by the cessation of his personal visits, the Church at large, and all down the age, was and is the richer for the epistles written during his imprisonment. The Lord who watches over all the interests of His Church may have given him the leisure at Rome which he would not otherwise have taken, filled as he was with love and zeal repeatedly to visit and build up the various assemblies (Romans 15:15-32), even as He later permitted the apostle John to be banished to Patmos, there to receive for the whole Church that final Revelation so necessary to their comfort and assistance during the long years of tribulation which lay before them.

**13:20** "*Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant*", is the final reminder of the contrast between the Law Covenant, under which the Hebrews were born, and the New Covenant, into which they had entered, receiving the forgiveness of their sins with a completeness impossible under the Law.

God is invoked as the God of peace, rather than the God of love or of power, because through that New Covenant peace, everlasting peace, was made possible between Him and the believing Israelites. He it was who "*raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead*" (Romans 4:24), and set Him at His own right hand, there to officiate as Mediator, Advocate, Intercessor, and in the many other offices indicated by the numerous titles He now holds. Jesus did not raise himself from the dead. His death as a sacrifice for sins was no pretence; it was real; and, being real, He was unable to raise himself. Everywhere we are assured that the Father raised Him by his own power (Acts 2:32; 1 Corinthians 15:15).

The Lord's resurrection was a proof that His death came through no sin in himself. Had He sinned, death would have been His due punishment forever. But death had no rightful claim upon Him. It pleased God to accept the offering of His perfect human body as the satisfactory propitiation for sin, and the validity and permanency of that offering were in no wise disturbed by His resurrection in the divine image and His exaltation to the divine throne.

### **That Great Shepherd of the Sheep**

While on earth our Lord called himself "*the good Shepherd*" (John 10:14). He was the one who entered by the door into the Jewish sheepfold, meeting all the requirements of prophecy as to birth and lineage, and was so recognised by John the Baptist, the porter, who opened the door by announcing Him to the Jews as the Messiah. He called His own sheep, and led them forth out of the Law Covenant fold into the New Covenant Fold. Others also, "*not of this fold* [Jewish]" He was to bring into that new fold, but during His ministry He called Jews only (John 10:16). It was not until after His death that the "*other sheep*" from among the Gentiles were called. His title of Shepherd of the sheep is therefore not limited to the few years of His earthly ministry.

Besides which, various prophecies concerning the Shepherd were not wholly fulfilled during His earthly life, hence remained to be fulfilled after His resurrection, such as Ezekiel 34:20-31; 37:24, where kingship is associated with the "*one shepherd*" foretold. True, our Lord on earth was king of the Jews, and heir of David's throne, but He did not to any great extent exercise that authority, and in death He renounced it entirely. But He received authority as King at His resurrection, at which time also He became "*that great Shepherd of the sheep*", as Hebrews 13:20 states.

The apostle Peter also applies the title Shepherd to our Lord in His present kingly position, saying, *"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls"* (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4).

### **The Everlasting Covenant**

To what covenant does the apostle refer as the *"everlasting"* covenant? A covenant is an agreement or contract. God entered into several distinct covenants, according to the Old Testament records. In some cases the party of the second part was included without volition on their part, as where, after the flood, God included *"every living creature of all flesh"* in the agreement that *"the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh"* (Genesis 9:8-17). God alone 'established' this covenant, for it is obvious that neither Noah nor the lower creation could assist either in bringing about or preventing a repetition of the flood. Of this sort, also, was the covenant with David guaranteeing him an heir to the throne (2 Samuel 7:18-29), and referred to in Acts 13:34 as *"the sure mercies of David"*.

In other cases the covenant between God and a human being contained conditions to be fulfilled, God proposing the covenant, and the other party agreeing to enter into its terms and conditions. Of such were the covenant with Abraham, and the covenant with Israel at Sinai.

Thus we have four great covenants brought to our notice in the Old Testament: (1) the covenant with Noah; (2) the covenant with Abraham; (3) the covenant with Israel at Sinai; (4) the covenant with King David. Did the apostle in the passage we are now considering refer to any of these as the *"everlasting covenant"*?

Of these four covenants, three may rightly be called everlasting in that they have not been abrogated or repudiated. The covenant with Noah was to endure as long as the earth endured and was inhabited, and that, other scriptures show, shall be to all eternity, for the earth is man's everlasting home (Genesis 8:21,22; 9:1-17; Isaiah 45:18). In Genesis 9:16 this covenant with Noah is called *"the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth"*. But this cannot be the everlasting covenant of Hebrews 13:20, because our Lord Jesus did not become the great Shepherd of the sheep through that covenant, neither can that covenant be said to operate in believers now as required by verse 21.

The covenant with Abraham was also an everlasting covenant. God has not repudiated it, but has faithfully carried out and will carry out its provisions according to His word and oath. Abraham observed his part of the agreement by removing to Canaan and remaining a wanderer in it in full faith that the land should be his. And that land shall yet be given him in the resurrection (Genesis 12:1-8; 13:14-17; Acts 7:2-5; Hebrews 11:8-10,39,40).

That part of the covenant pertaining to the Seed through whom all the families of the earth should be blest God has also kept, His well beloved and only begotten Son Jesus being the Seed of the promise, as stated by the apostle Paul (Galatians 3:16; 4:4), and the blessing through Him as the Seed began at Pentecost, said Peter (Acts 3:25,26). That blessing has been proceeding upon all who accept Christ as the true Seed (Galatians 3:14), and shall continue until all the families of the earth have received their blessing (John 1:9; Habakkuk 2:14; Isaiah 9:6,7; 42:4). A covenant fulfilled in its every detail by the contracting parties well deserves the description of *"everlasting"*.

But the Abrahamic covenant cannot be the *"everlasting covenant"* referred to in Hebrews 13:20, because it was not the blood of that covenant that made Jesus Christ the great Shepherd of the sheep. The blood of the Abrahamic covenant was the blood of the animals over whose carcasses the agreement was ratified (Genesis 15:9-21), and the blood of those animals did no more than ratify that particular instrument. Moreover, it was not by that blood of the Abrahamic covenant that Jesus entered heaven as our great High Priest, but *"by his own blood"*, shed on the cross (Hebrews 9:12).

The later oath (Genesis 22:15-18; Hebrews 6:13-15) was God's guarantee of the fulfilment of His promise that in Abraham's Seed all nations should be blest, but the covenant itself was ineffective as a means of blessing, there being no provision in it for the forgiveness of sin, the great essential to blessing. Yet in Hebrews 13:21 the covenant referred to not only secured for Jesus His position as the *"great Shepherd of the sheep"*, but also was able to *"make you perfect in every good work to do his will"* (verse 21). Some other than the Abrahamic covenant is evidently required by the apostle's words.

Coming now to the Law Covenant, we enquire, was it an *"everlasting"* covenant? No time limit was set when at Sinai the covenant was entered into, and ratified by blood, as

described in Exodus 24. The Jews evidently thought it was forever, for our Lord during His ministry could not persuade the majority of His hearers that its term was drawing to a close. Yet its end was inevitable, since at no time did the children of Israel live up to their part of the contract.

It became then only a matter of God's long suffering and patience in continuing His part of the covenant, so far as their rebelliousness would permit (Romans 10:19-21).

Exodus 40:15 and Numbers 25:13 describe the priesthood under the Law as "*everlasting*", but in this case everlasting (Hebrew 'olam') must be considered in its more limited sense, namely, 'continuous'. The priesthood could last no longer than the Law which constituted it. That the Law came to an end, being nailed to the cross, the scriptures assert, hence it cannot claim the title "*everlasting covenant*".

Moreover, it was not by the blood of the Law Covenant that Jesus attained His present high position as the "*great Shepherd of the sheep*". Nor was it by the ratifying blood of the Law Covenant, or by any blood shed according to the Levitical ritual, that believers could be made "*perfect in every good work to do his will*".

This disposes of all four of the principal covenants recorded as having been established by God in Old Testament times. None of these fills the requirements of Hebrews 13:20,21.

We must observe, however, that God caused the prophet Jeremiah to foretell a New Covenant different from the Law Covenant, and adequate for man's needs because containing provision for the forgiveness of sins (Jeremiah 31:29-34). Does this New Covenant answer the requirements? Is it an "*everlasting*" covenant? Was it by the blood of that new covenant that Jesus attained the title "*great Shepherd*"? Is it by the blood of that New Covenant that believers are made "*perfect in every good work to do his will*"?

Yes, to all these questions. The New Covenant answers the requirements of our text. The New Covenant is an "*everlasting covenant*" in the absolute sense. The parties to the Covenant, God on the one side and repentant believers on the other, are able to fulfil the terms of the covenant. It was ratified by the blood of Jesus, and so it became operative as an instrument of blessing, the benefits being experienced by the believers addressed by the apostle in this epistle, as well as by believers elsewhere.

Our Lord declared His blood to be the blood of the New Covenant, for the forgiveness of sins. And it was by His blood, as the blood of atonement, that He entered heaven, there to appear in the presence of God on behalf of all for whom the blood was shed, as well as to become the Great Shepherd and Bishop of their souls (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:16; 1:3; 9:24). It was the "lamb as it had been slain" that was seen in the throne (Revelation 5:6). Through the blood of the New Covenant, the precious blood of Christ, believers are brought nigh, and made at peace with God (Ephesians 2:13-18; Romans 5:1). Through that blood, and that blood alone, they are also being sanctified, perfected forever (Hebrews 10:14), and being perfected "*in every good work to do his will*" (verse 21). (See comment in chapter 10, "*perfected forever them that are being sanctified*".)

### **God Works through His Son Jesus**

It will be observed that above we have treated the last phrase of verse 20, "*through the blood of the everlasting covenant*", as explanatory both of the means by which Jesus became the "*great Shepherd*" (verse 20), and of the means by which the will of God is accomplished in the believer (verse 21).

But from the construction of the passage we believe Paul had in mind the first of these two explanations, namely, that Jesus Christ was made "*the great Shepherd of the sheep*" because He had in the first instance laid down His life for them; His blood, thus shed, being at the same time the ratifying blood of the New Covenant, the propitiation for our sins, and the purchase-price for the race of mankind. "*To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.*" "*The Son of man came ... to give his life a ransom for many*" Romans 14:9; Matthew 20:28).

Thus "*the God of peace*" worked through His Son to effect reconciliation between Himself and mankind. *This is also stated in 2 Corinthians 5:19, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself".* Not that He is now reconciled to all the world, unrepentant sinners as well as believers, as some think this passage teaches, but that in Christ He has made provision for the reconciling to Himself of all who are willing to be reconciled when the knowledge of His great love is made known to them.



### **What is the New Covenant?**

The New Covenant is the Instrument, the *modus operandi*, by which this reconciling work is being carried out, and under which the reconciling work will continue to be carried out until every human being has been brought to the knowledge of its gracious terms and has had the opportunity to accept them.

The New Covenant, as defined in Jeremiah 31:33,34, was an expression of God's purpose to put His law into the hearts and minds of His people, to be their God, and to forgive their iniquities and sins. It was to be different from the Law Covenant given through Moses. That God would require, before this New Covenant could go into effect, the blood of His own Son to ratify it, as well as to be the blood of atonement, was not made clear in the Old Testament. Nor was it clear what "*law*" should be written in the mind and heart.

These things were made plain by our Lord during His ministry and by the apostles subsequently. The Sermon on the Mount was His first public utterance designed to show the difference between the Law Covenant and the New Covenant. For example, the Law of Moses said, "*Thou shalt not kill*", and took notice only of actual murder.

But the New Covenant takes note of the thoughts of the heart, and condemns as murder anger against a brother (Matthew 5:21-24). Other differences between the Law Covenant and the New Covenant are given in 2 Corinthians 3.

The one was unto death, the other is unto life. The Law was written on tables of stone, the New Covenant requirements are being written on believers' hearts. All the admonitions to holiness, meekness and goodness contained in our Lord's words and the apostolic epistles, as well as the example He and they set, indicate that the character of God is the standard of righteousness under the New Covenant, all the commands to do this and not to do that being to the intent that the forgiven believer may know what to avoid as sin and what to cultivate as righteousness (Matthew 5:45,48; Philippians 2:15).

But before character development as one of the people of God can take place in an individual, that individual must acknowledge himself as a sinner and receive forgiveness of sins. This is shown in the wording of the covenant, called (Hebrews 8:6) "*a better covenant, which was established upon better promises*", the "*better promises*" being defined in Hebrews 8:10-12 (quoted from Jeremiah), as follows:

1. I will put my laws into their mind;
  2. and write them in their hearts;
  3. and I will be to them a God;
  4. and they shall be to me a people;
  5. they .... all shalt know me
- [that is, all who become His people].

All these blessings, however, are dependent upon the next promise, as shown by its introduction with the word "*For*":

6. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness,  
and their sins and their iniquities  
will I remember no more.

Mercy was exhibited in the giving of His only begotten Son as the perfect sacrifice for sin, and in the provision of His blood as the ratifying blood of this New Covenant. But there is nothing to show that sins are forgiven unconditionally. Throughout the ministries of our Lord and the apostles the people were continually called upon to repent in order that they might receive the forgiveness God was willing to grant. And those who repented and were forgiven then came in line to receive the other five promises of the covenant.

### **Individual Dealings**

All the gospel teaching shows that under the New Covenant God deals with individuals who come unto Him through Jesus, whom He had appointed as the only way of approach (John 14:6; 12:32,33). The New Covenant is a statement, as already said above, of God's purpose to grant certain blessings, but instead of being imposed upon a whole nation, as was the Jewish Covenant, it becomes a personal covenant or contract with each individual who accepts it.

This wonderful New Covenant, opened up and made operative by our blessed Lord, is still open to every sincere penitent, and we trust that these remarks on the subject will be the

means, by God's favour, of encouraging sinners to come to God through Christ, asking for forgiveness, and accepting it, in Jesus' name. On being forgiven, the other promises begin to be fulfilled to us. Writing the law on our minds and hearts is a figurative way of saying that we shall be taught God's will by His Holy Spirit and word so effectively that daily progress will be made in the doing of it. Constant meditation on God's precepts and daily practice thereof will make righteousness a habit, and thus the likeness of God will be worked out in our characters, and we shall be sons in fact as well as in name (Romans 8:14-17).

**13:21** To this individual dealing under the New Covenant the apostle refers when he says, *"Now the God of peace ... make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."* *"The God of peace ... working in you ... through Jesus Christ."* God is our God, and we are His people. God is our Father, and we are His sons. Yet all the operations of God in us are *"through Jesus Christ"*.

The same thought, of Jesus as the one through whom God works in us, is expressed in the conclusion of 2 Corinthians 3, after describing the superiority of the New Covenant over the Law Covenant, *"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord [or, of the Lord the Spirit]."* This also shows the method of the transformation of character: Beholding the beautiful character of our Lord Jesus, the New Covenant people seek to imitate His virtues. Growing daily more like the Lord Jesus, they become the more like the Heavenly Father.

Our Lord's chief delight was to do His Father's will. He is therefore well qualified to assist us to delight therein. Nothing is *"well pleasing in his sight"* but the good and true, the holy walk and conversation. Truly a great change is required in every one of us, a radical change in the thoughts of the mind, as well as in the actions resulting from the thoughts, for *"out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh"* (Matthew 12:33-37; Luke 6:43-45).

So to transform those who were once *"enemies in your mind by wicked works"*, and *"dead in trespasses and sins"* (Colossians 1:21; Ephesians 2:1-5), that they shall delight to do God's will, is a most wonderful *"work"*, and here it is said that God does this through Jesus Christ. This 'work' is also referred to in Philippians 2:13, *"For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"*, and in Romans 12:2, *"transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove [by performance of it] what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God"*.

### **Make You Perfect**

Perfection may well be ascribed to God. Christ also is perfect, and was so while on earth, not having sinned (Deuteronomy 32:4; James 1:17; 1 Peter 2:22). Perfection is set before us as a thing to be attained as a result of God working in us through Jesus Christ and by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

In the present life we cannot expect to attain to it fully, owing to the inherent weakness of the flesh. Yet we should not be satisfied with less. If our aim be high, *"looking unto Jesus"*, we shall come nearer the mark than if we aim low. For while God does the working by His word and Spirit and providence, and through Jesus Christ, it remains for each of us to make personal effort, as those scriptures teach which exhort us to *"walk in love"*, *"run with patience"*, and *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"*. *"Be ye perfect"* and *"Be ye holy"* also indicate that we must put forth effort, as well as those passages which exhort us to put off the deeds of the *"old man"*, and define for our instruction the *"works of the flesh"* which are opposed to God's will and therefore are not to be indulged in, but mortified or put to death (Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 12:1; Philippians 2:12; Colossians 3:5).

Perfection may also be considered in a relative sense. A child may be 'perfect' in its spelling lesson, but that does not mean that it can spell all the words in the dictionary. It means that it has spelled correctly the words selected for that particular lesson or examination. Looking at ourselves as pupils in the school of Christ, we have from day to day certain tasks, trials, and testing given to us.

Say we 'do the best we can' to discharge every duty and cultivate every grace. That, under the New Covenant, is accepted as *"perfect"*, provided it all be *"mixed with faith"*, because the faith is *"counted for righteousness"* quite apart from the degree of actual perfection attained (Hebrews 4:2; Romans 4:22-25).

It is, then, not a question of becoming organically perfect as human beings, or absolutely pure and holy as was our Lord while on earth, but perfect in the sense of doing God's will, and His will includes the faith as the compensating factor in our daily attempts to please and honour Him. By works is our faith made manifest. Without the endeavour to reach as near perfection as possible, our professions of faith are vain (James 2:16-26). Vain also are the works without the faith. But faith and works united in our daily experiences in the school of Christ constitute us 'perfect' for that day, all mistakes being forgiven when we confess them (1 John 1:9), and forgive others (Matthew 6:14,15). Each day must be lived by itself. The careless and faithless will go from bad to worse (unless they repent and turn again), while the attentive and faithful will grow in grace and knowledge and in ability to do God's will (2 Peter 1:3-7; 3:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15,16). *"The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you"* (1 Peter 5:10). The suffering assists the work of perfecting (Hebrews 5:8; 12:5-11).

*"To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."* All the praise, all the credit, for our salvation and development in His likeness; all the glory and praise for raising up His Son to be the great Shepherd of the sheep, are due to our heavenly Father, who, seeing man's desperate need for deliverance from sin and death, *"so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"*.

One thought more on the comparisons and contrasts between the Law Covenant and the New Covenant, before we leave the subject. The Law Covenant contained many promises of what God would do as the party of the first part. But it contained also many pages of commandments and ordinances concerning the minutest affairs of daily life, which it was compulsory on the people, the party of the second part, to perform in order that they might gain the life and other rewards promised.

The failure of the people released God from His voluntary obligations. Nevertheless, out of His abundant love and grace He did carry out some of them, overlooking much of their backsliding and stiff-neckedness. Their failure demonstrated that there was no help in man, that man could not keep a perfect law, for even those who loved God and sought to obey Him found the requirements of the Law beyond their ability (Romans 7:12-24).

In contrast, the New Covenant, as briefly defined in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8, says nothing at all as to what man shall do. It tells only of what God had determined to do. True, those who would have the benefit of the New Covenant must comply with certain conditions and gratefully accept God's arrangements, but these conditions are so easy, so well within the ability of the very weakest to comply with, that we may say, as the gospel song says, 'salvation is free'. We do not earn it; we simply accept it.

We do not forgive our own sins. God forgives them. We do not write His laws on our own minds and hearts. God writes them. We do not provide the true light which lightens every man that cometh into the world, so that the time is coming when the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. God provided that true Light and every other requisite to salvation. All we do is to accept for ourselves what God has arranged to do for all who are willing to accept it. How simple, how loving, how grand! ***"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"*** (Acts 16:31).

Thus when we hear the gospel we become a contracting party in the New Covenant the moment we exercise faith in the Lord Jesus, whether we understand all about the New Covenant and God's plans in general or not. What we do not know to begin with the Lord Jesus will teach us as we continue in the school and obey the instruction of the Great Teacher, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Under that training and discipline the doing of God's will becomes a pleasure (albeit for a time it may seem grievous), and the more we learn of His love and mercy the more we love Him and desire to be like Him. This is the true spirit of sonship, whereby we may know that we are His sons, and may cry confidently, Abba, Father (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 5:3).

**13:22** That the great apostle should conclude his wonderful epistle to the Hebrews with a sort of apology is another indication of his humble spirit. In it he felt called upon to reprove them, or some of them, for slow progress or even backsliding, but he was hopeful that, having already suffered much for Christ's sake, they would revive their faith and activities. Surely the knowledge that he wrote from love and to do them genuine service would heal any wound, and they would be thankful for his *"word of exhortation"*.

The epistle to the Hebrews was one of his longest letters, yet he calls it *"in few words"*, doubtless having in mind the importance and immensity of the subject. Doubtless, also, his comments on other details of the tabernacle and its service, of which he *"could not speak particularly"* (9:2-5), would have been interesting and edifying, had he lengthened the letter.

But he confined himself to the main features, which had to do with his purpose of comparing the Law Covenant and its mediator with the New Covenant and its Mediator, and showing the superiority of the latter in every respect.

We could wish that he were here to-day to furnish us with his comments on his own letter, or, shall we say, with the Holy Spirit's comments. But the Holy Spirit, which is still the Guide of the Church, can still elucidate what the apostle wrote under inspiration, and it is our hope and prayer that that guidance has been ours. May the same Holy Spirit guide each reader of these pages into a correct understanding of the word of truth, and may we all with one mind continue steadfast therein.

**13:23** Timothy had been with Paul in captivity, but had been set at liberty, and was the bearer of this epistle to the Hebrew brethren. Apparently it was Paul's intention, on Timothy's return, to revisit them, and further explain the matters dealt with. On account of defective eyesight Paul, it is thought, usually employed an amanuensis, and Timothy was probably so employed in the present instance, while a fellow prisoner at Rome.

**13:24** It was usual then, as now, to close letters with greetings to friends and brethren. No individuals are named, as in other of his epistles. The greeting shows he intended his letter for the Hebrew brethren generally, and not for the leaders only, since he here exhorts them to salute for him *"them that have the rule over you,"* that is, their leaders. (Compare with 1 Corinthians 16:15,16.) The brethren of Italy joined Paul in sending greetings to all.

**13:25** Perhaps with a desire not to unduly lengthen the letter, Paul concludes with one of the briefest benedictions, *"Grace be with you all. Amen"*.

## Chapter 14

### ATONEMENT SACRIFICES

Mere speculation on the significance of the tabernacle types has become all too common among Christians, and also a tendency to make specific types out of every detail of its furnishings and ornamentation. We should not like to be deprived, nor to deprive others, of any useful lesson contained in such details, but we believe it safe to follow the New Testament precedent and regard as types only those things which the Lord and His apostles referred to as such. Useful lessons may be drawn from hundreds of events and circumstances of Old Testament times which are by no means types. The evil doings of the children of Israel in the wilderness, for instance, were to be regarded as examples, or samples, of what we should avoid (1 Corinthians 10:6-12). But an example is not necessarily a type.

In modern printing a piece of metal having at one end the form of a letter such as a, b, c, called a 'type'. It is fixed in form, and with every use makes the same impression. So God caused the children of Israel to crystallise certain forms and ceremonies and repeat them for centuries in exactly the same way. When Moses was commissioned to build the tabernacle he was told, "*See that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount*" (Hebrews 8:5; Exodus 25:40). Any priest who departed from the prescribed ceremonial was liable to death, as when Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered the strange fire, that is, fire not taken from the brazen altar as required by the ordinance (Leviticus 10:1-3,9; Exodus 28:43; 30:18-21,33,38; Numbers 4:15,20). The Levites were to keep to their particular sphere and duties, under penalty of death if they trespassed on the priests' functions (Numbers 18:1-3).

It must also be remembered that the antitype, and not the type, is the important thing. In the preceding chapters, as no doubt the reader has observed, we allowed the Epistle to the Hebrews not only to explain the antitypes, but to point out to us just what persons and ceremonies under the ritual of the Law were to be regarded as the corresponding types. By so doing we found, moreover, that while the apostle pointed out some very striking comparisons or resemblances between antitype and type, he also pointed out numerous contrasts or differences. Thus his exposition bore out his statement in 10:1 that the shadows of the Law were not the very image of the things they foreshadowed. To give a very simple illustration, the lamb offered in sacrifice was not the 'very image' of Christ the antitype. But in the light of the New Testament explanations we can see that in certain characteristics, "*without blemish and without spot*", the innocent lamb very vividly typified the innocent Son of God sacrificed for our sins (1 Peter 1:18-19).

#### The Tabernacle and Its Service

The tabernacle structure was so constructed of boards fitted into sockets that it could be easily taken down and re-erected on a new site. This was often done in the course of the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, Aaron and his sons being charged with the duty of superintending such removal, and with its care when set up in its new place.

The court of the tabernacle was enclosed ground surrounding it, and was required to be a hundred cubits long from east to west, and fifty cubits broad from north to south. To the height of five cubits on every side it was enclosed with curtains of fine twined linen, hung from brazen pillars, either stretched across or run on silver rods reaching all along from pillar to pillar. The pillars were set in sockets of brass, twenty pillars on the north and south sides, and ten pillars on the east and west ends. The entrance into the court was in the centre of the east end, and was twenty cubits wide. It was closed by a hanging "*of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework*", hung from four pillars, and it could be drawn up by means of cords.

The tabernacle stood in the centre of the west end of the court, and faced the east. It was made of boards of shittim wood overlaid with gold. When set up it was thirty cubits long, ten broad, and ten high. It had five pillars at the east end. The whole framework was covered with curtains of different materials, one over the other, which effectually excluded the light of day. The under covering was of fine linen curtains; the next over it, curtains of goats' hair; the next, coverings of rams' skins; the next and outermost, coverings of badgers' skins. The east end or entrance was closed by fine specially woven linen curtains attached to the five pillars. This was the 'door' of the tabernacle or tent.

The inside of the tabernacle was divided by a curtain into two apartments, the one at the entrance being 20 cubits long and 10 wide. The inner apartment was exactly 10 x 10 x 10 cubits. The curtain separating these two apartments was called *"the veil"*, and sometimes *"the second veil"* (Exodus 26:31-33). These two apartments are called by different names in the scriptures, but for purposes of clarity we will adhere to two of these terms, *"the holy"* to signify the first and larger apartment, and *"the most holy"* to designate the smaller, inner apartment (Exodus 26:33,34). The latter the apostle sometimes called "the holiest of all" (Hebrews 9:1-5,8).

The altar of burnt offering, or brazen altar, stood in the court in a line between the entrance and the door of the tabernacle. Between the brazen altar and the door stood the laver, at which the priests washed before making offerings at the altar, or going into the tabernacle (Exodus 30:17-21). In the tabernacle proper, the first apartment, *"the holy"*, contained the table of shewbread on the right, the seven-branched golden candlestick or lampstand on the left, and the golden altar of incense just in front of the veil separating the two apartments. In the second apartment, *"the most holy"*, stood the ark of the covenant (Exodus 40:20-32). This was a rectangular piece of furniture of shittim wood overlaid with gold, and with a golden lid called *"the mercy seat"*. Two cherubim were made to rise out of this golden lid, one at each end, and looking toward the centre. Here, just over the mercy seat, the presence of God was made manifest by a light, and sometimes also by a cloud covering the ark and the mercy seat. Moses there heard a voice speaking to him (Exodus 25:10-22; Numbers 7:89).

Aaron the high priest and his successors in the high priestly office had full charge of the tabernacle and all its services. Some duties were exclusively reserved for the high priest, such as burning incense on the golden altar morning and evening when he went in to dress the lamps (Exodus 30:7-10; Leviticus 24:1-4). Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy, and that once a year on the Day of Atonement, the exception being in the event of removal, when he went in to cover the ark to protect it from the gaze of the removers. The separation of the tribe of Levi and the various duties assigned Levites as distinguished from priests (who were limited to the sons of Aaron), were commanded by ordinances given through Moses, as related in Numbers 3:1-39; 4:1-49. God Himself ruled the priesthood and all the work of the sanctuary, and this was necessary, since it was His purpose to use Moses and Aaron, priests, Levites, tabernacle, and services, as types of better things to come (Hebrews 8:1-6; 10:1).

Having in mind these general arrangements (aided by the illustrations current among Christians for many years, as representing as nearly as possible the appearance of the tabernacle and its furniture), and having studied the Day of Atonement antitype as expounded by the apostle Paul (Hebrews 9:6-14,21-28; 10:12; 13:11,12), we desire now to examine, in the same way, verse by verse, the account given in Leviticus 16 of the method of procedure to be followed by Aaron and his successors at the typical ceremony.

### **Priestly Responsibility**

**Leviticus 16:1** *"And the LORD spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before the Lord, and died."* To Moses exact instruction had previously been given (Exodus 30:1-10) concerning the golden altar and the use to which it was to be put. The golden altar was to stand in the first apartment of the tabernacle, called *"the holy"*, immediately in front of the veil which shut in the ark of the testimony in the second apartment, or *"most holy"*. The high priest was to burn upon it specially prepared incense morning and evening, as *"a perpetual incense before the LORD"*. Nothing else was to be offered on this altar, the fire for the burning of the *"sweet incense"* being taken from the brazen altar which stood in the 'court' outside the tabernacle structure. Once a year atonement was to be made on this altar by applying the blood of the Atonement Day sacrifices, and at no other time.

The occasion for giving the further instruction of Leviticus 16 was the death of the two sons of Aaron for offering, or attempting to offer, strange fire before the LORD, as related in chapter 10. The objective was to refresh the mind of Aaron the high priest on the particularity of the ritual to be observed on the Day of Atonement, including the offering of incense on the golden altar, that the cloud of incense might cover the Mercy Seat when he entered to sprinkle the atoning blood.

### **The Mercy Seat and the Ark**

**16:2** *"And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat."* The tabernacle was sometimes

called "*the tabernacle of testimony*", or "*witness*" (Numbers 1:53; 18 2). It was a witness or testimony to the children of Israel that God dwelt in their midst and was ready to bless them (Exodus 29:42-46; 40:34-38). On the other hand, it was a witness or testimony against them whenever they sinned, for within the ark was preserved the Law on the two tables of stone, which the people had unanimously promised to "*observe to do*" (Deuteronomy 5).

In 1 Kings 8:9 it states that the ark contained only these two tables, which may have been the case after so many years of half-hearted service and frequent enemy invasions, but from Hebrews 9:4 it would seem that Aaron's rod that budded and a golden pot of manna were originally preserved there. Some commentators, however, gather from Exodus 16:32-34; Numbers 17:10 and Deuteronomy 31:24-26 that "*the book of the law*", that is, the whole of the Law written in books, as well as the rod and the golden pot, was placed in a special and different receptacle in or at the side of the ark, or even before the ark. But it seems more reasonable, and more in harmony with all these statements, to consider that all were placed within the ark, together with the two tables of stone, and while there they were described as "*memorials before the LORD*" that is, memorials in His presence, for His presence was indicated by the shekinah light which shone above the mercy seat. The following description we take from 'Biblical Antiquities':

'At the extreme of the apartment, the western end of the whole tabernacle, rested the Ark of the Covenant. It was in form a box, a cubit and a half broad and high, and two cubits and a half long, made of shittim wood, and covered within and without with the purest gold. Like the table of shewbread and the golden altar, it was crowned with an ornamental border or rim, round about its top. Above upon it was the Mercy Seat. This was made of solid gold of the best sort, exactly answering in length and breadth to the ark, on which it rested as a flat cover or lid, so as completely to close it over. On each end of it was fixed a cherub, wrought in like manner of pure solid gold, rising above it, and overshadowing it with wings.'

The faces of the cherubim were turned inward, and it was from between the cherubim that God gave commandments to Moses by an audible voice, and to the high priest by the Urim and Thummim affixed to the breastplate (Exodus 25:22; 28:15-30; Numbers 27:21).

"*That he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.*" The implication is that, God's presence being manifested in the cloud upon the mercy seat, the high priest should not enter at his own free will or pleasure, but only when God was willing to receive him. Verse 13 describes how on the one day of the year when it was lawful to enter, the high priest must offer incense and wait until the cloud of incense covered the mercy seat, and so the evidence of the divine presence be obscured to his sight.

**16:3** "*Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering.*" But there was more than the offering of incense to precede the high priest's entry into the most holy on the Day of Atonement, for that was the day, alone of all the year, when the high priest was authorised to enter the most holy, the tenth day of the seventh month. An elaborate ceremonial was prescribed. Throughout the year it was the duty of the high priest and the under priests to offer various sacrifices, the morning and evening lambs, the sin, and trespass, and peace offerings, the voluntary gift offerings, vow offerings and burnt offerings. The reader will be repaid by reading the details of these offerings in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Sin and trespass offerings, as well as other offerings, were made on behalf of priests, rulers, individuals among the people, and for the congregation as a whole for particular offences in departing from God (Leviticus chapters 1 to 5). Furthermore, the guilty were required to make restoration with interest, in addition to a prescribed animal offering, before forgiveness was granted (Leviticus 5:14-16; 6:1-7). All these things the priests attended to throughout the year, with the assistance of the Levites.

But on the Day of Atonement the high priest alone officiated, to offer up an atonement for the whole house of Israel, and to cleanse the tabernacle and its furniture from the defilement which God regarded as having resulted from the continual sinning of the people throughout the year, the objective of this thorough cleansing of people and tabernacle being that they might begin a new year without the weight of past sins hanging upon them. As verse 30 states, "*to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD*".

The first duty of the high priest was to provide himself with "*a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering*".

**16:4** *“He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on.”* The linen garments to be worn by the priests when offering sacrifices had been made according to the divine directions given to Moses (Exodus 28:39,42,43; Leviticus 6:10). But before donning these garments Aaron should wash his flesh. They were holy garments, and not to be worn over unclean flesh. Cleanliness of body and clothing was a proper condition for entering upon the solemn duties of the Day of Atonement. These linen garments were white, emblematic of purity.

When about their duties, the priests washed their hands and their feet at the laver in the court (Exodus 30:17-21). Complete body washing and change of garments, such as was required on the Day of Atonement, may have been done more privately, although Exodus 29:4 seems to indicate that when Aaron and his sons were consecrated to the priestly office they washed, or were washed by Moses, at the door of the tabernacle, where the laver stood.

**16:5** *“And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.”* In the meantime the congregation of the children of Israel was to have brought two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. Note that the two kids are described as one sin offering, two kids for a sin offering.

#### **First for His Own Sins**

**16:6** *“And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house.”*

This command concerning Aaron and the sacrifice for his sins has been so misused by some interpreters of types that we trust all students of the scriptures to whom these pages come will give attention to our effort to expound them in harmony with the New Testament explanations, already studied. These explanations show that the type was made to fit the antitype, not the antitype to fit the type, and where the type does not in every respect fit the antitype, the type must be kept within its proper bounds.

It has been asserted that since Aaron had washed his flesh the offering of the bullock could not be for his sins, they having been, they say, symbolically washed away before he put on the linen garments. Such a view flatly contradicts the text itself, which says *“his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself”*. It also contradicts the inspired statements of the apostle, *“which he offered for himself”* (Hebrews 9:7), *“first for his own sins”* (Hebrews 7:27).

Such a view also contradicts Hebrews 9:22, *“without shedding of blood is no remission”*. Compare with Leviticus 17:11, which reads, *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul”*.

The high priest was an imperfect man, liable to err, and as such was in need of atonement to be made for his sins, as verse 6 says, *“and make an atonement for himself”*. The high priest, being the highest official and the one on whom was laid the responsibility of offering the Day of Atonement sacrifices, could not employ another to slay the animal and sprinkle the blood on his behalf. The fact that he did the work himself did not alter the other facts that the bullock was slain for his sins, and that he had committed sins that required this atonement.

Nor should the fact that in some respects Aaron was a type of Christ cause confusion of thought when considering Aaron's personal need of atonement. Moses also was a type of Christ, yet he was a sinful man and required atonement to be made for his sins. The point is that in their own persons neither Moses nor Aaron was a type of Christ. They were types in their official capacity, Moses the mediator, Law-giver, and prophet, and Aaron the high priest (Acts 3:22,23; 7:35-37; Hebrews 8:3-6).

#### **Which is for Himself**

The bullock Aaron provided was for a sin offering, an offering for sin, a propitiatory offering for his sins. Nothing could be plainer. Yet the words *“which is for himself”* have been twisted to mean something quite different, by asserting that *“for”* means ‘represents’. From this the theory has been advanced that the bullock represented Aaron, and that the slaying of the bullock represented his (Aaron's) death.



But such an interpretation is out of harmony with the whole Biblical scheme of offerings for sin. In every case the animal was an innocent victim slain on behalf of the sinner, to appease God whose Law had been broken, and to secure to the sinner the forgiveness of his sins. This is apparent in such cases as a specific sin on the part of *"the priest that is anointed"* (Leviticus 4:3-12), *"Let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering"* (Leviticus 4:3). To say that the bullock 'represented' the priest would be tantamount to saying that the priest died for his own sins.

But, as said above, the innocent animal was slain on behalf of the priest, to cleanse him of his guilt, and to reconcile him to God afresh. Under the Law, he that sinned in one point was guilty of all, and deserved the penalty of death (Galatians 3:10-12; James 2:10; 3:2). But God accepted the death of the sin offering as a satisfaction, and granted forgiveness to the offerer. We should note in Leviticus 4:26,35; 5:10,16,18 how the forgiveness of the sin was pronounced after the offering for the sin had been made, and not before.

This bringing of an offering for specific sins involved confession of the sin, and prior to that confession a realisation that the thing done was a sin. Hence the particularity with which various kinds of wrongdoing were described, including both moral and ceremonial sins. The Israelite was thus aided in the first place to avoid the sin, and in the second place, if he transgressed, to recognise the sin. In this way, and by reason of the penalties imposed, sin was made *"exceeding sinful"* (Romans 7:7,13).

In Leviticus 5:1-4,17-19 the possibility of sinning without knowing it is stated, with examples. The fact of the ignorance is not taken as a sufficient excuse. As soon as the trespasser finds he has erred, or been drawn into evil unwittingly, *"he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing, and he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned"* (Leviticus 5:5,6). After the priest made the offering, the sin was forgiven (Leviticus 5:10).

In all these cases one can readily see how absurd it would be to say that the sinner died representatively in the sin offering. Quite to the contrary, the sin offering was an innocent victim quite outside of itself, which God was willing to accept as an atonement or appeasement for the sinner's guilt.

So also in regard to the bullock brought by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The high priest, by so doing, acknowledged his sins and his need of forgiveness, and understood that by reason of the offering of the innocent victim, God would grant him the required forgiveness.

Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, was unlike Aaron in respect of sin. He *"knew no sin"* (2 Corinthians 5:21), consequently had no need, as Aaron, to offer a sacrifice for His own sins before He could offer for the people. This we saw when studying Hebrews 7:26-28. Verse 28 says the Law made men high priests who had infirmity (that is, sin), but the Lord Jesus, our High Priest, was not high priest under the Law. By God's oath he was of the order of Melchisedec order (Hebrews 7:21), moreover, He was *"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"* (Verse 26).

#### **And For His House**

The bullock for a sin offering which Aaron brought was not alone for his own individual sins. It was also to make an atonement *"for his house"*. Aaron and his house were thus placed on a level so far as requiring an offering for sin was concerned. This emphasises a distinction, not only between Aaron and the people mentioned in verse 5, who were to bring two kids for a sin offering, but also a distinction between Aaron's 'house' and the people generally, inasmuch as Aaron's 'house' was included with Aaron under the bullock offering, and not with the people under the goat offering.

Just who were included in Aaron's 'house' has given rise to difference of opinion among Christians, but bearing in mind that in the antitype our Lord Jesus paid the price and made atonement for all alike, being the antitype of both bullock and goats, the question as to who is or is not included in Aaron's house is of less importance than if Christ had come as a high priest of the order of Aaron.

Who constituted Aaron's house is a question of fact rather than of theory, or even of interpretation. We have to consider in what way 'house' was used in Old Testament times. All of the family and descendants of Jacob who went into Egypt were called his 'house' (Genesis 46:27; 50:22). The name *"children of Israel"* was applied to them (Exodus 1:1), and is used of them all through the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Sometimes they were addressed as *“all Israel”*, or simply *“Israel”* (Deuteronomy 5:1; 33:28,29). The title *“house of Israel”* occurs first in Leviticus 10:6, and throughout the scriptures is used interchangeably with *“house of Jacob”* and *“children of Israel”* (Exodus 19:3; Luke 1:33).

Each of Jacob's sons became the head of a family, which later expanded into a tribe, all of them constituting *“the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Genesis 49:28; Exodus 24:4; Acts 26:7). Each tribe was called the 'house' of its first 'head', thus, *“the house of Ephraim”* (Judges 10:9), *“house of Levi”* (Exodus 2:1; Numbers 17:8). The house of Levi included Aaron, who in turn also had a 'house'. God promised to build David a 'house'; *“Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house”*. *“And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before me”* (2 Samuel 7:11,16). Our Lord Jesus belonged to the house of David, that is, He was one of the family or descendants of David (Luke 1:32,33; 2:4; Matthew 21:9).

The priesthood was given to Aaron and his sons, Aaron being high priest. At his death one of his sons succeeded him to the high priestly office. As time passed Aaron's 'house' multiplied, and in the days of the kings the number of priests was great (Exodus 28:1,29,38,43; 1 Chronicles 6:49-53; 9:10-13).

While Aaron lived his 'house' would have consisted of his sons and their families, had it not been that God added to him all the remainder of the tribe of Levi. It will be remembered that the whole tribe of Levi had been taken by God in place of the firstborn, in order that they might perform the service of the tabernacle (Numbers 3:12-51). In order that this service might be more effectively rendered and co-ordinated under one head, God gave them to Aaron as a gift, to be under his charge for the work of the tabernacle (Numbers 3:5-9; 18:1-6). Hence Aaron's 'house', for the purposes of the tabernacle, included the whole tribe of Levi. And for this reason we understand that when Aaron was told to take a bullock for a sin offering for himself and his 'house', God desired to accept the one bullock as an atonement for the whole tribe.

What was the reason that the Levites were included with Aaron, and not with the people, when the annual atonement was made? We believe the reason was to maintain their status as a tribe separated unto God. They had been separated from the other tribes to take the place of the firstborn sons of all the tribes. Had Aaron and the priests and their families only been atoned for by the bullock, the Levites would have been placed in an anomalous position, since they were on all other occasions, in their dwellings and lands, as well as in their service of God, on a different footing from the other tribes. The Day of Atonement services were national in character. It was fitting, then, that the sins of the Levites should be included with Aaron's, whose servants they were, rather than with those of the people. However, as we shall see, this distinction was not observed in a later part of the ritual of the Atonement Day.

### **Two Kids of the Goats for a Sin Offering**

**16:7** *“And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”* The presentation of the two live goats before God was a customary formality. Every offering brought for sacrifice was brought *“unto the LORD”* at the door of the tabernacle. Having arrived there, it was said to be *“before the LORD”*, inasmuch as God's presence was manifest in the tabernacle (Leviticus 1:2,3; 4:4; 5:7). There the offerer laid his hands on the animal in token that he presented this offering as a burnt offering, or as for his sins, to make atonement, and God accepted it with the specified objective in view (Leviticus 1:4). Furthermore, it was one thing to bring an offering, and another thing to have it accepted. The priest had first to inspect the animal, to see that it was without blemish, for sometimes the Jews were tempted to pass off on God the maimed and diseased (Leviticus 22:21-25; Malachi 1:8). After the two goats were presented and accepted, Aaron proceeded with the next feature of the service.

**16:8** *“And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat.”* Aaron cast lots upon the two goats. Both goats were of the first year, unblemished, that being the requirement in all sacrifices from the flocks (Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 9:3). The casting of lots indicated that neither goat was preferred above the other. Two distinct ceremonies were to be carried out, and either goat would answer for either purpose. The meaning of *“scapegoat”*, Hebrew 'azazel', will be considered in connection with verses 21 and 26. It has in it no suggestion of 'scapegrace', a wrong meaning attached to it by some Bible teachers. A scapegrace is one who disgraces his family by careless or vicious living. On the other hand, a scapegoat is an innocent victim made to bear the penalty of the wrong-doing of others. The Hebrew word 'azazel' is in harmony with the word scapegoat, as given in the King James Version.

In some cases the sin or trespass offering was to be a female lamb or kid (Leviticus 4:28,32; 5:6; 14:10; Numbers 6:14), but on the Day of Atonement the requirement was two he-goats. The objective of this variety in the offerings of the herd and of the flocks of sheep and of goats appears to have been twofold. First, to represent degrees corresponding with the priestly office, social standing, or wealth of the offerer or offerers and the seriousness of the sin for which the offering was made; second, to make only such demands upon the people as they could readily supply without serious one-sided depletion of their flocks and herds.

**16:9** *“And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD’s lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering.”* The lot indicated God’s acceptance of this goat for sacrifice on the altar. The method of offering will be considered in connection with verse 15, for the bullock was to be offered first, and the LORD’s goat was therefore held in reserve until the proper time.

**16:10** *“But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.”* The scapegoat, however, was not to be killed, but *“presented alive before the LORD”*. This ceremonial followed the sacrificing, and will be considered in connection with verses 21 and 22, where the scapegoat’s part in the atonement is described. Let it not be forgotten that the scapegoat was as pure and unblemished as the LORD’s goat, and that it was designed *“to make an atonement with him”*, that is, the scapegoat was associated with the LORD’s goat as part of the atonement offering.

In other words, the use of two goats showed two aspects in the forgiveness of sin: first, the appeasement of God by the sprinkling of the blood on the mercy seat; and, second, the carrying away of the sin out of God’s sight and out of the sight of the people whose sins were thus borne away.

A somewhat similar ceremony was performed with two birds when the priest pronounced a leper clean after certain days of separation. One of the birds was killed, and the living bird was let loose into the open field (Leviticus 14:4-7).

#### **The Bullock for the Sin Offering**

**16:11** *“And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself.”* The *“bullock of the sin offering”* was the first to be presented. The word *“bring”* here is preferably *“present”* as in the Revised Version, having reference to the formal presentation of the bullock *“before the LORD”*. After this the bullock was to be killed beside the brazen altar. The customary method was to take a sharp sword or knife, and with one swift blow sever the jugular vein, the blood being immediately drained out.

It was obviously in order that the offering for the sins of the high priest and ‘his house’ should be offered first. Precedence is one method of indicating superior office or dignity. The objective in slaying the animal was to make an atonement for Aaron’s sins and for the sins of ‘his house’, as already stated in verse 6. The death of the animal was necessary in order to provide the blood of atonement, to be taken into the Most Holy and sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat. The blood of a wounded animal would not have sufficed, since the penalty of sin was death. Also the death was necessary in order to make a true picture or type, pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, who was appointed to give His life a sacrifice for sin, *“Who gave himself for our sins”*, *“who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God”* (Galatians 1:4; Hebrews 9:14).

Christ’s perfect human body was prepared for sacrifice, and presented at His baptism, and in due time He was slain (Hebrews 10:5-10; Matthew 27:35; Acts 2:23). The death of Christ as a satisfaction for the sins of the whole world was typified by the sacrifice of the bullock and of the goat, hence, the sacrifice of the bullock was only the first step in the formation of the type. This is taught by Hebrews 9:14 and 10:4,5, as well as by Leviticus 16:30, which describes the whole of the ceremonial as for the sins of the nation as a whole. But here we also notice a contrast: The Day of Atonement ceremonial was for the sins of Israel; Christ’s atoning work is farther reaching: it is for the sins of the entire race of mankind.

#### **Sweet Incense in the Divine Presence**

**16:12** Before proceeding with the blood of the bullock offering, the high priest was directed to take a censer full of burning coals from the brazen altar in the ‘court’, and his hands full of the specially prepared incense (Exodus 30:34-37). Instead of, as usual, placing the coals on the golden altar and burning the incense thereon, Aaron was, on this occasion, to take the censer and the fine perfume into the Most Holy.

**16:13** In the divine presence, *“within the veil”*, Aaron was to burn the incense, that the cloud might cover the Mercy Seat. So important was this ceremonial in the making of the type, that death was the penalty for disobedience to the command. Doubtless also this strictness was necessary for the time then present, in order that God's dignity might be upheld by the high priest, and that he might have a due reverence and sense of the honour bestowed upon him in permitting him to enter the divine presence.

The whole of our Lord's life was as sweet incense to the Father, but more particularly that portion of it, following His baptism at Jordan, when His life was being spent in self-sacrifice for the sake of the children of Israel to whom He was sent (Matthew 15:24), and was in every respect pleasing to God (John 4:34; 5:30; 8:29). The apostle refers to this as an example to us, *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour”* (Ephesians 5:1,2). Walking in love was a sweet incense to God, distinct from the death on the cross, which was also a sweet savour, but accomplished a different purpose, and was typified by the odour arising from the animal sacrifices offered on the brazen altar in the 'court' (Exodus 29:18,41; Leviticus 16:24,25).

The incense was typical also of prayer, *“the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name”* (Hebrews 13:15; Revelation 5:8; 8:3,4; Psalm 141:2).

### **Sprinkling the Blood of Atonement**

**16:14** *“And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.”* But while the incense was important, the most important thing was the blood, which the high priest now took and sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat. Isaac Leeser's version for Hebrews reads, *“And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger above toward the mercy-seat, eastward; and before the mercy-seat shall he sprinkle seven times of the blood with his finger”*.

Our Lord's holy and consistent life while on earth was important as demonstrating the strength of His devotion to God, *“The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up”* (Psalm 69:9; John 2:17). His holy life also demonstrated His ability to keep the Jewish law, which was beyond the ability of any fallen human being to keep, and thereby His absolute perfection as a man was established and His fitness to be the offering for sin and the corresponding price for Adam and His race.

All this love and devotion and perfection of obedience was as sweet incense to the Father, but it was not the most important feature of our Lord's work as the Saviour of mankind. His death was the most important step in the plan of redemption, because *“without shedding of blood is no remission” of sin* (Hebrews 9:22), and it was for the express purpose of being this perfectly satisfactory offering for sin that our blessed Lord came into the world (Hebrews 2:9; Matthew 16:21; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

The entrance to the tabernacle faced the east, and the Most Holy was the western apartment of the two rooms into which the tabernacle was divided. The ark was the only piece of furniture in the Most Holy, and was so constructed that the divine presence was manifested in the exact centre, above the Mercy Seat and between the Cherubim. Aaron's duty now was, according to Leeser, to sprinkle the blood with his finger 'above and toward' the Mercy Seat, and in an easterly direction. This would imply that he must pass to the western side of the ark, so that he faced practically all the building and all the furniture thereof. But the Revised Version reads, *“sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat on the east”*, as though Aaron stood on the east side of the Mercy Seat. In either case, the action was the sprinkling of the blood once above the Mercy Seat, for Aaron was not to touch the ark. The blood would fall of its own weight upon the Mercy Seat. Aaron was also to sprinkle of the blood with his finger before the mercy seat seven times.

Two opinions in regard to the sprinkling are held by Bible expositors. Some consider that the blood was sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat and before the Mercy Seat seven times, thus making the figure of a cross seven times, while other commentators hold that there was but one sprinkling on the Mercy Seat itself and seven sprinklings on the ground in front of the Mercy Seat.

What would be signified in either case? Seven being a symbol of perfection, the seven times sprinkling would represent the perfection of the atonement to be effected. Whereas if there were but one sprinkling upon the Mercy Seat and seven upon the ground in front of it, the teaching would appear to be that the way to reconciliation would be seven times more difficult for man than for God.

But, whatever the reason for the distinction in the Levitical service, there was no such distinction in the antitype, for the blood of Jesus was but once shed, and but once sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat. *"This he did once for all when he offered up himself"* (Hebrews 7:27; 10:11-14). Here is one of the contrasts which the apostle so frequently called attention to in his epistle to the Hebrews. The Lord made purification for sins when he ascended to heaven after His resurrection, and then He sat down at the Father's right hand, to do no more sacrificing, but *"expecting till his enemies be made his footstool"* (1 Corinthians 15:25,26; Hebrews 1:3; 10:13).

#### **The Blood of the LORD's Goat**

**16:15** *"Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat."* Aaron's next duty was to kill the goat of the sin offering for the sins of the people, and take its blood into the Most Holy, and do with it exactly as he had done with the blood of the bullock.

Since the apostle, in his inspired explanation given in Hebrews 9:12; 10:4-7, states that our Lord Jesus was the antitype of both bullock and goat, it is clear that this second application of blood for the sins of the people as distinct from the application of the bullock's blood for the sins of Aaron and his house was only, as we have before stated, for the time then present, in order to maintain the arbitrary distinction between the Levitical tribe and the remainder of Israel, this distinction being done away in Christ, who is the one offering for sin for all tribes and nations and peoples without distinction (1 John 2:2; Hebrews 2:9; Romans 10:12).

#### **Cleansing the Most Holy**

**16:16** Here is given the reason for this ceremony on the Day of Atonement. Though there were two animals, two slayings, and two sprinklings of blood, yet there was but the one objective, namely, to cleanse the *"holy place"*, *"because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel [all twelve tribes, including Aaron and his house], and because of their transgressions in all their sins"*. In the KJV the word *"place"* is here found in italics, indicating that it is supplied by the translators to show the true sense of the original. That the Most Holy is meant is shown by comparing with verse 2, which explains that the holy place referred to is *"within the vail"*, and Hebrews 9:7,8, where the apartment which the high priest entered once a year is called *"the second"* and *"the holiest of all"*. Because of the sins of the whole nation, high priest, priests, and Levites, as well as the people generally, God looked upon the sin as defiling the very sanctuary of His presence, and nothing would cleanse away the defilement but the offering of blood as He prescribed it once every year.

#### **Cleansing the Tabernacle**

This yearly ceremonial cleansing was not only for the Most Holy, the Mercy Seat therein, and the very earth at the foot of the Mercy Seat, but also for the remainder of the tabernacle. No separate ceremonial for cleansing the first apartment being mentioned, it is possible that it was counted clean after the application on the Mercy Seat. But the words, *"and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation"*, may mean that the golden altar, lamp-stand, and table of shewbread in the first apartment were also to be sprinkled with the blood of bullock and goat, in a manner similar to the application on the Mercy Seat. In Hebrews 9:2,3 each of the apartments is called a tabernacle or tent, while in this chapter *"tabernacle"* (verses 16,20,33) seems to refer to the first apartment only. The cleansing of the altar of burnt offering in the *"court"* is described in verses 18 and 19.

**16:17** *"And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel."* This ordinance prohibits any man from entering the tabernacle structure [RV, *"tent of meeting"*] while the ceremony was in progress and until the complete atonement is made *"for himself [the high priest], and for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel"* (RV).

According to Hebrews 9:12, the Jewish high priest entered the Holiest of all *“by the blood of goats and calves”*, that is to say, it was because he bore the blood of atonement to sprinkle on the Mercy Seat that he was allowed to enter for the performance of that duty only. Here the apostle unites both errands (first with the bullock’s blood and then with the goats) as one entry, just as Leviticus 16:17 speaks of the double ceremonial as one atonement.

The apostle refers then to the blood of Jesus Christ as the antitype of the blood of both bullock and goat, *“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place”*. And that once was so efficacious, the apostle proceeds to say, that thereby the Lord *“obtained eternal redemption”* (the words ‘for us’ are not in the original) (Hebrews 9:12). This eternal redemption, *“for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant”*, unobtainable under that Covenant, was obtained by Jesus Christ under the New Covenant and by reason of His being High Priest after the order of Melchisedec and not after the order of Aaron, and because He entered by His own blood rather than by that of beasts (Hebrews 9:15; 8:4,5; 7:20-22).

### **Cleansing the Brazen Altar**

**16:18** Having completed the atonement for, or cleansing of, both apartments of the tabernacle, Aaron was to go out to *“the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it”*. The expression *“before the LORD”*, which occurs frequently in the Old Testament, is shown by verse 7 to mean in front of the door of the tabernacle. The *“altar that is before the LORD”* therefore means the brazen altar in the court, at the door of the tabernacle.

**16:19** The blood of the bullock and the blood of the goat were to be applied to the horns of the brazen altar, separately, the one after the other. In addition, the blood of each was to be sprinkled seven times upon the altar, to *“hallow”* or cleanse it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel. Here all uncleanness of all twelve tribes are referred to as having in a manner defiled the altar of burnt offering, all of which defilement was cleansed away by the sprinkling of the blood (Hebrews 9:22).

**16:20** The three steps of the cleansing are here again referred to. The KJV says *“reconciling”* the holy place, the tabernacle, and the altar. The RV says *“atoning for”*. The idea is, cleansing them from the defilement of sin. After having finished this cleansing, Aaron was to proceed with the ceremony in connection with the live goat, which until now had been waiting at the door of the tabernacle *“before the LORD”* (verse 10). Verse 21 repeats that this live goat was to be presented before the LORD for acceptance.

### **The Goat Bearing Away the Sins**

**16:21** *“And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.”* Laying both his hands upon the head of the live goat was an action in harmony with the words uttered, for over him Aaron was told to confess *“all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins”* (RV). The sins of Israel, the entire nation taken together, the defilement of which had just been cleansed by blood from the Mercy Seat, from the tabernacle and its furniture, and from the brazen altar, are now put upon the head of the goat, Aaron’s hands ceremonially accomplishing this transfer, as it says, *“putting them upon the head of the goat”*.

Undoubtedly some sins are more vile than others. The Levitical code and the manner of dispensing justice under Moses and his successors, as well as instances where the people took vengeance into their own hands, show this. The New Testament tells of sins which should not be named among Christians, much less indulged in (Ephesians 5:3-5).

Yet the fact remains that in God’s sight the slightest infraction of His Law is a sin that requires confession, atonement, and forgiveness. No Israelite was allowed to absent himself on the Day of Atonement on the plea that he had not committed the abominable practices of his neighbours. The most devout, and so far as in them lay blameless, Israelites were required to fast and afflict their souls in token of sorrow for transgressions and sins of which they had been guilty.

And here no distinction was made between the high priest and ‘his house’ and the people. The sins of all degrees of heinousness and of all classes were confessed in a lump over the head of the live goat.

In this ceremony of laying the sins on the head of the goat, the high priest was typical of God, for the prophet says, "*The LORD hath laid on him [that is, upon the man Christ Jesus] the iniquity of us all*" (Isaiah 53:6). As sin is the transgression of God's law, God alone has the right to say how He shall be appeased, and He alone has the right to lay the guilt upon an innocent victim. He laid our guilt upon Christ, who had no sin of His own to condemn Him in the eyes of the divine Law-giver.

The goat, laden with sins, was then sent away "*by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness*". The margin reads, "*a man of opportunity*", Leeser's translation says, "*by the hand of a man appointed thereto*". In order to avoid confusion, doubtless the man to perform this service would be one previously arranged for, probably a Levite acting in a servant's capacity. (Compare with Leviticus 4:11,12; 8:17; 9:11.)

The Levites had been appointed for all menial tasks. No stranger or alien was to come near the sacred edifice (Numbers 18:2-7). Only at a later time did God, through Joshua, permit the Nethinims to become "*hewers of wood and drawers of water*" for the house of God (Joshua 9:22-27). After the return from the Babylonian captivity many of these Nethinims were faithful servants, in strong contrast with indifferent Levites who did not return, or were afterwards unfaithful (Ezra 2:43,58; 7:7,24; 8:20; Nehemiah 10:28). But, even so, there is nothing to show that any other than a Levite was permitted to take part in the Day of Atonement ceremonies.

**16:22** "*And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited* [Hebrew, of separation], *and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.*" Here appears the objective to be served by laying the sins on the head of the scapegoat, namely, that they might be borne away out of the camp of Israel. Sending the goat into the wilderness, "*to a land not inhabited*", would indicate, as fully as a type could do, the removal of the sins out of God's sight and remembrance, and so make possible renewed relations with the people thus freed, and waiting, now hopefully, for a sign that God was ready to smile upon them once more (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 43:25).

#### **The Antitype, the Reality**

That our blessed Lord Jesus was the antitype of the scapegoat the scriptures assure us. Not only have we Isaiah 53:6, referred to above, but also John 1:29, "*Behold the lamb of God that taketh* [margin, beareth] *away the sin of the world*", for the scapegoat was the only animal in the Atonement Day services that is spoken of as bearing away sin. The use of the word "*lamb*" in John 1:29,36 is no obstacle to this thought, because (see Exodus 12:5) the Passover animal, taken from either sheep or goats, was called a lamb, that is, a young one. So "*lamb*" could here be appropriately used of a kid of the goats. Added significance is given to John's statement by the fact that it was made in the 7th month, when the minds of all pious Jews dwelt upon the Day of Atonement and its offerings. Our Lord was the antitype also of the morning and evening lambs, but these lambs were not sin offerings (Exodus 29:38-42), nor did they carry away sin.

Another scripture showing that the man Christ Jesus was the antitype of the scapegoat is 1 Peter 2:24, "*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on* [literally, 'to'] *the tree*". The cross of Christ stands for His death, consequently death is the antitype of the "*land not inhabited*" to which the scapegoat was sent. Our Lord bore our sins with Him into the grave. Thank God, they are there, not to return and burden us again, if we are of those who prostrate themselves in worship and in sorrow for sin, and accept forgiveness on the terms our loving Heavenly Father has arranged.

**16:23** These are directions to the high priest in regard to the holy linen garments worn during the ceremonial thus far. They shall be left in the first apartment of the tabernacle.

#### **Completing the Atonement**

**16:24** He shall wash his flesh in (literally) a holy place, not in the holy place where stood the ark. The dress he would now put on would be the "*garments for glory and for beauty*" described in Exodus 28:2-5; 39:1-31. But the sacrificing was not yet over, nor was the atonement yet complete.

There yet remained the two burnt offerings, the ram for Aaron and 'his house' and the ram for the congregation (verses 3 and 5). These burnt offerings represented another aspect of the sacrifice of Christ, namely, the completeness of his sacrifice of Himself. He gave His all.

**16:25.** Of the bullock and goat whose blood was brought into the Most Holy and sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat, only the fat was burned on the brazen altar. The burning fat sent up a sweet odour unmistakably declaring that the sacrifice had been made and the blood carried in. It is not clear if the fat was burned before the whole burnt offerings or in conjunction with them. In all probability the two kidneys and the caul (or midriff) were included with the fat, as in other sin offerings (Leviticus 4:8-10).

#### **The Goat for Azazel**

**16:26** Again cleansing; the man who led away the scapegoat must wash his clothes and bathe his flesh before he can re-enter the camp. This washing and bathing was no part of the atonement, but a detail, similar to Aaron's bathing at different times, consistent with the general objective of the atonement services, and in harmony with the ordinances prescribing frequent washing and bathing.

The word 'azazel' occurs here, as in verses 8 and 10. Having now seen the ceremonial through, we can also see that the word 'azazel' must in some way express what was done with the live goat. Those who claim that it is a name for the devil fail entirely to understand the antitype as clearly shown in the New Testament. The devil could not possibly be typified by a pure, innocent kid of the first year. The devil was a murderer from the beginning, a liar and the father of lies, said our Lord (John 8:44). He is more fitly represented by the subtle serpent which he used as his mouthpiece in Eden (Genesis 3:1; 2 Corinthians 11:3).

Others have propounded the theory that the scapegoat stands for a class of unfaithful Christians upon whom God will send heavy chastening. But, again, such a class could not fitly be typified by a pure, innocent kid "*without spot or blemish*" Such unfaithful Christians are decidedly spotted and blemished, and themselves need cleansing.

The only consistent view is that of the inspired prophets and apostles, namely, that Jesus, the pure and spotless one, bore the sins of the world, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29, margin). 'Azazel', then, has a meaning consistent with the work accomplished by our Lord Jesus when He "*bare our sins in his own body to the tree*".

Had the Hebrew word 'azazel' not been placed in the margin of the KJV, and had the RV not placed 'azazel' in the text; had both given a translation of the word, much of the mystery attaching to the "*scapegoat*" would have been avoided. The meaning of the word is simply, 'the goat for removal', and that is exactly what was done with the scapegoat: it was removed out of the camp of Israel, and with it were removed "*all their transgressions [of the children of Israel] in all their sins*". See also Revised Version footnote, 'dismissal'. Young's translation has it "*a goat of departure*".

So our Lord Jesus was made the sin bearer, and if we desire our sins removed we must confess them and repudiate them, and ask Him to carry them away for us, even as the apostle Peter exhorted the Jews to do when he urged them in these significant words (literally rendered), "*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord*". The blotting out of sins is another way of expressing their removal from God's sight. The prophet also referred to the time when, "*though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*". In the Lord Jesus these promises are fulfilled (1 Peter 2:24, margin; Acts 3:19; Isaiah 1:18).

#### **Jesus Suffered without the Gate**

**16:27** "*And the bullock for the sin offering, and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall one carry forth without the camp; and they shall burn in the fire their skins, and their flesh, and their dung.*" The carcasses, of the bullock and the goat whose blood had been brought into the Most Holy and sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat were to be carried forth without the camp, and there completely burned, "*their skins, and their flesh, and their dung*". According to Leviticus 4:12 and 6:11, a "*clean place*" was reserved outside the camp, where the ashes from the brazen altar were deposited, perhaps considered 'clean' because of this deposit. There the carcasses of the sin offerings were to be burned upon the wood fire maintained for the purpose. Thus on Golgotha did our Lord suffer without the gate. There He made His soul "*an offering for sin*" (Hebrews 13:11,12; Isaiah 53:7-10).

In this carrying outside and burning together of the carcasses of bullock and goat is seen again the oneness of the atonement for the whole world.



Our Lord “suffered without the gate” in order that He might “sanctify **the people** with his own blood” (Hebrews 13:12). Thus again does the apostle indicate Jesus as the antitype of both bullock and goat. The distinctions of the Law between priests and Levites and people are no longer recognised. The blood of Jesus is efficacious for every human being. He died for all, and all are invited to come to Him for salvation. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). And so He is doing and will do. The gospel has gone out to all nations and peoples and tongues, and “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Matthew 28:19; Romans 10:13).

Among “the people” thus sanctified the apostle Paul included himself and all the Hebrew Christians to whom he wrote, including priests, Levites, rulers, common people, all who need a Saviour from sin, and are willing to “go forth therefore unto him without the camp”. (See Comment on Hebrews 13:12,13).

**16:28** The washing of clothes and the bathing of flesh of the man who performed the service described in verse 27 was enjoined before he could again enter the camp.

Thus sanctuary, tabernacle, camp, and people were cleansed.

### **A Holy Convocation**

**16:29** The Day of Atonement was one of the sabbaths or rest days of the system of sabbaths imposed upon the Jews (Leviticus 25). The sabbath days were not only for rest from labour but for “holy convocation”, that is, days for assembling together for the worship of God. The seventh day of the week was a sabbath of rest and holy convocation. The first day of the seventh month was a sabbath, “a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation”, in which no “servile work” was to be done (Leviticus 23:1-3,24,25; Numbers 29:1-6). In Leviticus 23:26-32, as well as in 16:29 and Numbers 29:7, the tenth day of the seventh month is set apart as the Day of Atonement. It also was a “sabbath of rest” and a “holy convocation”.

Other sabbaths were for rejoicing. This sabbath was a gathering of the people to the tabernacle to afflict their souls and to give attention to the atoning work of the high priest. Even aliens living amongst them were obliged to observe this day of rest.

**16:30** Since the high priest was to perform for them a special service of national cleansing, it was incumbent upon them to assemble together in an attitude of mind and a neglect of food indicative of sincere penitence, and in readiness to receive the blessing to follow the successful carrying out of the high priest’s work.

**16:31** A day of rest from labour like other sabbaths, but different in that they should “afflict their souls”, that is, by fasting.

**16:32** The priest to serve on this special day was the high priest, first Aaron, then Aaron’s son who should succeed him as high priest, the office of high priest being hereditary in Aaron’s family. Only the high priest was authorised to wear certain garments (see verses 4 and 24; and Exodus 28:2-5).

**16:33** In this brief summary of the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement, the three stages of the cleansing of the tent and furniture are: (1) “for the holy sanctuary”, that is, the Most Holy, or Holiest of all; (2) for “the tabernacle of the congregation”, that is, the first apartment of the tabernacle building; and (3) for the “altar”.

The work of cleansing the children of Israel is here divided into two portions, priests and people, the Levites being not specifically attached to either. But this statement should not be considered as contradicting verses 6 and 17, where, for reasons already given, the Levites were considered as part of Aaron’s ‘house’. When referring to this yearly service the New Testament lays little stress on these divisions, Hebrews 9:7 saying simply, “offered for himself, and for the errors of the people”, and Hebrews 5:3, “as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins”.

**16:34** This command of God through Moses for a Day of Atonement service was to be “an everlasting statute unto you”. So far as the children of Israel were concerned, they had no power to alter the statute, and no right to break it. It was everlasting in the sense of being a continuous obligation. The Law lasted many centuries, and to that extent was ‘ever’ lasting. But it was not intended to be absolutely without end, for God foresaw that the children of Israel would not keep the Law, and the Day of Atonement was itself a witness that the Law would some time be put an end to, for it prefigured that greater atonement effected by our Lord Jesus Christ “in due time”.

## Cleansing the Worship

The tabernacle and its furniture, the priesthood and Levitical assistants, the offering of sacrifice, and all the ritual of the various feast and fast days as well as of the ordinary days, represented the presence of God in the midst of the children of Israel and their worship of Him as their God. As He dwelt in the midst of an unclean people, their imperfections and sins raised continual barriers between God and themselves (Isaiah 59:2-15), even their worship being imperfect, so that continual sacrifices were required for their reconciliation (Hebrews 5:1-3; 10:11).

Yet once a year God ordained a thorough cleansing of the tabernacle and its furniture and of every member of the nation without exception of class or tribe. Thus with a cleansed tabernacle and a cleansed people another year of worship was begun. Year by year the worship became defiled and cleansed, defiled and cleansed, until the inadequacy of the Law and of its sacrifices had been unquestionably demonstrated (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Then, in *"the fullness of the time"* *"God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the Law"*, that the children of Israel in bondage under that Law might be liberated, and engage in the true worship in a better tabernacle, even that simple form of worship established by our Lord Jesus under the better promises of the New Covenant, sealed with His precious blood (Galatians 4:4,5; John 2:19; Hebrews 8:5,6).

Now the true worshippers may draw near in any place, at any hour, in full assurance of faith, in the name of Jesus, who opened up for us the new way of life through the veil, that is to say, His flesh (John 4:21-24; Hebrews 10:19,20). Through Him, as *"high priest over the house of God"*, *"that is passed into the heavens"*, we may *"come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Hebrews 4:14-16). Mention of *"the throne of grace"* recalls that a throne is associated with the reign of a monarch.

Two 'reigns' are brought to our notice in Romans 5:21, the reign of sin, and the reign of grace, *"That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord"*. This 'reign of grace' is made possible by the establishment in the heavens of *"the throne of grace"*.

Instead of an ark containing a testimony against us, a God pronouncing our condemnation, and a mercy seat calling for propitiatory blood, as in the tabernacle in the wilderness, we have now the throne of a loving Father and gracious God, Jesus Christ as our perpetual Mercy Seat with full atonement made, whence mercy and grace flow to us whenever we apply in faith believing. Let us then come boldly, that is, confidently, with *"full assurance of faith"*, and we shall have a continuous flow of mercy and grace to assist us in every time of need.

Under the Law Covenant, with its tabernacle and temple services, the way into the holiest (God's Presence and favour) was not yet made manifest, because those sacrifices could not cleanse the conscience, but under the New Covenant the way into God's Presence is open to those who will come through Jesus our Mediator and High Priest, for His blood cleanses the conscience to serve the living God in spirit and in truth (Hebrews 9:8-14).

### The Red Heifer

While on the subject of cleansing, it may not be amiss to refer to the ceremony connected with the red heifer, described in Numbers 19:1-10, particularly as in Hebrews 9:13 *"the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean"* are included with the blood of bulls and of goats as *"sanctifying to the purifying of the flesh"*, and as typical of the blood of Christ which is able to purge the conscience.

The blood of the heifer was sprinkled before the tabernacle seven times, and a water of separation or purification was made of her ashes, to which (while the carcase was burning) were added cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet. The cedar-wood and hyssop were pungent and bitter, and the scarlet was the colour of the blood which had been sprinkled before the tabernacle. From various forms of uncleanness this water of separation purified the Jew, but it was only a cleansing of the flesh.

The *"ashes of an heifer"* were available throughout the year for the individual cleansing whenever required of the children of Israel who had already been cleansed on the Day of Atonement. So Christ is always available for cleansing the Christian believer from the defilements which come in the ordinary course of daily life. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

Presumptuous indeed would it be to draw near the divine presence while still indulging daily contact with the unclean things which God has prohibited. (Compare with Numbers 19:11-22.) Under the Law those who remained unclean *“defiled the sanctuary of the LORD”*. So does every Christian who persistently indulges unclean habits bring discredit upon the New Covenant worship. Particularly as members of the *“royal priesthood”* (1 Peter 2:4-9), let us remember the exhortations, *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”* *“Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.”* *“Be ye holy; for I am holy.”* (2 Corinthians 6:17; 7:1; Isaiah 52:11; Leviticus 22:1-9; 1 Peter 1:15,16; Leviticus 11:44,45)

Our call to the royal priesthood is that in the Kingdom Age we may serve as kings and priests of God and of Christ. But our duty in the present is that we *“shew forth the praises [or virtues] of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”* (Revelation 20:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Matthew 5:16). Then the apostle declares (1 Peter 2:10) that we owe all our privileges to the New Covenant under which we obtained mercy, *“Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy”*.

### **Additional Offerings, and the Blessing**

In Numbers 29:8-11 additional offerings for the Day of Atonement are mentioned, apparently to precede the atonement sacrifice proper. Leviticus 16 makes no mention of these.

Neither does Leviticus 16 mention the conclusion of the service, that is, the coming forth of the high priest formally to bless the people, in evidence that reconciliation was complete. That there was a formal blessing may be gathered from Numbers 6:22-27, *“And the LORD spake unto Moses saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, the LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace”*.

So our Lord Jesus, our High Priest, having by himself purged our sins, is ready to bless and give full assurance of God’s favour and love towards those who come in the appointed way, by the blood of his cross (Acts 2:33,38,39; 3:26; 13:32,38; Hebrews 9:28. Other comment on the blessing following the Day of Atonement offerings may be found in Chapter 9.

The blessing of peace descends upon us from our glorious High Priest, peace and reconciliation with God. *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”* (Romans 5:1,2).

For all these mercies let us give praise in the language of Galatians 1: 3-5,

*“Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*

## Chapter 15

### THE CHERUBIM OF GLORY

In the directions given to Moses for the furnishing of the Tabernacle, he was told to make an ark overlaid with gold, the lid of which should be of pure gold, and called the “*mercy seat*”. Of a piece with the mercy seat, and rising up out of it, he was told to make two cherubim \* of gold, one at each end. Their wings were to be stretched forth on high, covering the mercy seat, and their faces were to be toward the mercy seat. Concerning this sacred place, God said,

*“And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel”* (Exodus 25:22).

When the tabernacle was finished, the furnishings in place, the appropriate sacrifices offered, and the altar dedicated and anointed, then God communed with Moses as He had promised to do,

*“And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him [that is, with God], then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims: and he spake unto him”* (Numbers 7:89).

God’s presence between the two cherubim was manifested not only by a voice giving directions to Moses, and subsequently to the high priests, concerning the governance of the children of Israel, but also by a marvellous Light, called the Shekinah. This was a visible manifestation of the divine glory, shining between the cherubim, the exact nature of which, whether a steady illumination, or a burning flame, is not stated. The Urim and the Thummim, inserted in the breastplate of the high priest, also were used when direct answers were desired to solve difficulties (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21; Ezra 2:63).

#### God’s Dwelling

God’s dwelling was to be between the cherubim for the purposes of the tabernacle and temple worship; the manifestations of light and voice being constant tokens of His presence. But before the tabernacle was made, and while Israel journeyed through the wilderness, God manifested His presence and guiding providence in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night. When the tabernacle was completed, the cloud and fire rested on the tabernacle, and the glory of the LORD filled the interior (Exodus 13:21,22; 40:34-38; Numbers 9:15-28).

When, subsequently, the temple was erected, the same manifestations of the divine presence were granted, the Most Holy being called the Oracle (1 Kings 6:5, 6, 9; 8:6-11).

The verb ‘yashkan’, from which the term ‘shekinah’ is derived, means ‘to dwell’, and is used in the following passages concerning God’s dwelling in the midst of the children of Israel:

*“And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.”* (Exodus 25:8);

*“And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God.”* (Exodus 29:45);

*“... that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell.”* (Numbers 5:3);

*“Remember ... **this Mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.**”* (Psalm 74:2).

Ezra 6:12 may be read literally, *“And the God that hath shekinized his name there”*. Compare also Deuteronomy 12:11; 14:23; 16:2,6,11; 26:2; Nehemiah 1:9. The same thought is expressed in Exodus 24:16, *“And the glory of the LORD abode upon Mount Sinai”*.

God’s abode, or dwelling place, between the cherubim is also referred to in the books of Samuel,

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\* **NOTE.** The Hebrew word ‘keruwb’, with its plural form, has been transferred to the English language as ‘cherub’ and (plural) ‘cherubim’. But by an erroneous practice the plural form ‘cherubim’ has been pluralised again as ‘cherubims’. This erroneous plural form is used by the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and by some other English publishers in their editions of the KJV of the Bible, while Scottish and American editions use the proper plural form, ‘cherubim’. In the foregoing chapter both forms have been utilised. In the RV the universities have abolished the erroneous plural form, ‘cherubims’, in favour of the proper plural, ‘cherubim’. All the above remarks apply equally to the Hebrew word ‘saraph’, which with its plural form has been transferred to the English language as ‘seraph’ and ‘seraphim’.

*"So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims"* (1 Samuel 4:4).

*"David arose, ... to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts, that dwelleth between the cherubims"* (2 Samuel 6:2).

When David triumphed over the Philistines, he composed a psalm (2 Samuel 22; Psalm 18), in which he poetically speaks of God as having ridden one of the cherubim to hasten to his aid. His prayer for help had been directed to the sanctuary, where God dwelt between the cherubim (2 Samuel 22:7,11).

Other references in the psalms are: *"Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth"*, and *"He sitteth between the cherubims"* (Psalm 80:1; 99:1). See also Hezekiah's prayer (Isaiah 37:16), *"O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims"*.

Solomon built the temple on a grand scale, and furnished it magnificently; but he made no new ark. The one made by Moses in the wilderness was placed in the Most Holy. Apparently to fill the space, and make the ark appear less forsaken in the larger room, Solomon made two additional cherubim, and stood them one on each side of the ark. These were colossal figures, but they would not be seen except by those who performed the service of the sanctuary,

*"And within the oracle he made two cherubims ... each ten cubits high. ... And he set the cherubims within the inner house: and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubims [or, the cherubims stretched forth their wings], so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house."* (1 Kings 6:23-27; compare with chapter 8:7; and 2 Chronicles 5:8).

Here, then, we have four cherubim, instead of the two with which the children of Israel had been more or less familiar up to this time. As Solomon was not divinely directed to make types as Moses had been, we may take it that the symbolism remained the same in the temple as in the tabernacle, though now expressed by four cherubim instead of two.

### **The Form of the Cherubim**

In all these references to the cherubim there is no description of their form. They are spoken of as though their shape was familiar. Moses was shown in the Mount a pattern of the things he was to make for the tabernacle, and some of these things he minutely describes (Exodus 25:40).

But he does not describe the cherubim. One might reasonably gather from this that they were not as mysterious to the Jews of that time as they have been since the temple was destroyed and the ark lost or broken. Though the people did not see the cherubim in the Most Holy, they were acquainted with their outlines, for cherubim were worked into the fabric comprising the hangings, which the wise hearted and devout women spun and embroidered, and the wise hearted and devout men erected, as their donation to God's house (Exodus 26:1,31; 35:25,35; 36:8,35).

When the temple was in construction, Solomon directed Hiram and his workmen, who were Phoenicians, to ornament *"all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without"*, so that it is evident even the heathen knew the form of the cherubim (1 Kings 6:29; 7:13,14). The doors were carved with cherubim spread over with gold (1 Kings 7:32-35). Ten bases for ten lavers were cast with borders in the form of lions, oxen, and cherubim, underneath which there was a thin sub-base (1 Kings 7:29). Other parts of the bases were engraved with cherubim, lions, and palm trees. All ten bases were of *"one casting, one measure, and one size"* (1 Kings 7:36,37). The great laver, or *"molten sea"*, was supported by twelve brazen oxen, the forequarters of which only appear to have been cast, or at least visible (1 Kings 7:23,25,44).

Solomon's workmen and Hiram's workmen worked together in the forests hewing timber and conveying it to Jerusalem. They also worked together as stonemasons and carpenters. But Hiram's men alone had the experience necessary to produce the castings and engravings, the children of Israel having been forbidden by their Law to make likenesses of any kind. Apparently God did not object to this ornamentation of the temple by the skilful Tyrians (1 Kings 5:5-18; 7:40-46).

What we gain from all this for our present purpose is that, while the cherubic figures in the Most Holy were sacred, and hid from the eyes of the multitude, yet both the Hebrew people

and their Phoenician neighbours were so familiar with the form of the cherubim that they could reproduce them in vast numbers in woven hangings, carved wood and stone, and graven gold and brass.

A modern idea, due, we believe, to the Roman church, is that a 'cherub' is an innocent, round-faced child with small wings. Such are represented in many 'old masters' hovering around the Virgin and Child. There is, however, no scriptural authority for that concept. So far, though we have found the form of the cherubim not described, the suggestion of their use is more of maturity than childishness. The two cherubs on the mercy seat appear not to have had feet, since they rose up out of the mercy seat in one piece. The feet of the two larger cherubs in Solomon's temple are not described, but the wings were immense, five cubits each, so that their four wings stretched across from one wall to the other, a distance of twenty cubits (about 30 feet) (1 Kings 6:23-27).

### **Ezekiel's Vision of the Cherubim**

Ezekiel supplies the information sought concerning the form of the cherubim; for, though what he saw was a vision, yet he says distinctly that what he saw was a representation of 'the cherubim', evidently referring to the cherubim with which he was familiar in connection with the temple at Jerusalem, for he was a priest (Ezekiel 1:3; 10:20). Concerning the form of the figures, he says, *"Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man"* (Ezekiel 1:5).

The cherubim in the tabernacle had, so far as the scriptures inform us, but one face. In Ezekiel's vision each living creature had four faces. Why this difference? The answer lies, we believe, in the lessons or teachings intended to be conveyed by the respective symbols. For who can doubt that there is a meaning in it all for God's children? It remains for us, by searching the scriptures, and comparing scripture with scripture, to discover that meaning, asking God's aid and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If, then, we consider that Ezekiel, as a priest and prophet of God, knew what has just been recited concerning the cherubim in tabernacle and temple; and, furthermore, if we grant that God, in giving him a vision, would portray symbols in harmony with those previously given to His faithful servants and priests, we are better prepared to study and understand Ezekiel's vision than if we considered it as an isolated and peculiar manifestation having no connection with anything contained elsewhere in the scriptures. And it is a remarkable fact that not only the living creatures themselves, with human face and form, but also the lion, ox, and eagle, the wheels, the fire, the cloud and the brightness are all drawn from the symbolic representations of Solomon's temple. In other words, God combined these symbols in the vision given to Ezekiel in such a way as to teach great truths in harmony with those previously taught by the sacred furniture and the divine presence in the temple.

We may go a step further, and say, that the vision of the seraphim given to Isaiah and of the four "beasts," or living creatures, seen by John the Revelator, are also in harmony in their use of the symbols and in the lessons taught.

### **Lions and Oxen Associated with the Temple Service**

As already seen, lions and oxen were used to support and embellish the great molten sea and the ten molten lavers which Hiram made for Solomon's temple. The lion, king of beasts, represents majesty and strength; the ox symbolises patient burden-bearing and perseverance. These qualities are exhibited by God, and are associated by Him with His provision for the cleansing of His people from sin. God's majesty and strength were often manifested in behalf of the children of Israel, as their history shows; as were also His long-suffering and patience. He bore with them century after century, and only at the time of Ezekiel's vision had His patience come to an end, that the Israelites might be given needed lessons in Babylon as well as judgments on their country.

The use of animals in scripture as symbols is extensive, but need not be gone further into here. In 'Daniel the Prophet in the Latter Days' we have examined their use to represent world-powers. In the temple and in Ezekiel's vision they are used to represent features of God's dealings with His people.

### **Wheels in Temple and Vision**

Wheels are also associated with the ten brazen lavers, as explained in 1 Kings 7:30,32,33, *"And every base had four brazen wheels, and plates of brass; ... And under the borders were four wheels; and the axletrees of the wheels were joined to the base: and the height of a wheel was a cubit and half a cubit. And the work of the wheels was like a chariot wheel: their axletrees, and their naves, and their felloes, and their spokes, were all molten"*.

These wheels were for convenience in moving the lavers to the molten sea to be refilled and returned to their stations on either side of the house. Each laver held forty baths, while the great molten sea contained two or three thousand baths, a bath being equal to 6 or 7 gallons (1 Kings 7:26,38,39; 2 Chronicles 4:6).

The wheels of Ezekiel's vision are said to have been *"like unto the colour of a beryl"*. Strong's Concordance and Smith's Bible Dictionary consider that the gem here referred to is the topaz, a golden-hued stone. This would make them correspond in colour to the wheels of the lavers, which were of burnished brass, and is in harmony with the general symbolism.

The rings (or circumferences) of the wheels were so high as to be *"dreadful"*. Leeser translates, so high that they *"excited fear"*. And they were so constructed as to give the appearance of 'a wheel in the middle of a wheel'. The spokes of a large wheel would be fortified by braces, which would give the appearance of duplication. For it is distinctly stated that there were only four wheels, and apparently each living creature or cherub was stationed by one of the wheels, not on the ground beside the wheels, but on a platform supported on the axles of the wheels (Ezekiel 1:15,16,18; 10:9, 0).

The motion of the wheels was direct, and controlled by the same life which animated the cherubim. They did not turn hither and thither, but went straight forward in any direction, up or down, or to any of the four points of the compass (Ezekiel 1:17-21; 10:11-17).

### **The Eagle**

The eagle does not appear in the symbolism of the temple. It is introduced in Ezekiel's vision as one of the four heads of the cherubim. Its use as a figure of speech is, however, frequent in the Old Testament, especially in connection with God's care over His people, as the following passages illustrate:

*"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him [Jacob's descendants] and there was no strange god with him"* (Deuteronomy 32:11,12; see also Psalm 103:5; Isaiah 40:31).

*"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself"* (Exodus 19:4).

*" . . . and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old"* (Isaiah 68:9).

The head of an eagle was, therefore, appropriate to the vision shown to Ezekiel, as we shall see when considering the meaning of the vision.

### **Their Feet**

Ezekiel thus describes the feet of the cherubim, *"And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass"* (Ezekiel 1:7).

Though it is possible that the cherubim erected by Solomon had such feet, there is no proof either way on the subject. However that may be, in the temple the fore-feet of the oxen which supported the *"molten sea"* were in evidence, shining with brightness, for they were cast in brass. See the margin of 1 Kings 7:45; the Hebrew signifies that the lavers and utensils made by Hiram were of 'bright' or 'scoured' brass. It seems reasonable to suppose that in Ezekiel's vision the feet of oxen or calves are joined to the cherubim in order to make a composite symbol.

### **The Infolding Fire**

The cherubim on the ark were made of pure gold. Those made by Solomon were of olive-wood overlaid with gold. Their appearance would consequently be very bright. But, as they stood in the Most Holy, the cherubim had no brightness of their own, for both the tabernacle and temple buildings were closely covered to exclude natural light; the former by means of heavy curtains and skins (Exodus 26:1,7,14). The lamps of the seven-branched candlestick were to be kept constantly burning (Exodus 27:20, 21), but these would not illuminate the Most Holy, for the candlestick stood in the first apartment, called the Holy, and there was a heavy curtain between the two apartments (Exodus 25:31-37; 26:31-35). No artificial light was provided for the Most Holy. Solomon made ten golden candlesticks of the seven-branched pattern, and stood them in the Holy, five on the right side, and five on the left side, *"before the oracle"* (1 Kings 7:49). Thus the only light admitted to the *"oracle"* or Most Holy, would be from these lamps on those rare occasions when the veil would be lifted by the high priest when he entered the inner sanctuary.

The belief is current among the Jews that a miraculous Light shone between the cherubim, and this view is generally accepted by Christians. There is no positive scripture to this effect, but there are allusions which confirm the idea; such as Psalm 80:1, *"thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth"* Furthermore, since God is Light, and manifested Himself on Sinai and elsewhere by fire, and His glory at times filled the tabernacle and temple, the Hebrew belief is not unreasonable. The cherubim, then, would shine and glow in this Light, indicative of the divine presence and favour.

There was, however, another light in connection with both tabernacle and temple; or, more properly speaking, a fire, which corresponds more nearly to the infolding fire seen by Ezekiel, than does either the Shekinah Light or the light of the golden lampstand. We refer to the fire kept continually burning upon the brazen altar of burnt offering, which stood in the court before the door of the tabernacle. Upon this altar the regular morning and evening sacrifices were offered, also other offerings, and from it live coals were taken upon which to burn incense on the golden altar in the Holy (Leviticus 6:12,13; Exodus 29:38-42).

But there was another fire whose manifestations before the children of Israel correspond still more nearly to the description of an infolding fire. This was that miraculous fire which came out from before God on special occasions: in some instances as a token of His presence and approval, or to commission a leader; at other times, to display His wrath in the destruction of evil doers. It will be of profit to consider these occasions, confining ourselves at present to those connected with the children of Israel from the time of Moses.

### **The Burning Bush**

*"And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed."* (Exodus 8:2).

Here was a steadily burning flame of fire, out of which came a voice, telling how God had seen the afflictions of His people, and had come down to deliver them by the hand of Moses, whom He then and there commissioned for the great task. God there gave also a revelation of Himself as YHWH, the covenant-keeping God, whom Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had known as *"God Almighty"*. And He gave Moses the assurance that in all the great undertaking He would be with him (Exodus 3:1 to 4:17).

### **The Smoking Mount**

At Sinai, when the people gathered to enter into a special covenant with God through the mediatorship of Moses, great manifestations of majesty and power overawed them. *"There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. ... And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.... And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mount."* (Exodus 19:16-20).

This was not a vision, but an actual demonstration with fire, smoke, thunder, lightning, and a great voice. The people were so terrified that they implored Moses, *"let not God speak with us, lest we die"*. Even Moses confessed that he exceedingly feared and quaked (Exodus 20:18-21; Hebrews 12:21).

The psalmist refers to these demonstrations as an historical fact handed down from generation to generation, *"O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah. The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel"* (Psalm 68:7,8).

Stephen, at the time of his martyrdom, refers to the experience of Moses at the burning bush as an historical fact, and mentions the giving of the Law at Sinai (Acts 7:30-38). The apostle Paul, writing under inspiration, also confirms the Old Testament records (Hebrews 12:18-21,25,26; 8:5). And our Lord endorsed all that Moses had written by constantly referring to the Hebrew Pentateuch.

The glory, majesty, and power of God which Moses and the people witnessed in the mount were manifested in various ways as He led them through the wilderness, also after they were settled in Canaan; but the exhibitions of fire were invariably the most thrilling, and the most expressive of His wrath against evil doers, as they were also the most effective representation of supernatural glory, which in itself is invisible to human sight, for we read that no man hath seen God at any time (Deuteronomy 4:12; 1 John 4:12; John 5:37; 1 Timothy 1:17).



This glory, which was displayed in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire as a constant visual proof of His presence and guidance, was afterward confined to a considerable extent to the direct precincts of the ark and the altars.

### **The Altar Fire**

At completion, both the tabernacle and the temple are said to have been filled with His glory, which remained, although in a less terrifying form. In addition, we read:

*“And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.”* (Leviticus 9:24).

*“And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD. So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.”* (1 Kings 8:10,11).

*“Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house.”* (2 Chronicles 7:1).

These passages show how intimately fire was associated with the glory of the LORD.

To convince Gideon that he was called of God to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites, the angel touched with his staff the offering which Gideon had brought, *“and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes”* (Judges 6:16-21).

The test which Elijah proposed, to prove whether Yahweh or Baal was the true God, was a trial by fire, *“the God that answereth by fire, let him be God”*. We all know the result. Baal was inert, helpless; but the God of Israel answered beyond doubt, *“Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench”*. The people were convinced; they fell on their faces, and said, *“The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God”* (1 Kings 18:17-40).

When the pestilential plague destroyed seventy thousand of Israel, David was greatly humiliated, for it was a punishment for his sin in numbering Israel. The angel came to Jerusalem to destroy it, but God commanded that the plague be stayed, for David and the elders of Israel prostrated themselves in prayer that the remaining people be spared.

Then David was commanded to set up an altar at the place where the plague was stayed, the threshing floor of Oman the Jebusite. So David bought the site, and on it built an altar and offered sacrifices. And God showed His complete reconciliation with David by acceptance of his offering: *“and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering”* (1 Chronicles 21:14-27). Upon this site was afterward erected the temple for which David immediately began preparations (1 Chronicles 22:1-5).

### **A Symbol of Wrath and Destruction**

While fire is a magnificent symbol of glory, majesty, power, and energy, in its effects it is a symbol of destruction. The fire consumed the offerings on the altars and on the rock. When directed against evil doers, its office was to destroy them, that they might no longer defy the Law and corrupt their neighbours. Demonstrations of fire from God for this purpose were made in the wilderness.

When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered *“strange fire”* before God, they disobeyed an express command; namely, that the fire for the incense offering, to be made at the golden altar in the Holy, be taken from the brazen altar in the court. Upon this brazen altar were offered the sacrifices for sin, and the burnt and peace offerings. Thus the lesson was that the incense would be acceptable and a *“sweet savour”* by reason of its connection with the altar of atonement (Exodus 30:7-9).

This connection was also shown in that the horns of the golden altar were anointed once a year *“with the blood of the sin offering of atonements”* (Exodus 30:10). The *“sweet spices”* for the *“pure incense”* were directed to be made into a *“perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy”*, and this perfume was to be kept ready for use in a convenient place near the golden altar (Exodus 30:34-36).

Nadab and Abihu disregarded these instructions, and used other fire. As a punishment for their disobedience, and to make it clear that infringement of the ordinances was a serious matter, *“there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD”* (Leviticus 10:1-3).

Another display of the wrath of God by fire was exhibited in the matter of the 250 prominent men, not priests, who thought they were as qualified to offer incense as was Aaron. Korah, the ringleader of the rebellion, was of the family of Kohath (of the tribe of Levi), which was dedicated to the service of the temple, but not to priestly functions. The other principal rebels were Dathan, Abiram, and On, of the tribe of Reuben. Many of their families and sympathisers were destroyed by the earth opening to receive them. But the 250 men who offered incense were consumed by *"a fire from the LORD"* (Number 16:1-41).

As verse 19 states particularly that *"the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation"*, doubtless in its usual place over the tabernacle, it is evident that the fire came down in their sight as an ocular demonstration of God's anger. Verses 17 and 18 state that the would-be offerers stood in the door of the tabernacle, with their censers in their hands, together with Moses and Aaron. It is probable they did not go into the tabernacle at all, but were slain where they stood, while Moses and Aaron were unhurt, and therefore vindicated as the true representatives of the God whose glory shone above them. No more striking symbol of wrath and destruction can be imagined than this burning flame causing instant death.

It may indeed have been a lightning flash, for on Sinai lightning was associated with the fire of the divine majesty. Ezekiel speaks of lightning as having been seen in his vision, *"It [the fire] went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning"* (Ezekiel 1:13).

In the psalmist's picture of God's glory, as manifested to Israel, and in their behalf, he includes both fire and lightning, *"Clouds and darkness are round about him: ... A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world"* (Psalm 97:2-4).

### **Our God is a Consuming Fire**

What was in the wilderness literal destruction by literal fire became at a later day symbolic of God's power to destroy His enemies, both during the Jewish Age and since; for the apostle Paul, after referring to the wonderful demonstrations at Sinai, concludes one of his serious warnings to the Church with these words, *"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire"* (Hebrews 12:28,29).

The same symbolism is employed in other of his warnings, notably Hebrews 6:8, and is implied in Hebrews 10:27,31, *"fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries"*, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"*. The thought here is not eternal torment, but swift and certain destruction, as when God's wrath was visited upon the 250 profane princes of Israel. Though this destruction is certain as the punishment of wilful apostates, it is not inflicted in the spectacular manner shown in the wilderness; nevertheless, it is certain to befall those who emulate the spirit and rebellion of those men.

### **Symbol of Energy**

The appearance of the *"fire infolding itself"*, which Ezekiel saw in his vision (4:1), suggests great energy. Those who have witnessed a large conflagration have seen how the great waves of fire roll up and roll back on themselves, tossed to and fro by the force of the heated and expanding air and by shifting winds and drafts. A whirlwind accompanied the cloud and fire which Ezekiel saw, but the description seems to indicate it as the means of propulsion of the entire vision, rather than the cause of motion in the fire. The energy of the fire seems to result more from internal force, like the fire Moses saw in the bush; feeding on nothing, but always in motion. Exodus 24:17 agrees with this, saying, *"the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount"*. The centre or vortex of the fire was like the colour of amber or of molten metal (Ezekiel 1:4).

The living creatures, or cherubim (in the vision), were illuminated by this fire, just as were the cherubim in the Most Holy illuminated by the Shekinah Light, *"And in the midst of the living creatures was an appearance, like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning"* (Ezekiel 1; 18; compare with Septuagint rendering).

Illuminated by this light, the movements of the living creatures also appeared like lightning flashes (Ezekiel 1:14).

### **The Firmament upon their Heads**

The word "*firmament*" here used simply means 'an expanse'. The same word is used in Genesis to refer to the expanse between the earth and the highest heaven. Genesis 1:14-18 tells us that the sun, moon, and stars were placed in this firmament. What Ezekiel saw was "*the likeness of the firmament*", not as immense, of course, as the firmament of nature, for the firmament or expanse of his vision was limited in circumference. It was part of the imagery of the cherubimic group (Ezekiel 1:22).

The description of its colour is mystifying, as given in the KJV, "*as the colour of the terrible crystal*". The RV margin substitutes "*ice*" for crystal, but that makes it no clearer. The Hebrew word rendered "*terrible*" may refer to anything that excites reverence, as well as that which arouses fear. Leiser renders the phrase "*(shining) like the glitter of the purest crystal*". This rendering seems more comprehensible. What was there in the temple that resembled the "*purest crystal*"?

Was it not the pure water contained in the great molten sea, which Solomon made as a reservoir for the convenience of the priests? Here in the vision the cherubim are represented as bearing aloft a crystal-like expanse or sea. And the wheels also may be supposed to support the sea, just as in Solomon's temple the ten lavers were supported on bases having four wheels each (1 Kings 7:30,32), for when the cherubim went the wheels went, and when the cherubim stood still the wheels stood still also (verses 17 to 21).

### **Above the Firmament a Throne**

The throne above the firmament completes the picture of the glory of the LORD. The throne was "*as the appearance of a sapphire stone*" (Ezekiel 1:26). The name sapphire is now given to various coloured stones, but principally to a stone of a clear blue colour.

Professor N. Story-Maskelyne contributes to the Variorum Bible the opinion that it is difficult to identify positively the stones mentioned in the Old Testament, except in the case of the sapphire, which he identifies with our lapis lazuli (ultramarine), especially in view of Exodus 24:10.

In this feature also Ezekiel would recognize a connection with previous representations of God's glory, particularly that described in almost similar terms in Exodus 24:10, "*And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness*". Here the colour of the sapphire is given without a doubt: a transparent, blue stone, like the body of heaven in its clearness.

### **A Man Above Upon It**

The whole attention is now riveted on "*the likeness of the appearance of a man above upon*" the throne. Why is he there, in the throne of God? Yet he looked like no human being, for he sat in the midst of fire, "*And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire*" (verse 87).

In other visions of the glory of God, and in those exhibitions of God's glory over the tabernacle in the wilderness, there was no likeness of a man in the midst of the glory. Evidently a new symbol is introduced here, the purport of which it is our desire to understand.

### **The Rainbow**

Ezekiel saw a rainbow about the throne, "*and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about*" (verses 27 and 28).

A rainbow in scripture is the token of a covenant and promise. Its first appearance was after the waters of the flood were dried up, when God covenanted with Noah and his seed, and with every living creature, that there would never be a repetition of so vast and destructive a flood. Every time we see a rainbow, we are reminded of this promise (Genesis 9:8-17).

### **Location of the Fire**

Before going fully into the meaning of the vision and its movements, as related by Ezekiel in chapters 1 to 11, let us look at another detail, as given in chapter 10, and try to get a picture in our mind's eye of the entire vision, by seeing the relationship of the various parts to each other. The man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, was commanded, "*Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubims; then he went in, and stood beside the wheels. And one cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that was between the cherubims, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen: who took it, and went out*" (Ezekiel 10:6,7).

This seems to make it clear that the fire was situated on a platform, with a wheel and a cherub at each corner, or on each of the four sides. To get the coals of fire the man with the inkhorn *“went in”*, standing in a place adjacent to the platform and the wheels. Verse 2 supports the idea of a platform on which the cherubim stood, for the voice commanded the man with the inkhorn, *“Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims”*.

The thought of a cherub stationed at each wheel is borne out by Ezekiel 1:19, “And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them”; that is, according to the RV and other versions, *“beside them”*; and verse 20, *“the wheels were lifted up over against them”*. Each living creature, as it were, controlled a wheel; for *“the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels”*.

Some commentators prefer the marginal reading, *“the spirit of life was in the wheels”*, as though the wheels had a spirit in them independent of the living creatures; but Leeser’s Translation retains the KJV rendering, that it was the spirit of the living creatures that was in the wheels.

### Wheels within Wheels

This expression, *“wheels within wheels”*, has become a classic. It is used of anything complicated. Closely woven intrigues and wire pulling are spoken of as wheels within wheels. If all the wheels operate harmoniously the affair prospers. If the wheels revolve in opposite directions, disaster follows. Thus a writer on Russian affairs says of conditions before the war; ‘In any other country than Russia such patent signs of intrigue on the part of one principal section of the administration would have been good evidence of the underlying intention of the government. But in easy-going Russia, in a condition of disorganisation, the wheels of the official machine often revolved in opposite directions, and merely checked each other without driving the country along any clear paths.’

The four wheels of Ezekiel were not so complicated. He saw, as it were, *“a wheel in the midst of a wheel”* - **only one** wheel within each of the four wheels, and that, as already remarked, may have been to suggest the great size of the wheels so that they required bracing. The operation of the wheels was as though all four wheels were one wheel—all working in absolute precision in response to the living creatures.

The living creatures themselves were moved by a Power higher than themselves. They were controlled by Him whose voice came from the throne. They were there to do His bidding, and they did it instantaneously, the wheels co-operating (Ezekiel 1:12,14).

The idea of a cherub at each corner, or on each side, supporting the firmament or sea, is also in harmony with Ezekiel 1:23,24, *“And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side their bodies. And when they went I heard the noise of their wings, ... when they stood, they let down their wings”*.

We understand this to mean that the two wings of each cherub on the inner side were not used for flying; these were stretched under the firmament or sea. But their outside wings were used for flying, and when not in use were folded to cover their bodies. Verse 11 states the same thing in slightly different language, *“two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies”*.

We should note here that Ezekiel 10:14 is not contained in the Septuagint, and therefore was probably not contained in the very ancient Hebrew manuscript from which the Septuagint translation into Greek was made. Its omission takes nothing from the word of God, for its description of the faces of the cherubim does not tally with that contained in 1:10. See also footnote in Variorum Bible, which states that verse 14 was originally a gloss on verse 22. Consequently it forms no part of the inspired scriptures.

Verse 13 also contains a peculiar expression, *“As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel”*. Various versions give various renderings of the words, *“O wheel”*. The KJV margin has it, *“They were called in my hearing, wheel”*, or, ‘galgal’. The Hebrew word ‘galgal’ means a wheel. It is derived from a verb meaning ‘to roll’. Mr. George Smith, F.A.S., thinks the word rendered *“O wheel”* (‘haggalgal’) is simply a command given to the wheels, and should be rendered, ‘Roll on’. On receiving this command, he says, *“the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the august vision moved onward”*. The RV has it that they were called *“the whirling wheels”*.

Yet why 'galgal' should be thus translated is not clear, since the account states that when the vision was at rest the wheels rested also, and their movements at other times were not like those of ordinary wheels; for instance, when they went on their sides (Ezekiel 1:17). Other versions do not attempt a translation, but transfer the Hebrew word bodily, 'galgal'.

It is well that understanding of the lessons of the vision in general does not depend upon a knowledge of the exact movements of the wheels. The important point is that they went instantaneously straight forward, up, down, north, east, south, or west, without the necessity of consuming time turning the vehicle (if so it might be called) about. Hence they are an excellent symbol of directness of achievement.

### **The Voice**

The KJV has it that the voice came *"from the firmament that was over their heads"* (Ezekiel 1:25). The RV and other versions have it that the voice came from above the firmament; that is, from the throne which was above the firmament. This is more in keeping with the representations to Moses, at Sinai, and on other occasions, where the voice came from the mercy seat in the Most Holy, or from the cloud over the tabernacle, and not from the lavers at which the priests washed in the court of the tabernacle.

This is evident also from chapter 2, verse 1, *"And he said unto me"*, referring to the voice from the throne, and not necessarily to the likeness of a man on the throne. In each case Ezekiel emphasises the teaching that the vision was a vision of the glory of Yahweh, and that it was the LORD God of Israel who addressed him out of the throne (1:28; 3:16,22-27; 8:1,4; 10:19; 11:22,23).

Ezekiel testified faithfully to the children of Israel the messages and warnings and promises sent by God, and it is possible that the vision of YHWH's glory was seen on more occasions than are set down in his book. The next and last occasion mentioned is in chapter 43, where he says the vision then given, in the twenty-fifth year of the captivity, was according to the vision he saw at Chebar, as related in chapter 1.

### **Full of Eyes**

The rings or circumferences of the wheels were *"full of eyes round about"* (Ezekiel 1:18). These must have a meaning. Chapter 1 makes no mention of eyes in connection with the cherubim, but chapter 10 describes both cherubim and wheels as full of eyes, *"And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had"* (Ezekiel 10:12).

The eye is a symbol of intelligence and observation. Many eyes would represent quick and accurate perception. Nothing could be hid from the all-seeing. Also, many eyes would indicate prompt action; for, all sides of a subject being seen and understood, there would be no need for hesitation.

### **Isaiah's Vision of Glory**

Another passage that should be considered, before taking up the interpretation of the details of Ezekiel's vision, is Isaiah chapter 6, verses 1 to 9. Isaiah prophesied some years before Ezekiel, and this chapter shows that he was commissioned for his work as prophet in much the same manner as Ezekiel was at a later date. There was not in Isaiah's vision the wealth of detail seen in Ezekiel's, for the reason that in Isaiah's day the time had not arrived for certain things to take place which Ezekiel was honoured in prophesying about and recording.

Isaiah says, *"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train [margin, 'the skirts thereof'; that is, probably, the cloud usually seen in connection with representations of God] filled the temple. Above it [above the train or cloud] stood the seraphims; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: The whole earth is full of his glory.'"*

Here are brought to our notice *"the seraphims"*, and their description is somewhat similar to that of the cherubim seen by Ezekiel. How many seraphim there were is not stated; but, in the absence of a definite statement, we may infer that there were two, that being the least number that could attach to a plural noun. Or, as there were four in Solomon's temple, it would not be out of harmony to consider that Isaiah, like Ezekiel, saw four cherubim.

The reason for considering the “*seraphims*” of Isaiah to be the same as the “*cherubims*” of Ezekiel, is that the word *seraph* simply means ‘burning one’, or ‘shining one’. And the only ‘burning ones’ answerable to the position these occupied in relation to the throne of God were the cherubim of the temple and of Ezekiel’s vision.

This is further confirmed by what follows. Isaiah lamented that one of unclean lips should have been vouchsafed this wonderful vision, for he knew the scripture that none could see God and live (Exodus 33:20). One of the *seraphim* took with the tongs lying by a live coal from the altar, and with it touched the prophet’s lips, and said, “*Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged*” (Isaiah 6:5-7).

Then follows the commission by the voice of God “*Go, and tell this people*”. Thus Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel were honoured above other men by visions and commissions, which were not only an honour to them but an encouragement to all God’s people in their time and since who long to know more of God and His gracious purposes. Our Lord, commenting on one of Isaiah’s prophecies, said to His disciples, “*Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear, what many prophets and righteous men desired to understand, but the knowledge was not given them in their day*” (Matthew 18:18-17).

### **Meaning of Ezekiel’s Vision**

Let us now reconstruct Ezekiel’s vision as he saw it. A whirlwind brings a cloud, in which is seen an infolding fire. As he looks, various features of the vision become clear. He sees four cherubim, each with four heads and four wings, standing on a platform swung between four immense, glittering wheels, the fire being between the cherubim and illuminating them. With their inner wings the cherubim support a sea (or huge laver) like crystal, and above the crystal sea is the throne of God, the figure in the throne being enshrouded in an amber flame and the throne itself surrounded by a rainbow. From out the throne comes a voice giving Ezekiel his commission.

In this vision every one of the essentials of the worship of God is represented, excepting only that of the sacrificial blood; namely:

- (1) The fire of the brazen altar where the sacrifices were offered;
- (2) The lavers and great sea, on wheels and on oxen, provided for the cleansing of the priests;
- (3) The golden candlesticks or lamps, for lamps **or** torch-like figures were seen in the midst of the fire;
- (4) The mercy seat, or throne, from which shone the Light of God’s presence;
- (5) The cherubim in attendance at the mercy seat.

This vision was shown to Ezekiel at a critical time in the history of the Jewish nation, when God was about to inflict upon them a severe punishment. Jerusalem was to be destroyed, the temple desecrated, and the land subjected thereafter to foreign control.

But could the temple be destroyed while the great YHWH dwelt in it? And if the temple were destroyed, the majority of the nation killed or scattered, and the remainder taken captive to Babylon, did that mean that God had deserted His people, and repudiated His promises? Did it mean that the heathen should boast that they had forever triumphed over the God of the Hebrews?

These were vital questions, and we believe that the vision of God’s glory was given to reassure Ezekiel and other believing and trusting Jews on these points, not merely that vision recorded in chapter 1, but that which is in some respects a continuation of it, second and third instalments of it, in chapter 3, verse 23, chapters 8 to 11 and chapter 43, verses 2 to 6.

Chapters 8 and 9 showed the hopeless idolatry and hypocrisy of leaders and people, and how only a small percentage were of such piety as to sigh and cry for all the abominations practised around them. These pious ones were to be saved from the coming destruction and carried to Babylon, to await the time when God was ready to return them to their own land, after it had lain desolate the required number of years (Jeremiah 29:1-14). God, as it were, paid this visit to the temple, with Ezekiel as eye witness, before He abandoned the house.

Chapter 10 then proceeds to show that the glory again rested on the house while the man with the inkhorn was given the coals to scatter over the city, in token of its coming destruction (10:4-7). Then the glory of God departed from the house and stood over the

cherubim, which conveyed it to the east gate, where sat 25 principal men, all convinced, and trying to convince others, that they were safe in the city, and that God would not suffer it to be destroyed (11:1-3). Against them Ezekiel was told to prophesy (11:4-12). Then followed a promise of God's care over the penitent and believing: *"Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come"*, and he would gather them again into their own land, at the end of the captivity (11:16-20).

Then the glory of God departed to the midst of the city, thence to the mountain on the east (probably the Mount of Olives), and there the vision ceased (Ezekiel 11:23).

The vision portrays not only this departure of the glory of God from the abandoned city, but also the great fact that the essentials of the worship of Himself would not be lost thereby, nor would one word of His promises fail to those Jews who still retained their faith. The essentials of the worship were represented in the brazen altar, the laver, the cherubim, the mercy seat, and the presence of God between the cherubim. These, in the vision, are represented as preserved and carried away, to be restored again at a later date; for they were types of divine things, and in Ezekiel's day the time for the types to give place to the gospel realities had not arrived.

And the man seen in the throne of God's glory, not portrayed in other representations of His glory, may be taken as an assurance that the promise of a king upon the throne of Israel had not been forgotten, but would be fulfilled in its due time.

The same prophet, Ezekiel, was used to declare both the overthrow of the last king of Judah and the promise of one to come, *"whose right it is"*. *"And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the LORD God; Remove the diadem and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him"* (Ezekiel 21:25-27).

### **Rainbow Covenants and Promises**

The appearance of the rainbow about the throne in Ezekiel's vision indicates that God is a covenant-keeping God. His covenant with the Jews, that they should be His people, would be kept, notwithstanding their temporary captivity, and the disasters upon their land. Also His covenant with David, that he should not fail an heir to the throne, was sure (2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 89:34-37).

John also saw a rainbow about the throne (Revelation 4:3). This was a token of the New Covenant; for John's visions related to the things concerning the Lamb slain and God's plans and purposes in Him (Revelation 5:6). It was an emerald colour, symbolic of its everlasting character; its freshness spoke of life and vitality. The life which God has promised is in the Son (John 3: 16,36; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:14-28; 1 John 5:11-13).

Surely a glorious vision was this, of the one whose right it is to sit on the throne of Israel, which was called the throne of the LORD, and which other prophecies tell us embraces rulership of the whole earth; for our Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the great King, foretold (1 Chronicles 29:23; Zechariah 9:9,10; Isaiah 9:6,7; Matthew 28:18; Luke 1:32; Romans 14:9; 1 Timothy 6:14-16; Revelation 19:16).

### **The Glory of the LORD and the New Temple**

Coming now to Ezekiel chapter 43 and the vision there seen, we find it to be a message to the Jews in Babylon and elsewhere, that the years of the captivity were passing, and that it was God's will for them to consider the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem and to prepare for their return, or at least to keep alive their hopes and their interest in the return at the close of the seventy years' captivity (Ezekiel 43:10,11).

Some of the considerations involved in this vision of a temple are examined in chapter 16 of this book. At present we are concerned with the meaning of the *"living creatures"* or cherubim.

We have not as yet defined their meaning as a symbol, because there is another passage in which *"living creatures"* are described that needs to be examined, in order to have all the data possible before us. These are brought to view in one of the visions of John on Patmos, and are called *"beasts"* in the KJV.

### **The Four Beasts around the Throne**

*"And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."* (Revelation 4:6-8).

It is not difficult to recognise in this vision the same symbols used in Ezekiel's vision. Verses 2 to 5 are a description of the throne of God. He that sat thereon was like a jasper, and a sardine stone, and there was a rainbow about the throne. Out of the throne proceeded lightnings, and thunderings, and voices, and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne. Also before the throne was seen the sea or laver of glass like unto crystal. The jasper was the diamond, representing purity and brilliancy, while the sardine stone was a fine red agate. The blending of red with the white would indicate a modification of the glare, tempering it, as it were, to John's sight, in order that he might more readily see the things about to occur in the throne, as portrayed in chapter 5.

The four "beasts" correspond remarkably with the four cherubim, but 'living creatures' is a better translation than "beasts", according to the Revised and other modern versions. There are some variations also. The four cherubim of Ezekiel each had four faces, while those of Revelation have but one face each. But since the faces are the same, man, lion, ox, eagle, in both visions, we may take it that the meaning of the symbol is the same in both.

The lion signifies majesty and strength; the calf or ox, patient endurance and perseverance; the man, intelligence and moral uprightness; and the eagle, farsightedness and swiftness of flight. The fact that each had six wings adds the figure of swiftness of movement to each of the four living creatures, as in Ezekiel's vision.

### **Four Wings, or Six Wings**

Isaiah's seraphim had six wings each, Ezekiel's cherubim four wings each, and now these living creatures in Revelation 4 have six wings each. Is there any way to harmonise these variations? Yes, by a method suggested by Dr. Adam Clarke. He calls attention to the fact that Ezekiel's cherubim had also hands, while both Isaiah's seraphim and John's living creatures are said to do things which ordinarily require the use of a hand. The seraph had "a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar", and with it touched Isaiah's lips (Isaiah 6:6,7). The four living creatures (as well as the elders) seen by John, had "every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints" (Revelation 5:8).

Ezekiel mentions the hands definitely three times:

*"And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides"* (Ezekiel 1:8);

*"And there appeared in the cherubims the form of a man's hand under their wings"* (Ezekiel 10:8);

*"Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings"* (Ezekiel 10:21).

It was one of these hands that the cherub stretched forth, to take the live coals of fire and give them to the man with the inkhorn (Ezekiel 10:7). The "form of an hand" is also mentioned in Ezekiel 8:3, and implied in 11:1,24. The "hand" of chapter 2, verse 9, may have been the hand of one of the cherubim.

Dr. Adam Clarke's suggestion, which seems a reasonable one, is that the arms of these hands were covered with feathers; and so resembled wings; and that, when folded, the appearance was, as Ezekiel expresses it, as a hand under their wings.

Further, the "seraphims" of Isaiah and the "living creatures" of John, who are described as having six wings, use two of them as hands, for it requires two hands to hold and play upon a harp, and to hold at the same time a golden bowl of odours; and it is not likely the seraph mentioned by Isaiah had only one hand-terminated wing (Revelation 5:8; Isaiah 6:6).

The matter of the number of wings is not, however, a vital point, since the symbolism of both (when in motion) is the same, swift and sustained flight. See the use of wings in this sense in Daniel 7:4,6, where the rapid conquests of Nebuchadnezzar and his father, and of Alexander the Great, are referred to.



### The Lamb in the Throne

But the central and most significant feature of John's vision is not the four living creatures, nor yet the four and twenty elders, but the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Special attention is drawn to Him by the manner in which the action of the vision develops.

The one seated on the throne undoubtedly represented God. He had in His hand a book, and a strong angel cried with a loud voice, "*Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?*" John wept when no one answered, but presently an elder said, "*Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof*" (Revelation 5:1-5).

Then John saw something not before seen in the visions of God's glory. He says, "*And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts [living creatures], and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne*" (Revelation 5:6,7).

Yet, though not before seen as in this vision, the Lamb of God had been foreshadowed in all the previous representations of fire, crystal sea, mercy seat or throne, and cherubim. His was the blood that required to be sprinkled on the mercy seat to make satisfaction for sin; and until He came the worship of God as conducted in the temple by pious Jews was preserved, with the exception of that period in Babylon when God's glory was temporarily removed and the city lay desolate.

When the Lord Jesus came, and offered himself as a Lamb without spot and without blemish, His blood was accepted as an atonement for the sins of the whole world; and at His resurrection He appeared in heaven to sprinkle the antitypical mercy seat (Hebrews 9:24-26).

Now John sees Him, "*as it had been slain*"; no longer dead, but risen, and crowned with all authority in heaven and in earth (seven horns). By reference to Daniel 7, it will be seen that "*horn*" is a symbol of power. He had "*prevailed*" and therefore was worthy to take the book and to loose the seals thereof. To Him also were given the "*seven Spirits of God*", symbolic of the Holy Spirit, which after His resurrection He received from God, with authority to pour it, or a due portion of it, upon the waiting disciples in the upper room.

This it was that was required to complete the vision: the Lamb slain, in the midst of the throne. And when the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders saw it, they fell down before Him, and they sang a new song (Revelation 5:8-10).

The angels round about the throne took up the refrain; and every creature in heaven and earth, and in the sea (the Sinaitic manuscript omits "*under the earth*"), joined the glad anthem, saying, "*Worthy is the Lamb*". Undoubtedly this extension of the song is prophetic of the time when the knowledge of God will fill the whole earth, and when every man ransomed will be brought to an exact knowledge of the truth; else how could they praise the Lamb slain? (Hebrews 2:14; 1 Timothy 2:4-7; Revelation 21:1-7).

### What the Cherubim Symbolise

We have deferred stating what we believe the cherubim to symbolise until this stage of our examination of the subject, because Revelation 5:9,10 seems to give a clue to their significance. "*And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*"

This language indicates that the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders represent part, if not all, of the redeemed, "*hast redeemed us*", "*we shall reign*".

Mr. George Smith, in his treatise on 'The Cherubim', takes the correct position when he says that New Testament explanations of symbols must be taken as the correct interpretations; and that in seeking to understand Old Testament types we need to be guided by the inspired applications made by the Lord and His specially guided apostles.

Accepting, then, this statement in Revelation 5:9,10, he interprets the cherubim of Revelation 4 and of the prophets as meaning the redeemed, particularly the redeemed as they shall stand in the presence of God in heaven after concluding their pilgrimage on earth.

### The Cherubim of Glory

With this view we might have felt disposed to agree, were it not that a Greek manuscript is available now which had not been discovered in 1850, and to which, consequently, Mr. Smith did not have access, else no doubt he would have modified his remarks.

We refer to the Sinaitic manuscript, discovered by Professor Tischendorf at Mt. Sinai in 1859. The readings of the Alexandrine manuscript were available in 1850, but it is possible they were not given the attention they deserved.

The other very ancient manuscript, the Codex Vaticanus 1209, does not contain the book of Revelation, its New Testament ending with Hebrews 9:14.

The Alexandrine MS. omits "*us*" from verse 9. The Sinaitic and Alexandrine readings of verse 10 are: "*and hast made them*" (Sinaitic), "*and they shall reign*" (Alexandrine), "*and they reign*".

Thus it is clear that the living creatures and elders do not sing of themselves as the redeemed, but rather of others redeemed, as expressed in the RV and other modern versions, "*Worthy art thou to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain. and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth.*" (Revelation 5:9, 10). Other translations, instead of the word "*men*" read, didst purchase "*out of*" every tribe".

The cherubim, therefore, do not symbolise the redeemed, neither the worthies of past ages, nor the Church being selected during the Gospel Age.

Another suggestion, for many years a very popular one, is that the cherubim and seraphim represent higher orders of angels: that the angels are interested in all God's work, in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and in His resurrection glory, and that they are swift messengers to do His bidding. This interpretation does not, however, fit all the passages. For instance, in this very chapter, Revelation 5, John heard the voice of many angels "*round about the throne and the beasts and the elders*", who join in praise to God as a class distinct from the living creatures and elders. The angels have been and are interested in God's plan and His faithful servants. They are sent forth "*to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*" (Hebrews 1:14).

But this interpretation of the cherubim and seraphim can scarcely be accepted, because nowhere in scripture are the angels referred to under those names when on angelic messages. The terms "*cherubims*", "*seraphims*", and "*living creatures*" are used exclusively of these emblematic figures seen in the tabernacle and temple and in the visions of God shown to Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John. Moreover, the angels are not spoken of as occupying a place in the midst of the throne, as is said of the "*living creatures*" (Revelation 4:6; 5:6).

The apostle Paul emphasises the limitations of the angels in his letter to the Hebrews. God did not said to any of the angels, as He said to Jesus Christ, "*Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool*". On the contrary, all the angels were commanded to worship the Son (Hebrews 1:5,6,13).

When he enumerates the contents of the Most Holy, he mentions "*the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat*" as a type of something in connection with the worship of God and the atonement, though he does not enter into the meaning of the cherubim as he does into that of the other pieces of furniture, and of the ceremonies conducted by the high priest (Hebrews 9:4-6).

He says that the Most Holy was a type of heaven itself into which Christ entered by His own blood. That the propitiatory is the Throne of Grace whereat believers obtain favour by reason of the blood of Christ sprinkled thereon. That because His blood is considered as sprinkled on this mercy seat, Jesus Himself may be truly called our propitiatory or mercy seat. It is through Him, and Him alone, that the believer has access to God (Hebrews 9:12,23,24; 10:12,19-22; Romans 3:25). Hence the logical conclusion is that the cherubim also represent something in connection with that worship rather than any angelic order of beings.

It seems more consistent with the emblematic use of the altar, crystal sea, mercy seat or throne and rainbow to consider the cherubim as representing some agency most intimately associated with God and His dear Son and the great plan of redemption. That agency is **divine providence**. This interpretation of the cherubim as representing divine providence fits very well every scriptural reference to "*cherubims*", "*seraphims*" and "*living creatures*".

### **Varying Manifestations of Divine Providence**

Divine providence necessarily partakes of the essence of the divine character. But the cherubim were not types of the divine character, nor were they symbols of the attributes of God, of which the principal are integrity, justice, mercy, wisdom, love, power. God Himself, including His attributes, was represented in the glory, in the requirement of a sacrifice for sin, the provision of that sacrifice in the person of His own Son, the blessing of mercy and forgiveness shed forth when the sacrifice was offered.

The cherubim in the tabernacle and temple represented how His providence waited on the sprinkling of the blood in order that it might go forth to guide and care for those Jews whose faith laid hold on that blood as their surety. They also foreshadowed His providence waiting for the sprinkling of the blood of atonement for the sins of the whole world by His own well-beloved Son. For over sixteen centuries, while the tabernacle and temple were standing, God's providence awaited that great event.

In the meantime, His providence directed the affairs of the children of Israel; and we have seen how, as pictured in Ezekiel's visions, God's providence preserved the essentials of the Jewish worship when the temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and restored them again when the Jews returned to Palestine, at the termination of their captivity. His providence kept the Jewish nation together after the return from Babylon, and His providence sent John the Baptist as the Forerunner of the Messiah. His providence watched over our Lord Jesus during His lifetime, and at His agony in the garden was ready to send twelve legions of angels to His relief, had the Son asked for them.

God's providence often uses angels, as He was ready to do in this case, but the angels themselves are not the providence; for His providence is as well able to use other agencies, men, for instance, to accomplish His purposes. His providence has made use of evil men, and of the forces of nature, winds, famine and pestilence, as well as of good men and angels (Acts 11:14,20,21; Ezekiel 14:21; 26:7).

The fact that the cherubim on the ark were made of one piece with the mercy seat also showed the intimate relation between atonement and God's providential care over those who accept the atonement made (Romans 5:8-11; 8:28,32-39; Philippians 4:6,7; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23; Matthew 6:33).

The seraphim which Isaiah saw showed the providential arrangement for cleansing those of unclean lips by live coals of altar fire. The sacrifice would be made in vain did not God's providence send out the knowledge of that gracious truth in answer to the beseeching prayers of those who recognise that their inherited imperfections must forever debar them from God's favour did not God provide some method of cleansing. Whether this coal, as some translators suggest, be a hot stone, or an ember of the wood of the altar fire, or a portion of the sacrificed animal, the teaching is the same.

The cherubim seen by Ezekiel symbolise, in addition to what has been already said, how God's purposes are independent of man's failures, and how His providence, in the most depressing and outwardly hopeless circumstances, is able to provide a way out of the difficulties, and bring good out of evil. Even the wrath of man is made to praise Him, as when Pharaoh's obstinacy became the occasion of many mighty miracles (Psalm 76:10; 78:5-16).

The cherubim seen by John the Revelator testify to us that the providence which was over God's people in the past is no less with them now, and that one of the first acts of His providence after the Lamb was slain was to raise Him from the dead and fulfil to Him all those promises of glory, honour, and immortality previously given Him. Furthermore, they show that the divine providence, hitherto exercised by the Father through various instrumentalities, would now be exercised by the Son, for the cherubim are represented as falling down and worshipping the Lamb slain, now exalted to the divine throne. Thereafter the cherubim, or living creatures, are directly associated with the work of the Son, as the succeeding chapters of Revelation show. All power in heaven and on earth is His. He has also the keys of hell ('hades', the grave) and of death; there is no place where divine providence, now delegated to the Son's service, cannot reach.

### **Why Four Faces, Six Wings?**

But why, some one may ask, if this is so, are there two or four cherubim, with four faces, four or six wings, and innumerable eyes all to represent but one thing, divine providence? Why not only one cherub?

The reason is that the multiplicity of detail in the symbols gives God's people more light on the nature of His providential care over, and dealings with, His people, and illustrates pictorially a greater variety of passages of scripture, thus aiding the mind through the eye.

Of the seraphs seen by Isaiah it is said of their wings that "*with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly*" (Isaiah 6:2). This reminds us of Paul's words, after describing some of the mysteries of the divine plan, "*How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*" (Romans 11:33).

Not only is it often impossible to forecast God's purposes, or see the direction in which His providence is heading, in regard to public and world-wide affairs, and concerning His dealings with the Church as a whole, but it is often difficult to discern His objective in permitting or sending trouble, persecution, loss of money and friends, and other trials upon His people. Like Job, they wonder why all this is allowed to befall them. Not only are the purposes (the head) covered, but also the consequences or after affects (the feet) are hidden. They can only trust that as there are still two powerful wings capable of long and sustained flight, God's providence is not overcome or exhausted. It is still able to touch the lips of the sincere penitent with a live coal from the altar and make him an instrument in His service; especially when the purged and accepted sinner follows Isaiah's example, and says, "*Here am I; send me*" (Isaiah 6:8).

At the time Isaiah prophesied, much more obscurity attached to the forthcoming dealings of God with the Jews than was the case when Jeremiah and Ezekiel were commissioned. The trouble coming and the nations to take part in the punishment of Israel were named by Isaiah, but many details given by Jeremiah and Ezekiel were lacking. In addition, there was a mystery about the cry of the seraphim, "*Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory!*" or, "*His glory is the fullness of the whole earth!*" Where, when, how could that be when the only people recognised by Him as His people were about to be sentenced to numerous defeats by surrounding foes and finally to captivity in Babylon? Truly the head and feet, the beginning and the ending, of this divine intention and providence were hidden. Yet the central fact remained, a remnant would be preserved and carried over, as on eagles' wings, to maintain the true faith in Babylon and ultimately be the instruments for its re-establishment in Judea.

Other prophecies of Isaiah, such as contained in chapter 53, were also obscure to the prophet and other righteous men. They wondered and inquired, but it was revealed unto them that they did not minister those things to themselves but to peoples coming later, even us who are privileged to understand how the Messiah should both suffer and enter into glory (1 Peter 1:10-12; Luke 24:26,27).

So in regard to the four faces of each of the four cherubim of Ezekiel, and the different face of each of the four living creatures of Revelation, each face gives us a thought in regard to the providence of God, and turns our minds to texts of scripture for our consolation and encouragement.

### **The Meaning of the Four Faces**

The lion face, in its majesty and strength, teaches that God's providence is always majestic and strong. There is nothing weak or cringing about it. And those who trust in that divine providence partake of its strength and courage. "*Be strong in the LORD, and in the power of his might*", rings in their ears. "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*", is their sentiment when pushed to the last extremity (Ephesians 6:10; Philippians 4:13). And they continually remind themselves of God's omnipotence, not only by words of scripture, but also in their hymns of praise, 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform: He plants His footsteps in the sea. And rides upon the storm'.

The face of the ox or calf reminds us that God's providential dealings are of a long-suffering and patient kind. The whole history of the children of Israel shows this, as does the history of the gospel Church. Every believer can testify from personal experience that God has been patient and long-suffering, and also persevering; for He does not wish any of us to fall away, but continually overrules in our affairs to the end that we may win the glorious prize set before us. Peter tells how long and patiently God endured the evils before the flood, the false prophets of Israel, and the reprobates among Christians. Even now He endures patiently the corruption that is in the world, while getting ready by His marvellous providential over-rulings for the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 2:1,9; 3:9,13,15; Hebrews 12:6-14; 13:5,6).

The face of the eagle reminds us that God's providence is ever on the alert. The eagle not only flies high and sees far, but can drop like a stone or dart from an immense height directly upon the object of attack. This thought of quick and direct interference is emphasised in Revelation 4:7 by the statement that this "*living creature*" was like a flying eagle; not a caged or indolent or aged bird, but one at the zenith of his powers. So swiftly and unerringly does God's providence go to the aid of His people and to the discomfiture of their enemies. "*And there were given to the woman [the persecuted church] the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness unto her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent*" (Revelation 12:14; RV; see also Exodus 19:4). Furthermore, as already referred to, God's providence is like the mother-bird, tenderly feeding the young in the nest, bearing them away, in the case of danger or for other reasons, in safety on her wings; and also, when they are strong enough, teaching them to fly, that their own wings may develop by exercise.

The face like unto a man reminds us that God's providence is dispensed in a moral and upright manner, consistent with His holy character, to sustain and direct the righteous. The steps of a righteous man are ordered of God, not the steps of the wicked (Psalm 37:23-40; James 1:2-7). Also the man's face indicates the intelligence and reasonableness of God's providence. It is consistent with, and an incentive to, man's highest thoughts and endeavours.

Though His providence may be likened in its various aspects to the lion, the ox, and the eagle, yet in its essence and ethics it is far above the animal sphere. As man is the highest of God's earthly creation, he having been made in the image of God, so the face of the man in the cherubic figure represents the highest moral and spiritual conceptions, and assures us that, however strange God's providence may at times appear, there is nothing dishonourable or coarse or degrading in it.

Those who wait upon the LORD and study His word find their minds ever directed to that which is holy, and pure, and good; and if at any time they fall into sin, they may be confident it was not God's providence that led them there but their own ignorance or disregard of His precepts and guidance (James 1:12-17).

### **They Went Straight Forward**

The eagle-like directness of God's providence is shown in another way in Ezekiel's vision. At the command of the Spirit of God the cherubim and the wheels were animated to instant action, and they did not turn round to reach their objectives. They always went straight forward. This directness was made possible by the possession of four heads, enabling them to see in all directions at once. There was not any turning back, because every side was a 'front'. The wheels moved as well sidewise, upwards, and downwards, as in the ordinary directions of an ordinary wheel (Ezekiel 1:17-21).

### **Innumerable Eyes**

This directness is also further accentuated by the fact that the wings and the wheels were full of eyes. So also in Revelation chapter 4, the wings of the four living creatures were "*full of eyes before and behind*" (verse 6); "*and had each six wings*", "*full of eyes within*" (verse 7). Commentators differ as to what is meant here; whether verse 7 is a reiteration of verse 6, or whether it is eyes on the inside of the wings additional to those mentioned in verse 6. Either way, the idea of a great number of eyes is conveyed to us, some turned toward the throne, to see everything occurring there, and some turned away from the throne to see what developed elsewhere. So then the "*living creatures*" of Revelation, like Ezekiel's cherubim, were fitted for instant recognition and execution of God's commands.

Father, we thank Thee that Thy wonderful divine providence is over all Thy works. Nothing is too small for Thee to see. The least of Thy children is not overlooked. Not a hair of their heads can be injured, unless Thou see some good purpose in permitting it. Not one of their gifts of love and contrition falls unheeded to the ground. They have but to plead the blessed name of Jesus, and Thou dost hear, and all the wonderful resources of Thy divine providence will be exerted on their behalf. Who would not worship and adore thee, O God?

Even so: daily we are constrained, as were the living creatures, the elders, the angels, and every other creature in heaven and in earth, to praise His name, saying, "*Blessing and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*". Amen.

## The Cherubim Guarding Eden

One other mention of the cherubim in the scriptures now requires notice. It is in the first book of the Bible, and the symbolism is, we believe, in harmony with that seen in later portions of scripture.

Genesis 3:22-24 reads, *“And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”*

There was one tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but the trees good for sustaining life were many, and probably of some variety. \*

It must be remembered that up to the time of the sin Adam and Eve were perfect, with no cause of death in them, and that to live forever was a possibility, the grove of life providing food of the necessary sustaining quality. It was therefore no figure of speech when God said, *“lest he take, and eat, and live forever”*.

Man having sinned, and come under the death sentence, the proper place to inflict the penalty was not in the garden which had been prepared for a perfect pair, but in the uncultivated, unprepared, and ‘cursed’ area outside the garden. The context thus plainly shows that the cherubim were placed where they were to keep or guard the way, and thus block any attempted return on the part of the guilty pair or their immediate descendants, for it is not known how long the cherubim remained at their post.

It might be thought that such a precaution was unnecessary, since the sinners were repentant, and realised more fully than at first the propriety and necessity of obedience. But it is possible, nay, probable, in view of what is said in later times concerning the cherubim as types, that there was an additional reason for placing the cherubim and the *“flaming sword”* at the entrance to the garden.

It should be observed that the original says the cherubim, as though some particular cherubim were meant. And as Moses was the writer of the book of Genesis, the use of that phrase indicates that the cherubim set on guard were of the same pattern as those which Moses was afterward commanded to make for the tabernacle.

These cherubim, then, were not angels, or any other living beings, but symbolic figures, whose presence was intended to accomplish more than block the way to the grove of life.

## The Flaming Sword

There were at least two cherubim, but only one sword. This sword acted independently of the cherubim, according to the language of the KJV, for it was a *“flaming” sword*, and it *“turned every way”*. Might there be more in this than appears on the surface? The RV reads, *“the flame of a sword which turned every way”*. Young’s Translation says, *“causeth to dwell at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubs and the flame of the sword which is turning itself round, to guard the way of the tree of life”*. A Variorum footnote suggests, ‘the blade of the flashing (or, waving) sword’. Thus the *“sword”* appears to have been a waving flame; and if the same arrangement were followed there as in the later representations, the flame would be between the two cherubim.

Mr. George Smith quotes Julius Bates’ ‘Similitudes’ in regard to the Hebrew words rendered *“a flaming sword”*; ‘As to the first term, it admits of no question: it means ‘fire, flame, ignited vapour.’ The word rendered a sword, is applied to any destroying matter, to any thing scorched or dried up; does not signify a sword, as an arbitrary, inexpressive word; not as describing its shape, materials, or any other idea belonging to a sword, ... but a destroying instrument. It signifies destruction; and a sword is said to devour (2 Samuel 2:26). In this all the Lexicons agree, and usage justifies them.’

In regard to the words, *“which turned every way”*, he suggests that they are very expressive of the motion of fire, which continually rolls in waves back upon itself; especially when confined as in a cloud or furnace; and answers exactly to the words used in Ezekiel 1:4, *“infolding itself”*; or, margin, *“catching itself”*.

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\* In the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which was in use in our Lord’s time and is quoted in the New Testament writings, the Greek word ‘xulon’, is used in Genesis 2:9. This shows that the collective sense of “tree” is to be understood in Genesis 2:9, for that is the significance of ‘ulon’ as may be understood from its use in Revelation 22:2. See also note on this word in the Emphatic Diaglott at Revelation 2:7.

If this explanation be correct concerning the cherubim and the flaming fire, the next step would be to regard this fiery manifestation as an emblem of the presence of God; that like as He "*dwelt*" between the cherubim upon the mercy seat, so He '*dwelt*' between the cherubim placed eastward of the garden. Thus while Adam and Eve were outcasts from the garden and condemned to suffer the punishment of death prescribed for their disobedience, they were not altogether cut off from communion with God.

Another reason for believing- that God was favourable to them was the provision of skins for clothing, which required the death of an animal, and which, in all probability, marked the beginning of sacrificial offerings for sin.

A further reason is that Eve considered her firstborn Cain as a gift from God; and after Abel was slain, and Seth was born, she said, "*For God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew*". Thus she expressed faith and confidence in God (Genesis 3: 21; 4:1,25).

Still another reason for believing that after the sin our first parents were repentant, and that God provided a regular mode of sacrifices and worship, is that neither Cain nor Abel offered his sacrifice in the pasture or in the field, but '*brought*' their respective offerings to some recognized place; a place where the voice of God spoke in reproof of Cain. Also part of Cain's regret was that his punishment meant not only banishment from the home centre, but "*from thy face shall I be hid*". Later, it is recorded, "*And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden*" (Genesis 4:3,4,6,14,16).

Now we know, as the scriptures state, that God "*dwelleth not in temples made with hands*", for heaven is His throne, and earth is His footstool (Acts 7:48,49; 17:24; Isaiah 66:1). But the scriptures also show that for the purposes of divine worship, God recognised a temple and an ark as His dwelling place in the midst of the children of Israel. This was done for their benefit, not His own.

So, it would appear, for the benefit of our first parents and their immediate descendants God provided and '*dwelt*' in the midst of the cherubim at the gate of the garden of Eden; and the miraculous fire there continually burning was an emblem of both His wrath against sin and of the propitiating atonement which would be required before the reconciliation between the sinful race and Himself could be complete.

And when we read, "*then began men to call upon the name of the LORD*" (Genesis 4:26), we may understand that this regular mode of worship in the presence of the cherubim was an established practice according to a God-ordained manner; and not, as might at first be supposed, a worship according to each man's disposition or invention. The experience of Cain showed that God did not and would not accept haphazard and offhand worship. Whoever draws near to Him must do so in a manner prescribed by Himself.

That is as true to-day as it was then. Now we do not draw near with sacrifices of animals to some sacred place in Eden, or to some tabernacle or temple, not because we would refuse to offer animals, but because God has instructed us not to do so. When we come to Him it must be in the name of the antitypical sacrifice, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for our sins. Neither do we draw near to some particular spot on earth, for our Lord said, "*Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. ... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*" (John 4:21,23)

We look not to the '*patterns of things*', the cherubim, the infolding fire, the crystal sea, and the presence of God in these emblems; we look to the grand realities which they foreshadowed. We see in heaven the "*holiest of all*", the throne of God (now a "*throne of grace*", or favour, (Hebrews 4:16), the sprinkled blood of the ever efficacious sacrifice for sins, the New Covenant of mercy and forgiveness, and the Lamb triumphant as King of kings and Lord of lords; and to that throne we direct our prayers and the devotion of our lives, as sweet incense to God (Hebrews 9:12,14,15,24; 10:19-22, 12:24; Ephesians 5:2; Revelation 8:3).

A great and wonderful privilege is thus granted unto us, which we trust this glance at the methods of worship of the past and their typical significance will help us to realise more fully, and also more frequently take advantage of. Ours is the privilege to "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Wherever we are, and whatever we may be occupied with at the moment, we may turn our hearts to God in prayer, if only in a few disjointed words, for help to do His will and bear patiently whatever of trial we may be called upon to endure; and at all times render the thankfulness of our hearts.

*"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." (Hebrews 13:15).*

*"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." (Ephesians 6:18).*

*"Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy fullness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Colossians 1:11,12).*



## Chapter 16

### THE TEMPLE OF EZEKIEL'S VISION

In the twenty-fifth year of the captivity of the children of Israel in Babylon, which was the fourteenth year after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel was shown a vision of the temple rebuilt at Jerusalem. In the vision he was carried to the land of Israel, and set on a very high mountain, from which he could see the frame or outlines of a city on the south (Ezekiel 40:1,2).

He was then (in the vision) conducted to the city, where he beheld a man, *“whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; and he stood in the gate”*. The measuring reed was six cubits long, and with it the man measured walls, gates and entries, telling Ezekiel their exact measurements. The objective in showing this vision with these precise measurements to Ezekiel was that the information might be written down by him for the benefit of the children of Israel (40: 3-5).

The remainder of chapter 40, and all of chapters 41 and 42, are occupied with these descriptions, showing that Ezekiel faithfully performed his allotted task. He was then (43:1-3) brought around to the gate which looked toward the east, and there he beheld the glory of the LORD, an exact facsimile of the vision of glory he had seen twenty years previously, in the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, as recorded in chapters 1 to 10. Ezekiel had at that time been used to declare the departure of the LORD from the temple before its destruction by the invader, and the vision gave hope that while God's favour was removed from Jerusalem it was not removed from a remnant of His people, nor were the promises or the form of worship abrogated.

Jeremiah had foretold that the captivity would last seventy years, and then Israel would return to their own land; not only so, the holy city should be rebuilt on its own heap (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10-14; 30:18). Ezekiel was God's prophet to Israel during the captivity, as Isaiah and Jeremiah had been before the captivity. The present vision is logically a further revelation of God's will concerning Jerusalem, His people Israel, and the restoration of true worship in the temple at Jerusalem.

#### **Was Ezekiel's Temple Ever Built?**

An answer frequently heard to the question, 'Was such a temple as Ezekiel saw in his vision ever built?' is no. There is no record either in the scriptures or profane history of the building of a temple and courts after the pattern and measures shown in this vision. Some who have studied the specifications have attempted to draw plans in harmony therewith, and have declared that the construction of a temple on those lines is not feasible.

Thus we have two separate schools of interpretation: one claiming that such a temple was not built, and therefore, to fulfil the prophecy, must be constructed in a future age on the site of Jerusalem, with the restoration of animal sacrifices; while the other school of interpreters claims that God did not intend any of the dimensions or directions to be taken literally, and therefore only some deep symbolic meaning must be sought for each article described and every dimension indicated.

Without wishing to dogmatise on what is confessedly a difficult portion of scripture, we should say that the vision contains both definite instructions for a material temple and also symbolic teaching. And we shall give reasons for believing that such a material temple was built after the return from the captivity, and will not be built in any future age.

We have seen that the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple erected by Solomon were literal, material structures, erected by the Hebrews according to divine directions, and that the apartments and furniture and ceremonies had a typical significance, the sacrifices pointing to Christ Jesus our Lord, the great sin-bearer. The same may be said concerning this temple which Ezekiel saw. The Jews were now in captivity without a temple, and on their return to Jerusalem the temple was to be rebuilt. But was it God's intention that it be rebuilt to exactly the same plan and specifications as Solomon's temple?

We have seen that Solomon's temple was larger than the original tabernacle, and more ornate. It was a fixture in a certain place, and not removable as the tabernacle had been. Yet the general arrangement of the furniture was the same, as was also the method of offering the sacrifices. Though the two buildings differed in detail, the symbolic teaching was the same in both.

Similarly, as we look at Ezekiel's temple, we find it differing in detail from both the tabernacle and Solomon's temple. Nevertheless, the general arrangement of the essentials of worship is the same, as are also practically the ceremonies for cleansing the temple when finished, the sacrifices of sin, trespass and thank offerings, and the orderly rotation of Levites and priests.

As Ezekiel had seen the glory of the LORD depart from Solomon's temple by the east gate, so now he sees in vision a new temple erected, and the LORD's glory returning by the east gate. It returned, not as an indefinite haze or mist, but with the same definite representation of altar, laver, cherubim, and mercy seat, indicative of the prescribed form of worship, and of God's willingness to bless those who seek His face in the approved manner. *"So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house"* (Ezekiel 43:5).

As on the previous occasion, Ezekiel heard the voice of God speaking to him. It gave him a clear and simple message to the Israelites still captive in Babylon. The need of such a message at this time is apparent. There were still forty-five years of the captivity to run. Some of the captives had lost faith, and mingled with the people of the land. The sceptical were deriding Ezekiel and others for expecting to return at a specified time as promised. Those who held to the faith were often disconsolate, saying, *"They that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning"* (Psalm 137).

How appropriate, then, this message from God by Ezekiel His prophet, that His glory was still intact, as it were, and ready to occupy again its old dwelling place in the temple at Jerusalem. Notice the similarity of language between Ezekiel 43:7 and Exodus 25:8; 1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 132:13-16).

But there was a more practical purpose in this vision than a mere message of encouragement. It was designed as something to occupy their minds and thoughts during the remaining years of exile, and to prepare them for what would be expected of them on their return, namely, their active and united participation in the manual labour involved in reconstruction. Each individual Jew was to apply to himself the lessons of the captivity and the destruction of their city, how all came upon them because of rebellion, idolatry, and other sins, and how God wished to cure them of their backsliding by settling them in the midst of the Gentiles, where they might experience the difference between that and their own land under the true God whom they flouted. This is set forth in Ezekiel 43:7-11.

Now let them turn their minds completely from their wicked past, and think of this new house, *"Thou, son of man, shew the house to the children of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern"* (Ezekiel 43:10).

We can well understand how thoroughly occupied their minds would be by a study of this vision, if we read it through a few times and attempt to draw a plan of it. They were to *"keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them"* (Ezekiel 43:11). We can see, too, how studying over it would beget in the earnest ones a desire to return and have a part in the work of erecting and furnishing this grand building.

Ezekiel 43:12-27 contains a message for the priests and Levites, upon whom would come the responsibility of the altars, the sacrifices to be offered, and the cleansing of temple and people. Chapter 44, verses 9 to 31, contains another message to the priests and Levites, reminding them of their unfaithfulness in the past, and singling out the sons of Zadok for certain services, because that family had not departed from God, as others had done. Other directions for the priests are found in chapter 46, verses 13 to 15 and 19 to 24. These are mainly reminders of what the Law of Moses required.

#### **Provision for the Prince**

Chapters 44, 45 and 46 contain directions concerning *"the prince"*. He is introduced in a dramatic way in 44:1-3, by Ezekiel finding the east gate shut. God was the real Ruler of Israel, and He had entered the temple by the east gate. Therefore the east entry should be reserved for the use of the ruler who, under God, should govern Israel after their return, whose duty it would be to preserve and encourage the worship of the true God in the prescribed manner. The east gate was the main entrance (Ezekiel 46:1,2).

After another vision of glory from the north gate, Ezekiel is again impressed with the importance of noting carefully all that God tells him, and is given a message of reproach to all Israel (Ezekiel 44:4-8). In this reproof God holds the entire nation responsible for the failure to preserve the true religion, not the priests and Levites alone, whose rebuke follows in the remainder of chapter 44.

After directions concerning the reservation of a certain portion of the land for the sanctuary, and portions for the priests and the Levites (Ezekiel 45:1-6), a portion of land is designated to be set apart for *"the prince"*.

It should be remembered that the head of each of the twelve tribes was called a prince, not prince as we use the term to-day, to describe the sons of a reigning monarch, but rather as meaning a king or ruler. The head of each tribe was ruler over the tribe (1 Chronicles 27:16-22; Numbers 1:5-16). These princes were subordinate to Moses and the judges whom God raised up, also to the high priest, who was the acknowledged ruler when there was no judge. Under the kings, from Saul onward, the ruler-ship was divided between the king and the high priest, the latter having powers with which the king was not allowed to interfere.

After the return from the captivity, Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, was recognised as chief, Cyrus giving into his hand the treasures of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had brought to Babylon, and which King Cyrus now restored to their rightful owners (Ezra 1:8; 5:14). But Sheshbazzar, though (as head of the principal tribe, Judah) recognised as chief of these tribal princes, was not the leader of the expedition, nor yet the highest prince. The latter office was filled by Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, whose genealogy (1 Chronicles 3:10-19; Matthew 1:12) shows him to have been a lineal descendant of Solomon. In Hagai 1:1,14; 2:2,21, Zerubbabel is called the "governor" of Judah. As civil governor he co-operated with the high priest Jeshua (or Joshua) (Ezra 3:2).

God, through, Ezekiel reproves the princes for their unfaithfulness in the past. They had oppressed the people, and filled the land with violence (Jeremiah 22:13-17; Ezekiel 22:27). *"Let it suffice you"*, says the LORD (Ezekiel 45:9; 44:6-8). Or, as we would say in our graphic English, 'Enough of that'. Prepare yourselves, so that, when you return to your own land, you may do differently.

Then follow exhortations and commands regarding just weights and measures, the prince being held responsible for justice and equity (Ezekiel 45:9-12): the size and kind of offerings expected from a prince (verses 13-25), in which ceremonies the people should join (verse 16), with special attention to the Passover beginning the fourteenth day of the first month (verses 17-25). (Compare with Exodus 12). The fourteenth was the day for killing the lambs to be eaten on the fifteenth.

Further directions concerning the ceremonial attending the entry and exit of the prince by the east gate on sabbaths and new moons are contained in chapter 46 verses 1 to 12, also concerning his voluntary offerings (verse. 12). Verses 16 to 18 warn the prince not to exploit the people in favour of his own family (see 1 Samuel 8:11-17; 1 Kings 21:1-16), a sin for which Ahab and Jezebel were severely punished (1 Kings 21:17-24). The Law required every family to retain its own possessions (Leviticus 25:23; Numbers 36:7).

Chapter 46:13-15 appears to be a direction to the high priest regarding the regular morning offering of a lamb, no mention being made of the evening lamb, as prescribed in Exodus 29:41. Verses 19-24 contain further directions for the priests, and for the provision of facilities for boiling the offerings brought by the people.

The prince was responsible for the erection of these structures, as well as for the general maintenance of the true worship in the land. That such princes or governors would be raised up from among themselves after the return had been foretold by Jeremiah (30:18-21), and in due time the promise was fulfilled in the raising up of Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and others.

### **Comparison of the Temples**

It would be interesting to compare the details given to Ezekiel with those given to Moses. For example, the meat offering of Numbers 15:4,6 consisted of a tenth part of an 'ephah' of flour, and a fourth of an 'hin' of oil for a lamb, or one-fifth of an 'ephah' of flour and a third of an 'hin' of oil for a ram. The former meat offering is enjoined in Exodus 29:40 to be given with the lamb at the morning and evening sacrifice, whereas in Ezekiel 46:14 the measure for each lamb at the morning sacrifice is a sixth part of an 'ephah' of flour to a third part of an 'hin' of oil. In Leviticus 2 the proportions of oil and flour are not stated. But space forbids us to go further into these interesting details.

From the fact that there are such differences, however, we believe it is proper to conclude two things: (1) that God reserved to Himself the right to alter details at His pleasure; and (2) that such alterations did not affect the typical significance, for all offerings to God should be of the best materials and richly compounded.

Any differences between the requirements given through Ezekiel and those given through Moses would not, we think, indicate a discarding of the Mosaic ordinances, but rather an addition to them. Thus on the restoration of the sacrifices after the return from the captivity the leaders were particular to offer on the altar burnt offerings "*as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God*" (Ezra 3:2;6:18). Further, the fact that Ezekiel 46:13 describes a continual burnt offering of a lamb in the morning, without mention of an evening lamb, would not indicate the discontinuance of the evening sacrifice. Indeed, there is evidence to the contrary, for, after the return, Ezra twice mentions the evening sacrifice as a matter of course (Ezra 9:4,5; compare with 1 Chronicles 23:30).

That the directions to Ezekiel indicate God's will that the Mosaic arrangements be continued after the return from the 70 years' exile is further shown in Ezekiel 46:17, where the re-institution of the Jubilee is mentioned. If the Israelites missed the observance of one or two jubilees in Babylon, it was no worse than their previous failure to observe the sabbath system in their own land (Jeremiah 34:12-17). In fact, one of the reasons for their banishment was their disregard of the ordained sabbaths and jubilees (Leviticus 26:34,35,43,44; Jeremiah 44:22,23).

Hence, when the faithful returned under Cyrus' decree, one of their first duties was to reinstitute regular sabbath observance (as commanded through Ezekiel), and also to re-establish the jubilee every fifty years, the Jubilee being part of the system of sabbaths (Leviticus 25:10-17).

These directions to the prince concerning offerings on new moons and sabbaths, and regarding business dealings terminating at the year of jubilee, all go to show that these instructions refer to that time (and not to some age future from our day), because they were portions of the Law of Moses which was afterward nailed to the cross. Those who say that in the Millennium the Jews and others will offer animal sacrifices at Jerusalem do not seem to realise that such a proceeding would be a slight to the cross of Christ, and bring confusion among men who are taught under the gospel and the New Covenant to come to God through Jesus Christ alone (John 4:21-24; 14:6; 16:23-27; Hebrews 10:19-22; Ephesians 4:32; Hebrews 13:15).

Apparent innovations are noticeable in Ezekiel's vision, but it cannot be positively asserted that all are such, since the exact specifications of all the details of Solomon's buildings and courts are not available for comparison.

The argument that Ezekiel's temple was not built because no trace is left of it is no argument at all, since Solomon's temple has also disappeared, and there is no doubt from historical records that it, at one time, occupied a site at Jerusalem. Neither is the argument that historical data outside the Bible are lacking a proof that Jews on their return to their land from Babylon did not attempt to follow the plan set out in the vision.

The descriptions of Solomon's temple found in Kings and Chronicles pertain more to the furniture, implements, and rich embellishments than to exact measurements of foundations and walls, except in the case of the temple proper. Yet David had given to him by inspiration an exact pattern in writing of all the works, including three-storied chambers, treasuries, courts, and rooms for preparing and cooking the offerings (1 Chronicles 28:11-13,19). The brazen altar in the court was 20 cubits square and ten cubits high (2 Chronicles 4:1).

At the dedication of the temple Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. This gives some idea of the size of the court which would be required to accommodate the animals and the large number of serving priests and Levites, singers, and instrumentalists (2 Chronicles 5:6,11,12; 7:5,6).

That the space covered by Solomon's temple was not the whole area of the flat table land is shown by the fact that Solomon's residence occupied a site adjacent to the temple. It was a hundred cubits in length, fifty in breadth, and thirty in height, besides a porch for the throne of judgment, and other porches for other purposes (1 Kings 7:1-12; 10:18-20). The total area covered by the temple enclosure is not stated, but it must have been very large to accommodate the various courts and open spaces as well as the numerous buildings for all purposes.

Comparing Solomon's temple with the tabernacle, Smith's Bible Dictionary says, 'On comparing the Temple, as described in 1 Kings 6 and 2 Chronicles 2 and by Josephus 7:3, with the Tabernacle, the first thing that strikes us is, that all the arrangements were identical, and the dimensions of every part exactly double those of the preceding structure. Thus the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle was a cube, ten cubits each way; in the temple it was twenty cubits. The Holy Place or outer hall was ten cubits wide by twenty long and ten high in the tabernacle. In the Temple all these dimensions were exactly double. The porch in the Tabernacle was five cubits deep, in the Temple ten; its width in both instances being the width of the house. The chambers round the house and the Tabernacle were each five cubits wide on the ground floor, the difference being that in the Temple the two walls taken together made up a thickness of five cubits, thus making ten cubits for the chambers. Taking all these parts together, the ground plan of the Temple measured eighty cubits by forty; that of the Tabernacle was forty by twenty; and what is more striking than even this, is, that though the walls were ten cubits high in the one, and twenty cubits in the other, the whole height of the Tabernacle was fifteen, that of the Temple thirty cubits; the one roof rising five, the other ten cubits above the height of the internal walls. So far as the dimensions above quoted are concerned, every thing is as clear and as certain as any thing that can be predicated of any building of which no remains exist; but beyond this there are certain minor problems by no means as easy to solve, but fortunately they are of much less importance.'

The height of the porch, according to 2 Chronicles 3:4, was 120 cubits, equal to 180 feet, taking the cubit as 18 inches. To get this dimension, a superstructure is thought to have been erected over the porch, which is not described in the Bible, but which both Josephus and the Talmud refer to as having existed.

Concerning the outer court of the Temple, Smith's Bible Dictionary says, 'The enclosure of the Temple consisted, according to the Bible (1 Kings 6:36), of a low wall of three courses of stones and a row of cedar-beams, both probably highly ornamented. As it is more than probable that the same duplication of dimensions took place in this as in all the other features of the Tabernacle, we may safely assume that it was ten cubits, or fifteen feet, in height, and almost certainly 100 cubits north and south, and 200 east and west.'

### **Zerubbabel's Temple**

Now let us look at the temple which Zerubbabel the governor and Jeshua the high priest were authorised by Cyrus to erect at Jerusalem. *"Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof three-score cubits, and the breadth thereof three-score cubits; with three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber."* (Ezra 6:3,4).

Where did Cyrus get these dimensions? As a Gentile he had no personal interest in the size of the temple. The Biblical account gives us to understand that the Jews were anxious to return to their own land, as God had promised, and that Cyrus was led by God to grant that request. So far as the details of the temple structure were concerned, Cyrus would be guided by the plans of the Jews themselves (2 Chronicles 36:22,23; Ezra. 1:1-8). Beyond giving them permission to return, authority to rebuild the temple and settle in the land, and commanding that means be provided for materials and expenses, Cyrus seems to have left the rest to the princes of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites.

The obvious answer to the query as to where Cyrus obtained the dimensions to embody in his decree is that he received them from the priests. And the obvious reply to the next logical question, where did the priests obtain them? is that they followed the dimensions written down by Ezekiel according to the revelation made to him, and recorded in the last chapters of the book which bears his name.

Zerubbabel and Joshua did not get the dimensions from Solomon's temple, for the new temple was considerably larger than Solomon's, just as Solomon's temple was larger than the tabernacle. In his decree, Cyrus gives only two dimensions, the height, 60 cubits, and breadth, 60 cubits. What was the depth? The depth would be proportionate, on the same principle that the *"holy of holies"* in the tabernacle was a perfect cube, 10 x 10 x 10; and in the temple 20 x 20 x 20; while the first apartment of the tabernacle was 20 x 10 x 10; and in the temple 40 x 20 x 20. Thus the length of the two rooms of the temple was 60 cubits (1 Kings 6:2). With the side chambers added, Solomon's temple was 40 cubits wide. And if we take the measurement of Cyrus to include the side chambers, we find that Zerubbabel's temple was 20 cubits wider than Solomon's.

That the returning exiles obtained their instructions from God through Ezekiel is manifest when we compare the dimensions given by him with those commanded by Cyrus. In Ezekiel 41:4, the size of the “*most holy*” is stated as a square: 20 x 20. The width of the building proper, therefore, was 20 cubits, the same as in Solomon’s temple. The difference was in the size of the side chambers “*round about*”. In Solomon’s temple they were 10 cubits wide, in Ezekiel’s 20 cubits (Ezekiel 41:10). Thus we have it that Zerubbabel followed the dimensions given in Ezekiel. And since he followed Ezekiel in this specification, it is only reasonable to suppose that he followed him in regard to the other buildings and courts.

Another evidence to support this view is that, according to Josephus, Herod’s temple, which was a repairing of the old temple and not an entirely new structure, was sixty cubits wide.

The length of the porch of the tabernacle and of Solomon’s temple was the width of the house proper: 10 cubits in the tabernacle, and 20 cubits in Solomon’s. The fact that Ezekiel gives the length of his porch as 20 cubits therefore confirms what has just been said concerning the size of the temple proper erected by Zerubbabel (Ezekiel 40:49). In the tabernacle the breadth of the porch was 5 cubits; in Solomon’s temple, 10 cubits; in Ezekiel’s, 11 cubits.

### **Herod’s Temple**

Smith’s Bible Dictionary, while saying that the temple of Ezekiel’s vision ‘is not a description of a temple that ever was built or ever could be erected at Jerusalem, and can consequently only be considered as the beau ideal of what a Shemitic temple ought to be’, adds that it is interesting ‘inasmuch as there can be little doubt but that the arrangements of Herod’s temple were in a great measure influenced by the description here given’.

As we are not architects, we may not be able to enter into the difficulties of erecting such a temple as Ezekiel describes, but as far as we are able to grasp the descriptions and dimensions, we see nothing insuperable in them. And the fact that Herod, under the guidance no doubt of prominent Jews, followed them in some particulars further justifies our contention that the builders under Zerubbabel and Jeshua were guided by the vision recorded by Ezekiel.

Ezekiel speaks of a building “*before the separate place at the end toward the west*”. It was 70 cubits broad and 100 cubits long. The breadth of the face of the house and the separate place combined was 100 cubits (Ezekiel 41:12-14).

Some object that the temple site does not provide enough space for the requirements of Ezekiel’s temple and courts and the large outer enclosure “*to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place*”, the size of which was 500 reeds, or 3000 cubits, square (Ezekiel 42:15-20). Doubtless these objectors have failed to notice or give credence to the Septuagint reading, which has 500 cubits as the measure instead of 500 reeds, as in the KJV. While the Septuagint readings are not to be preferred in every case where they differ from the Hebrew manuscripts from which the KJV translation was made, in this case the correctness of the Septuagint may be accepted from the fact that this Greek version of the Old Testament was made while the second temple was standing, and the size of its courts was in all probability personally known to the scribe. Taking the size of this court as 500 great cubits (Ezekiel 40:5), or 916 feet, its dimensions are not incompatible with the area of the temple site, as we know it to-day. It will be noticed that while the reed in the man’s hand was six cubits in length, all the measures given (with this single exception) are in cubits, not in reeds. Hence the probability that the word “*reeds*” in 42:16-20 is merely a copyist’s error.

Even if the returned exiles failed to provide such a space, of exactly 500 cubits square, that would still not disprove that Ezekiel’s plan and specifications were intended for their guidance in rebuilding. God gave the Israelites a Law which they did not keep, and which He knew they were constitutionally unable to keep. Hence, it would be no new thing if He gave them directions for erecting a temple which they did not obey. Indeed, the apathy of the returned Jews in regard to the rebuilding is recorded by both Ezra and Nehemiah, two of the governors, and by two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, sent to them during the reign of Darius (Ezra 5:1,2,16; 3:3; 4:4,5; Haggai 1:2-15; 2:14-19; Zechariah 1:2-6; 8: 2-9; Ezra 6:14; Nehemiah 1: 3; 2:7).

When comparing Ezekiel’s temple with Solomon’s and Herod’s we must not forget that all contained some large areas not covered by buildings, inner courts for the use of the priests, and outer courts for other purposes. Herod’s temple is said to have had an inner enclosure of 240 cubits by 180, and an outer enclosure measuring 400 cubits each way.

## Opposition to the Building

Not only were the Jews themselves apathetic on the rebuilding question, but they met opposition from neighbouring governors and from the people of the land. After being settled in their cities, the Jews gathered to Jerusalem in the seventh month to keep the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. The brazen altar had been erected for the offering of the appropriate sacrifices, *“but the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid”* (Ezra 3:1-6).

In the second year, in the second month, a start was made on the rebuilding, and when the foundation was laid a celebration took place. The priests blew the trumpets, the Levites sang, and all the people joined in either shouting or weeping according to their temperament and their knowledge of the previous temple. There were very aged persons who remembered Solomon’s temple and had been preserved through the seventy years’ captivity to witness this great achievement, and it is no wonder they wept tears of joy (Ezra 3:7-13).

But the joy was not long-lived, for the *“adversaries”*, certain deputies in adjacent provinces, were jealous, and by physical violence prevented the Jews proceeding with their work, all the days of Cyrus even until the reign of Darius Hystaspis, their trump card being a decree from Artaxerxes [Pseudo-Smerdis] positively forbidding the Jews to proceed (Ezra 4:1-24; 5:16).

In the reign of Darius, Haggai and Zechariah showed the people that their failure to rebuild was due to lack of faith and zeal, and to falling in with the customs of the people of the land, and they prevailed on Zerubbabel and Joshua to resume operations regardless of opposition. (Compare Nehemiah 5:1-5 and Haggai 2:14-19). When their opponents found what was going on, they sent a protest to Darius, but Darius replied in the Jew’s favour. Thus the building was at last undertaken seriously, and after four years was completed *“in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king”* (Ezra 5:1 to 6:15; Haggai 1:12-14; 2:1-5; Zechariah 8:1-15).

It was built *“according to the commandment of the God of Israel”*, says Ezra; and, we may add, in all probability according to the manner prescribed in the book of Ezekiel, in large measure if not in full. As the work occupied four years, and the materials were abundant, we may be sure the result was a group of very fine buildings, courts, gates, and colonnades.

In the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (about BC 457) a large party of Jews returned under Ezra. Ezra had been appointed governor, and given large powers of administration over *“all such as know the laws of thy God”*. He also bore letters to the Gentile treasurers, adjacent, commanding them to contribute to Ezra’s expenses as he might demand (Ezra 7). Ezra was shocked at the manner in which the Jews had neglected the house of God and fallen in with the ways of the heathen, and he instituted a reform (Ezra, chapters 8 to 10).

But the reform was short-lived (Nehemiah 1:3), and the troubles of Nehemiah testify afresh to the laxity of the people and their indifference to the temple, its worship, and the rebuilding of the city. Under Nehemiah walls were rebuilt and gates restored. Nehemiah, as governor, and Ezra, as priest, had their hands full with a rebellious and backsliding people prone to forget their tribulations in Babylon, and failing to appreciate God’s goodness in returning them to their own land. We are warranted in assuming, however, that when the governors were God-fearing and faithful, the regulations prescribed by Ezekiel concerning the ceremonial entry of the prince by the east gate and the offering of sacrifices by him were strictly carried out.

## Two Innovations

Two important innovations are seen in the arrangements prescribed through Ezekiel for the guidance of the Jews after their return to their own land. And as these arrangements are known from other scriptures to have been executed, we have in them another evidence that the vision given to Ezekiel was of a temple to be erected immediately after the return and not in the distant future. These two innovations were: (1) that the *“strangers”* or foreigners who dwelt among them should be given an inheritance in the land; and (2) that a court be provided in which the Gentiles might draw near to worship.

(1) The land of Palestine was given to the Jews under Moses and Joshua for a possession, the native inhabitants being driven out. Those who were allowed to remain did so on sufferance, through the indolence of the Jews. The Jews considered Gentiles their legitimate servants (Leviticus 25:44-46; Nehemiah 9:24). Moreover, the Law forbade the Jews from selling their land except for the year of Jubilee, when it reverted to the original owner or his heirs. This was to maintain the tribes in their separate districts and to preserve every family in its inheritance. This arrangement continued up to the time of the captivity (Leviticus 25:23-34).

(2) The directions for constructing the tabernacle contain no provision for any court other than that in which the brazen altar stood, where the sacrifices were offered by the priests. This court was reserved for the priests and Levites, though an offerer might bring an animal in to the court to the hand of the priests and Levites at the brazen altar (Exodus 27:9; 38:21; Numbers 1:50,51,53; 3:6-12; Leviticus 1:3; 7:30; 2 Chronicles 35:3-5,10-14).

Solomon's temple contained an inner court and an outer court. As far as is known, it contained no court for the Gentiles. Any Gentile who wished to worship had first to become a Jewish proselyte. These were few, and mingled with the worshipping Jews.

The alteration concerning inheritance in the land is found in Ezekiel 47:22,23. After stating (verses 13-21) the boundaries of the land which they should occupy, God seems to have regard to the fact that while the Jews might now live in their own land, they were not now, as before, independent, but vassals. "*We are servants in it*", said Nehemiah (Nehemiah 9:36). Therefore God recognizes the rights of the other subjects of the empire who might choose to dwell in Canaan. Every family was to receive an allotment, as well the Gentile as the Jew.

The alteration concerning worship is indicated in Ezekiel 45:16,22; 46:3,9,10, where "*the people of the land*", which we take to mean all the inhabitants, Gentiles as well as returned Jews, are associated with the ruling prince in presenting certain offerings. On new moons and sabbaths they were to worship at the door of the gate where the prince entered (46:3), while on the solemn feasts they were to observe a certain order in arriving and departing. The prince represented all the people (Ezekiel 45:22).

That both these innovations of Ezekiel's vision were carried out by the Jews after the return to their own land is testified to by the real estate held by Gentiles in Palestine and by the fact that Herod (who probably followed the plan of Zerubbabel's temple) provided an area called "*the court of the Gentiles*".

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai refer to "*the people of the land*" as a source of contamination to the Jews. They do not censure the Jews for allowing them to live there, but they reprove them for falling in with their idolatry and for marrying among them. Not all the people of the land were incorrigible, however, for we read that when the temple was finished in the sixth year of Darius, and the Passover was kept, those participating were not only "*the children of Israel which were come again out of captivity*", but also "***all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel***" (Ezra 6:19-21).

Again, when Nehemiah made a separation and required princes, Levites, priests, and people (Jews) to sign a covenant, "*all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God*" were joined in the covenant (Nehemiah 9: 38; 10:28). These proselytes were accepted on the same terms as the Jews, having to be circumcised and cleansed (Numbers 9:14).

### **The Portion for the Prince**

Another evidence that the Jews under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, at least attempted to carry out the arrangements specified in Ezekiel's vision is found in the settlement of the tribes in their inheritances, and of special classes in and about the holy city.

When the Israelites were first given the land of Canaan, they were told to go in and possess it. Two-and-a-half tribes elected to remain in the fertile and well-watered district east of the Jordan, while the other nine-and-a-half tribes dispossessed the inhabitants west of the Jordan, with the assistance of those who took their inheritance east of Jordan. They were supposed to destroy the nations in occupation quickly, to prevent intermingling with them. But the Israelites were lax in this their duty, with the result that the to-be-expected evils came to pass (Deuteronomy 7:16-26; Psalm 106:34-40).

But when returning from Babylon the exiles were given no such commission of extermination, nor were they given a choice as to their tribal boundaries. The division of the land was very simply arranged, as set forth in Ezekiel 47:13-21. The holy land was defined as comprising all the country from Hamath and the borders of Damascus on the north, to Tamar and Kadesh on the south, the Mediterranean being the western boundary, and a line from Damascus following the Jordan to the east sea the eastern boundary. All strife among the tribes as to which should inherit which was obviated by another simple device, the drawing of imaginary lines due east and west from border to border. Dan was given the northernmost portion, Asher the next, and so on, as stated in Ezekiel 48:1-7,23-29. As the Jews were particular to keep genealogical records, no difficulty seems to have been experienced sorting out the families and settling them in their individual portions (Ezra 2:70).



Although the majority who returned to Palestine in the large immigrations were of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, who had been taken captive to Babylon, yet provision was made for the return of other exiles whose hearts turned toward God, namely, the descendants of those who had fled to Egypt and other countries, and also descendants of the ten tribes who had been deported to Assyria many years previously. Ezekiel's message concerning these portions for the twelve tribes was an encouragement for all these to return to the land of their fathers and to settle in the portions allotted them. That some of all tribes did return is shown by the use of the phrase "*all Israel*" in Ezra 2:70. Though after the dispersion of the tribes this term is sometimes used for Judah and Benjamin, the majority of the ten tribes having forfeited their right to the name by their apostasy, yet in this case it seems to include all the tribes. When our Lord came He found more faith among the people of Galilee, descendants of other tribes, than among the children of Judah (Isaiah 9:1,2; Matthew 4:13-16; John 7:1; 11:54).

A portion between Judah and Benjamin was to be divided off. This portion was to include Jerusalem and the temple. It was to be reserved for certain classes, and a certain section was to be considered an oblation or voluntary offering unto God. Any failure of the Jews, after the return under the decree of Cyrus, to provide this holy portion would therefore be due to neglect, and would not indicate that such a division is to be made in the Millennium. There are scriptures which show that certain portions were set apart for these purposes at that time, as directed by God through Ezekiel.

To avoid a repetition of the complications which followed the appointment of kings, whereby the people were oppressed and brought into bondage, yet having in view the desirability of a recognized ruling authority, God commanded that a certain portion of land should be set apart for the prince as his inheritance. This land comprised the portions east and west of the "*oblation*" in that strip of country from Jordan to the Mediterranean between the portion of Judah and the portion of Benjamin. This provision for the prince is described in Ezekiel 45:7; 47:21,22.

By this device, we are told in Ezekiel 45:8, the prince is deprived of any rights in the land appointed to the various tribes, with no excuse for exactions, since his own domain was large, and sufficient to supply more than his needs. This land he might not alienate to a servant, though he might give a servant a temporary inheritance. From his own domain he might give a gift to one of his sons as an everlasting possession, but he was by no means to seize the land of others to give to his sons (Ezekiel 46:16-18).

As the prince was to maintain a certain position, and offer large sacrifices of animals at regular intervals, it was appropriate that he should have a large estate, also an estate which could without ruination be subdivided among his descendants from generation to generation. "*Let it suffice you*" (Ezekiel 45:9) may, in addition to what has already been suggested, be a hint to the prince to be satisfied with this allotment and not to scheme for more.

### **Arrangement for the Holy City**

In order that the service of the temple might be properly performed by the priests and Levites in courses (see 1 Chronicles chapters 24, 25 and 26 for the apportionment by lot made by King David), arrangement was to be made for their residence at and near Jerusalem, and the portion of land set apart for them was to be considered "*holy*", even as the temple site was considered consecrated ground. Instead of taking this land from the children of Israel by compulsion, God asked them to set it apart voluntarily. The size of this holy portion is given in Ezekiel 48:20, "*All the oblation shall be five and twenty thousand by five and twenty thousand: ye shall offer the holy oblation four-square, with the possession of the city*".

By what measure, a reed or a cubit?

Neither the Hebrew nor the Septuagint supplies the term required here, hence the translator and the student insert either 'reeds' or 'cubits' according to their conception of the sense. The preceding description (verses 8 to 18) gives no assistance, for though the word 'reeds' occurs in our KJV, it is in italics, indicating that the original does not contain it.

Twenty-five thousand reeds at six cubits to the reed would be 150,000 cubits, or 275,000 feet. There are 5,280 feet in a mile. The dimensions of this oblation of land would therefore be in miles, approximately 52 by 52, and the area covered consequently 2704 square miles. If 'cubits' were considered the intended measure, the space indicated would be 37,500 feet by 37,500 feet, or an area of approximately 7 x 7 miles, equal to about 49 square miles.

Now let us see if there is some way to determine which of these measures is intended. First, we may consider the size of Palestine and the relative size of the portions set apart for each tribe.

Smith's Bible Dictionary says, 'The Holy Land is not in size or physical characteristics proportioned to its moral and historical position as the theatre of the most momentous events in the world's history. It is but a strip of country about the size of Wales, less than 140 miles in length, and barely 40 in average breadth, on the very frontier of the East, hemmed in between the Mediterranean Sea on the one hand, and the enormous trench of the Jordan Valley on the other, by which it is effectually cut off from the mainland of Asia behind it. On the north it is shut in by the high ranges of Lebanon and anti-Lebanon, and by the chasm of the Litany. On the south it is no less enclosed by the arid and inhospitable deserts of the upper part of the Peninsula of Sinai.'

In Ezekiel. 48:1-7,23-28, where the portions of eleven tribes are mentioned, no figures are given to indicate the size of each. But we must note that in the division of the land after the captivity a portion is assigned to Levi, which was not done when the land was originally settled (Numbers 18:20; Deuteronomy 10:9; Joshua 13:33; 21:1-42). Now the size of the portion to be assigned to Levi is definitely fixed, just as is the portion for the prince.

If we take the area of Palestine as quoted above, 140 miles long, and divide it into twelve equal portions, each extending from the Jordan line to the Mediterranean, we will have  $11\frac{2}{3}$  miles as the dimension of each from north to south, and an average of 40 miles from east to west, or approximately 466 square miles. Therefore an area of 2704 square miles for the "oblation" would be out of all proportion to the districts assigned to the other tribes, and would require that each of the others be reduced to about one-eleventh the size of the Levitical portion.

Moreover, if this holy oblation occupied a square of 52 miles on each side in the midst of the land of Palestine, there would be no room east and west for the portions allotted to the prince, as required in Ezekiel 45:7.

But if the holy oblation be considered as stated in cubits, as we believe it should be, there would be ample room for all requirements of priests, Levites, and temple, as well as for the portion of the prince on the east and west flanks. The holy portion would be 7 miles by 7 miles, or 49 square miles.

### **The Holy Oblation Apportioned**

Another way to get at the proposition, as to whether 'reeds' or 'cubits' are intended in the dimensions of the holy oblation, is to consider the subdivisions of the oblation and the uses to which they were to be put. These will be found in harmony with what we have already seen concerning the appropriateness of the size of the whole when measured in cubits. The method of the subdivision is described in Ezekiel 45:1-7; 48:8-18. There were three main subdivisions: (1) an area 25,000 x 10,000 for the priests; (2) an area 25,000 x 10,000 for the Levites; (3) an area 25,000 x 5,000 for "*a profane place for the city, for dwelling, and for suburbs*".

The portions for (1) the priests and (2) the Levites were equal, 25,000 x 10,000. How would these dimensions work out (a) in reeds; (b) in cubits?

25,000 'reeds' would be 150,000 cubits, or 275,000 feet. 10,000 'reeds' would be 60,000 cubits, or 90,000 feet. These dimensions in miles would be about 52 x 17, and the area 884 square miles. At that rate, the double portion of the priests and the Levites would be 52 miles x 34 miles, almost as impossible as the previous calculation of 25,000 reeds square. If ordinary cubits, taken as 18 inches, be considered the proper measure, the result is more reasonable, 37,500 feet x 15,000 feet, that is, approximately 7 miles long by 3 miles wide, or 21 square miles. This is the size for the priestly portion and the Levites' portion, respectively.

Out of the priests' portion was to come the site for the temple, 500 by 500 cubits. This might seem to contradict Ezekiel 42:19, but we have already given good reasons for considering the intended measure there not to be 500 reeds but 500 cubits, equal to 916 x 916 feet. In addition there was to be an open space 50 cubits wide all round the outer temple wall (Ezekiel 45:2).

If we take a block of land 916 x 916 feet from a larger piece, 37,500 x 15,000, we have left an irregularly shaped area, and, as the temple area was in the centre (Ezekiel 48:8,10), we have the priests' portion on all sides of the temple portion. The portion of the Levites adjacent to that of the priests presents no difficulties.

The smaller area indicated by cubits rather than reeds commends itself for another reason, namely, the number of persons expected to occupy it. Would a stretch of country 52 miles by 21 miles be required for the sanctuary and the houses of the priests? Those are its prescribed uses, as stated in Ezekiel 45:4. Would an additional piece of land 52 miles by 21 miles be necessary for the chambers of the Levites? That is the purpose stated in Ezekiel 45:5, "*shall also the Levites the ministers of the house, have for themselves, for a possession for twenty chambers*". But even the smaller measurement by cubits seems overlarge for these purposes, 7 by 3 miles for the priests, and the same for the Levites, equal to a combined area of 7 x 6 miles, or about 42 square miles. Surely miles of land are not required for the erection of twenty chambers, even if we should take them to be elaborate structures of many rooms each. The difficulty disappears, however, when we consult another reading for 'twenty chambers' (Ezekiel 45:5). The Septuagint reads, "*for a possession for cities to dwell in*". (See Revised Version.)

In considering the number of priests and Levites for whom these arrangements were designed, we must remember that the Jews who returned under Zerubbabel and Ezra were only a fraction of the former population, that the Levites constituted only one tribe out of the twelve, while the priesthood was limited to one family out of the tribe, the family of Aaron. Under the Law the tribe of Levi was given no inheritance in the land (Numbers 18:20-24), but provision was made for their sustenance by contributions and tithes from the other tribes.

Under Joshua certain cities and adjacent pasture lands had been set apart for the Levites and their families (Numbers 35:2,3; Joshua 21:1-42). These particular cities might not have been available at once on the return from Babylon. Nevertheless we are given to understand by Ezra 2:70 and Nehemiah 7:73, that the priests and the Levites, the singers and the porters, were given cities to dwell in, as were the members of the other tribes.

The duty of the Levites when not on service at the temple was to instruct the people in the Law, and this was best accomplished by living scattered among them in the capacity of home missionaries. But now a new provision is made: that they shall have a special reserve in the vicinity of the temple. This land they were forbidden to sell or exchange, nor could they alienate the first fruits of the land, which were considered holy unto God (Ezekiel 48:13,14).

The "*chambers*" in the temple area are referred to by some commentators as monastic 'cells', but this is foreign to God's regulations for a married priesthood and Levites. Most of these temple buildings were for storehouses, for boiling and otherwise preparing and for eating the offerings, and for the convenience of the priests, Levites, Nethinims, and singers in changing their garments. The sleeping quarters, if any, were only for those serving their courses, and not for the bulk of the priests and Levites, who had their own houses and settlements, as already referred to.

Josephus states that the whole circumference of Jerusalem was 33 stadia, or nearly four English miles, consequently, the holy "*oblation*" of land, 7 miles square, would more than cover it, extending out into the open country. The portion of the priests and Levites would give them the option of building their houses and villages either within or without the walls. The wall in Josephus' day was not, however, the same as that one reconstructed by Nehemiah, nor yet the same as that in evidence today. An interesting description of these walls is found in Smith's Bible Dictionary, to which readers are referred. Suffice it to say that the present wall was built by Suleiman, the Ottoman conqueror, in the sixteenth century AD. It is 381 feet high, and has 34 towers, and seven gates. Josephus states that the ancient wall contained 60 gates, while the Bible mentions by name at least 18 city gates and three in the temple wall. Chapter 3 of Nehemiah gives a list of those repaired under his supervision.

From these figures it is evident that ingress and egress were much easier in Nehemiah's day than at the present time. In picturing the holy oblation of land set apart for priests and Levites, as shown to Ezekiel, it is necessary to visualise the ancient wall with many gates and not the modern one with few entrances. It is also necessary to recall that the hill now called Mount Zion is, in all probability, not the hill anciently called by that name. The Mount Zion of David was associated with Mount Moriah and the temple site.

The list of the gates repaired by Nehemiah might seem at first as of small interest now, since they relate to long past times. But they gain fresh interest when we notice that his descriptions of the princes, priests, Levites, Nethinims, and others, and of the localities in which they laboured, give a clue as to how God's instructions through Ezekiel relative to the settlement of the priests and Levites in their holy portions were carried out.

Eliashib the high priest, with his brethren the priests, built the sheep gate, now known as St. Stephen's, through which passes the road to the Mount of Olives. This gate was the main eastern city gate, just north of the temple enclosure (Nehemiah 3:1; compare with John 5:2). Eliashib's "house", which we take to mean his residence, is mentioned as near the portion of wall repaired by two priests, Baruch and Meremoth (verses 20 and 21).

That the high priest's "house" was his residence and not a temple "chamber" may be gathered from the fact that the houses of others are also mentioned as near the same wall. If these others were priests, and the account ascribes a separate house to each, the implication is beyond question that they had 'houses' to live in according to Ezekiel's instructions in Ezekiel 45:4, where their 'houses' are differentiated from the sanctuary. The priests and their separate houses are also referred to in Nehemiah 3:28. On the other hand, if the others whose 'houses' are mentioned were not priests, such as Jedaiah (verse 10), this gives further assurance that the 'houses' of the priests referred to were their dwelling houses, the same expression being used in both cases.

Then it is stated, *"And after him [Meremoth] repaired the priests, the men of the plain"*. Thus we learn that some of the priests lived in the plain, presumably that immediately west of the wall (verse 22). Chapter 12, verses 27 to 29 describes the sons of the singers (who were Levites) as assembling for the dedication of the wall, *"both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi; also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmareth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem"*.

Though now the environs of Jerusalem appear desolate to the traveller, such was not the case when the children of Israel occupied the land, except when drought was sent as a punishment from God. The king had gardens in the valley of the Kidron, just under the south-eastern wall, near which was the Pool of Siloam. One of the gates, Josephus says, was called Gennath, meaning a garden. Streams were diverted and storages built to maintain a water supply, remains of which are still found, in some cases the pools themselves, as the Pool of Hezekiah within the Jaffa gate, and Solomon's pools outside. As long as the Jews were obedient, and brought their tithes regularly to God's treasury, the crops were abundant. The psalmist exclaims, *"Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, ... the city of the great King"* (Psalm 48:2).

We must think therefore of the holy portion of the Land as an earthly paradise, the city of Jerusalem its crown, and the temple its glory. All these were for the priests and Levites to enjoy, if they would but prove faithful to the LORD their God. The Nethinims lived in the fortress of Ophel, convenient both to the temple and the king's gardens. They are mentioned as having assisted in the repair of the wall (Nehemiah 3:26, marginal reading).

Ezra (2:64,65) and Nehemiah (7:66,67) give the whole number of Jews who returned under Zerubbabel as 42,360, besides 7,337 man servants and maid servants, and 245 singing men and singing women, just under 50,000 in all. Of these the number of Levites was 74, exclusive of the singers (sons of Asaph), 148, and the porters, 138 (Nehemiah 7:43-45).

When Ezra returned a few years after Zerubbabel, with a company of those whose hearts turned toward the city of God, he had journeyed some distance before he discovered that there was not one Levite among them (Ezra 8:15).

Unwilling to proceed without a contingent from the priestly tribe, Ezra sent messengers back with a special appeal for *"ministers for the house of our God"* (Ezra 8:16,17). By the good hand of God upon them, these messengers induced a number to join them, 38 Levites and 220 Nethinims. The latter were not Israelites, but certain Canaanites whom Joshua, and later on David, appointed to be *"hewers of wood and drawers of water"* for the Levites (Joshua 9:27; 1 Chronicles 9:2; Ezra 8:20). A company of these had been carried captive to Babylon, and the record shows that a remnant was so far interested in the things of God that when the time came for the Jews to return to Jerusalem they took advantage of the opportunity and returned also. Some of these Nethinims proved to be more faithful than numbers of priests and Levites.

The priesthood was limited by the Law to Aaron and his descendants (Exodus 28:1; Numbers 18:1-8). A proportionately large number of the priestly family returned under Zerubbabel, the number given by Ezra (2:36-39) being 4,289. Of these only the males over a prescribed age would be eligible to serve in the temple, and there was only one high priest.

There was also an age limit for the Levites. Aaron and his sons were set over the Levites to direct them in the performance of their duties, as set out in the third and fourth chapters of Numbers. After the return, only the sons of Zadok were recognised by God in the priestly capacity (Ezekiel 40:46; 44:15).

This census shows that the whole number of priests, Levites, Nethinims, porters, and singers in Palestine under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah was not very great. Consequently we may well conclude that the area indicated by the cubit measurement, 7 miles by 6 miles, was more than ample for residential houses and villages convenient to the temple precincts.

The mention of Zadok and his sons to serve in the temple described by Ezekiel as seen in his vision is another evidence that the temple was restored in accordance with its plans and specifications. These were priests living at that time, who had come back from Babylon, and were appointed by God to their office.

### **Provision for Food**

As in everything that God does, we see that His arrangements for housing the Levitical tribe were not only reasonable but generous. No less so was His provision for their sustenance. The ancient order was that the tribes as a whole should contribute to the support of the Levites, since they were given no inheritance in the land. After the return that commandment still held good, so far as tithes and offerings were concerned (Nehemiah 12:44-47). But now, He provided the priests and Levites with a special portion of land, and thus made them to a considerable extent, if not wholly, independent of these gifts.

But even this kindness became a snare to them, for they were prone to leave their duties at the temple to work in their fields. When Nehemiah vigorously contended with them they improved, but for how long (Nehemiah 13:10-12)? The Levites were now put under the same compulsion as other Jews, to bring the first fruits of their land to God (Ezekiel 48:14; Leviticus 23:10,14).

### **A Portion for the Holy City**

The remaining portion of the oblation of land, 25,000 x 6,000 cubits, was set apart for purposes described in Ezekiel 45:6 and 48:15. Out of this, a central area, 4,500 x 4,500 was for a city, surrounded by 'suburbs', or open spaces, 250 cubits in depth. East and west of this city the space left was for the Prince, but the increase thereof was to be "*for food unto them that serve the city*" (Ezekiel 48:18). This arrangement left an open space between the city and the temple, in addition to the courts enclosed by the temple walls and the 'suburbs' of 50 cubits outside.

The "*city*" was not for ordinary dwellers, but for certain out of all the tribes who were to devote themselves to God. "*And they that serve the city shall serve it out of all the tribes of Israel*" (Ezekiel 48:19). An attempt at least was made to fulfil this, for the eleventh chapter of Nehemiah mentions by name a number of principal men who thus set themselves apart, and there were many others less prominent, for example, 468 sons of Perez, all of them valiant men. These would be for the defence of the city. Besides them were priests and Levites who dedicated themselves to the holy city. All had their allotted tasks under overseers and administrators, as Nehemiah relates.

In addition to their regular duties, those who were specially set apart were given the responsibility for the cultivation of the open spaces immediately surrounding the city, as well as the portion of the Prince 10,000 cubits eastward and 10,000 cubits westward, of a width of 5,000 cubits. The command reads, "*And the increase thereof shall be for food unto them that serve the city. And they that serve the city shall till it [RV] out of all the tribes of Israel*" (Ezekiel 48:18,19).

Thus we have another evidence that Ezekiel's directions concerning these practical arrangements were for the instruction of the Jews after their return from the captivity, and that the Jews carried out this one by calling for volunteers for the city. We have no reason to doubt that they also carried into effect this plan to provide the food necessary for so large a community, particularly if we bear in mind that these men would, many of them, be men of families as well as substance, and would bring their families with them.

The expression "*a profane place*" in the KJV of Ezekiel 48:15 is rather a strong one, the idea is that it shall be for secular purposes as contrasted with the sanctity of the Levitical and priestly portions. (Compare with Ezekiel 45:6). In this portion, 25,000 by 5,000 cubits

(7 x 11 miles), the Prince would be in occupation, with authority as well over the city proper, 4,500 x 4,500 cubits (11 x 11 miles), in the centre of the estate. Local governors of the city are referred to in Nehemiah 3:9,12, two rulers being mentioned by name, while *“the governor on this side the river”* is distinguished from the governors beyond the rivers, mentioned in 2:7,9.

King Artaxerxes' decree setting Ezra the priest over the Jews is found in Ezra 7:25,26. According to this commission, none of the provincial rulers and treasurers over the Gentiles was to be recognised as in authority over the Jews. At a later period Nehemiah was governor for twelve years (Nehemiah 5:14-19).

### **Attempts to Follow Plan**

As far as is known, the large area required by the vision was not divided as directed with straight boundaries among the priests, Levites, and city defenders. What the holy oblation purposed was that the governor or prince, the priests, Levites, and city defenders should have their portions set apart from the rest of the tribes, and that was done by the leaders, Zerubbabel, Jeshua the high priest, Ezra, Nehemiah, and others, in so far as the people would co-operate. These leaders had, however, great difficulties to overcome, not only in the apathy of the people generally and the opposition of neighbouring Gentile governors, but also in the backsliding of the very priests and Levites who should have assisted in maintaining the holy portion, one priest (Eliashib) even going so far, during a temporary absence of Nehemiah, as to turn one of the temple store-rooms or buildings into apartments for a native ruler whose daughter he had married (Nehemiah 9:1,2; 13:4-11).

That a serious and genuine effort was made by the faithful rulers to execute the plan has, however, we believe, been demonstrated in the course of these investigations into the conditions existing immediately following the return. What was accomplished may be recapitulated as follows:

1. The temple was rebuilt on a large scale according to a pattern in harmony with Ezekiel's instructions.
2. Priests, Levites, porters, singers and Nethinims, were arranged in courses for service at the temple, and quarters were provided for their accommodation in Jerusalem and in the surrounding district as well as scattered among the other tribal areas.
3. A *“holy city”* was set apart for special volunteers to come from all the tribes, as directed in Ezekiel 48:19, the fulfilment being plainly indicated in Nehemiah 11:1-23. Lots were cast whereby one in ten was selected to dwell at Jerusalem, and the people *“blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem”*. The names of some of the more prominent men are given, among whom were *“mighty men of valour”* for the defence of the city. Various overseers were appointed, and there were 172 keepers of the gates. All this showed careful organisation according to a recognised plan.
4. A prince or governor was in control, a representative of the absent monarch, but one of themselves, sympathetic with Jewish aspirations, and under the hand of God instrumental in fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel which related to this return after the seventy years' captivity. These princes or governors did supervise and encourage divine worship as exhorted to do in Ezekiel's vision.
5. Whatever failure there was to carry out the plan outlined in Ezekiel's vision was due to the indifference and apostasy of priests, Levites, and people, and does not indicate that what they failed to do will be done at some time future from our own day, any more than their failure to carry out God's instructions in other things can be adduced as a reason for a re-imposition of the Jewish Law at some future date.
6. The plan of the tabernacle was given to Moses. It had, with the sacrifices offered, a typical significance.
7. The plan of the temple was given to David. It had, with the sacrifices, a typical significance in harmony with that of the tabernacle which preceded it.
8. The plan of the temple to be erected after the return from Babylon was shown to Ezekiel in a vision, and carried out as far as possible by the Jewish leaders. It had, with its sacrifices, a typical significance in harmony with that of the temple and tabernacle which preceded it. When this temple was destroyed, and Herod built another magnificent structure in its place, the typical character of the building and of its sacrifices was retained.

9. Had there been any alteration in the significance of the methods and sacrifices of these various temples, our Lord and the apostles would doubtless have referred to it. The book of Hebrews explains the types on the basis of one meaning throughout all the vicissitudes of the sacred buildings. All pointed forward to Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, and to the forgiveness of sins through Him.

### **The Living Stream**

Now, just as all those ceremonial buildings and rites which were actually built and performed had a typical significance, so it was possible for God to give Ezekiel a vision having a special symbolical significance not possible to be carried out by the returned Jews under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. A distinction may rightly be drawn between those visions which gave directions for buildings and sacrifices and places of abode to be executed by the returned exiles, and those visions which were typical of something God would do at a future time. Such a special vision is found in Ezekiel 47:1-12.

In other words, God included in His visions to Ezekiel a prophecy of something to come which it was most important for the Jews to think on. In Jeremiah this new thing was spoken of as a New Covenant, which would supersede the Law Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). In Ezekiel's vision we have an intimation that all the arrangements of the Law were powerless to give life, for a new stream was needed, unheard of before. To Ezekiel's astonishment this stream was deep and wide, it healed where it flowed, and because of its irrigation trees grew and produced wonderful fruit and leaves for food and medicine. Could anything be plainer as a lesson that the Law could not give life, and hence would be superseded by an arrangement from God which should give life?

And the 'how' of that arrangement is most beautifully shown in the vision.

The waters flowed out from the right "*shoulder*" (according to the Hebrew) of the temple to the south side of the brazen altar standing in the court, thence through the gate facing the east. What did that mean? It meant a blessing from God flowing out of His sanctuary, acknowledging the altar of sacrifice, using the principal and most beautiful gate reserved for the prince, and blocking forever the entry of that prince into the typical temple with its typical sacrifices, blocking the way also of the people who had been admonished to worship at that gate under the patronage of the prince. To see whither the stream flowed, Ezekiel was taken out of another gate, and then he saw and experienced the ever-deepening strength of the torrent.

The 'how' is the provision of a way of life typified in the temple and altar and mercy seat on which the propitiatory atonement was made, but in itself different. Ezekiel's astonishment in the vision was not greater than that of the Jews in our Lord's day when He offered them the river of the water of life entirely apart from the Law Covenant and the animal sacrifices of the temple, but nevertheless centred in a sacrifice, the sacrifice of Himself.

### **The Prince Comes to His Temple**

But before that rushing stream of life flowed from the propitiatory, the Prince did come to His temple. Our Saviour was the Prince whom Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led up to, and in some respects typified the great Prince foretold by the prophet Daniel (also a prophet of the captivity), who should be "*cut off, but not for himself*", thus linking Him, the Prince, with the altar of sacrifice (Daniel 9:25,26). In this great Prince rested the fulfilment of those things for which the tabernacle and temple stood, and when He would come the typical things would be no more. "*But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.*" (Hebrews 9:11).

The prophet Malachi foretold that the Prince would come suddenly to His temple. As the Prince He had a right to a ceremonial entry at the East Gate. He was "*the Lord whom ye seek*", whom they ostensibly sought. He was the one whom they should delight in, and whom a remnant would receive with joy. But the prophet goes on to say that, like Nehemiah and other princes who preceded Him, He would sit as a refiner of the sons of Levi, and reject the unfaithful. He came "*suddenly*" to His temple, notwithstanding all the prophecies and the special heralding of John the Baptist (Malachi. 3:1-6).

We may see the fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy in our Lord's visit to the temple at the beginning of His ministry. It was His first official act after turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. He went thence to Capernaum for a few days, and then He went

up with other Jews to keep the Passover at Jerusalem. Entering the temple, He found there those who defiled the place with unseemly business. Making a scourge of small cords, He drove out the merchants, the sheep and cattle, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, saying, *"Take these things hence: make not my Father's house an house of merchandise"* (John 2:13-16).

The Jews were quick to ask, by what authority He did this, for that is the sense of their inquiry, *"What sign shewest thou unto us?"* He did not satisfy them, but His words afterward gave enlightenment to His disciples. Nevertheless, He did show signs to the multitudes, by the mighty miracles which He did, signs which satisfied those willing to be satisfied, but not convincing to the proud and hypocritical scribes and Pharisees.

Our Lord might have told them that He did this in His capacity of Prince, but the time was not ripe for a full announcement of His authority and mission (Matthew 16:20). The reason for reticence is given in Luke 9:21,22. It was not our Lord's wish that the extreme enmity of the *"elders and chief priests and scribes"* be aroused before He had finished His allotted ministry and witness to the people. Any pious Jew was authorised to reprove iniquity, and doubtless there were those who did so. But the majority, seeing their impotence in view of the backslidden state of the nation as a whole, would only weep and mourn in private (Luke 2:25,38; Mark 15:43; Matthew 5:4). Such welcomed the bold and fearless action of the still unrecognised Prince, also His later exposures of the sophistries of the scribes (Mark 12:37).

Having thus fulfilled the prophecy that the Prince should come suddenly to His temple, our Lord proceeded to carry out the remainder of the prophecy, namely, to sit as a refiner and purifier of gold and silver. *"But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?"* the prophet asked (Malachi 3:2).

The evangelists record that the majority were found to be dross, only a remnant proved in the furnace showed themselves true precious metal. John sums it up when he says, *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power [liberty, or privilege] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name"* (John 1:11,12). This refining and separating process is also referred to in Zechariah 13:8,9.

### **The Triumphal Entry**

As our Lord's ministry progressed, and the time drew near when He should be delivered up to death for our sins, He permitted a freer discussion of His claims as the Prince. It had been prophesied by Zechariah (who, was contemporaneous with Zerubbabel, Ezra, Joshua, and Haggai), *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation"* (Zechariah 9:9).

So then, while at first our Lord declined public honours, He latterly accepted them, that the prophecies might be fulfilled. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem showed the willingness of the people to acknowledge Him, yet, had they not done so, the very stones would have cried out, for shouting and rejoicing there must be (Matthew 21:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-16).

Moreover, He approached the city from the east. And is it not remarkable that the gate through which He entered was that known as the 'Sheep Gate'? He came as *"a lamb to the slaughter"*, at the same time that He rode into the city the proclaimed King. He came also as the true Shepherd of the sheep, who would gather the lambs in His arms, and gently lead the delicate (Isaiah 53:7; John 10:1-18,27-29; Isaiah 40:11). Not all the Jews desired to be carried or led, but some did, and later on, Gentiles also (Acts 13:46-48). He is the true Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep, *"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls"* (1 Peter 2:25). *"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant [the New Covenant in His blood], make you perfect in every good work to do his will, ..."* (Hebrews 13:20,21).

He came from the Mount of Olives, the portion east of the city which, according to Ezekiel's vision, was the portion of the Prince, but which the Jews, alas, had not kept ready and waiting for the greatest of their princes. The Son of man had not where to lay His head, no place He could call His own. But in the mount of His inheritance He found a family in whose home He was always a welcome guest, and at the last a garden where He could spend His saddest hours in prayer.



While the people rejoiced, and spread palms and garments in the way, the Prince wept. His triumph, He knew, would be short-lived; His enemies would gain the upper hand; He should be taken and slain, and His disciples scattered. For the same prophet who foretold His triumphal entry also told of His final rejection, *"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd; ... smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered"* (Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 26:31,56).

Our Lord wept over the beautiful city, glorious in aspect as approached from the Mount of Olives, so soon to be devastated, and over the magnificent temple, so soon to be left without one stone upon another (Matthew 24:1,2). But chiefly He wept for the people betrayed by their leaders, and ready soon to cry *"Crucify him"* as heartily as they had acclaimed Him their king. Not the same individuals in each case, however. For a separation had been made between the 'Israelites indeed' who accepted Him, and the wayward and fickle who are in every crisis ready to change to what appears to them the winning side. That were indeed cause for grief to their Shepherd, that they should choose what was, in fact, the losing side (Luke 19:41-44; Acts 3:14,15).

For five days before His crucifixion the Prince made the final assertion of His rights in the temple, the people continuing to listen attentively to His wonderful words of truth, and to tell one another that this was indeed the Messiah, their King (Luke 19:47,48; 21:37,38. See also John 7:14; 8:1,2; 10:22,28). The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them (Matthew 21:14). His opponents also came to entrap Him with subtle questions, but His answers were so wise, and yet so obvious, that the people marvelled the more (Matthew 22:23,33). Finally the objectors were silenced, and then their envy and hatred contrived the plot to destroy him (Matthew 22:46; 26:3,4).

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."* (Matthew 23:37,38).

### **The LORD God Almighty and the Lamb**

When the glory of the LORD left the old temple at the beginning of the captivity in Babylon, it was to return to the restored temple at an appointed time. Not so in the case of the Prince. His sacrifice of Himself on the altar supplied that blood of atonement for which the Providence of God as symbolised by the cherubim had been looking, and His departure from the temple marked the beginning of the end for that temple made with hands. And not only of the temple buildings, but also of the form of worship for which they stood, served by the Aaronic priesthood with offerings of animal sacrifices. They will not be rebuilt, and the Aaronic priesthood and form of worship will not be restored.

The apostle tells us this quite plainly in the epistle to the Hebrews. Jesus is not High Priest after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchisedec. This affords another reason, one which in itself is good and sufficient, why Ezekiel's temple will not be built at any time future from the cross of Calvary. Ezekiel's temple was designed for the service of priests of the house of Aaron. Moreover, the description shows provision for a Prince who was a person distinct from, the high priest. Not so is it now under Christ, nor will it ever be again. As *"priest forever after the order of Melchisedec"*, the Lord Jesus Christ is both High Priest and King. He rules over His people now as their King, and He serves them as their High Priest, and through Him they draw near to God, to worship in spirit and in truth.

In the Kingdom Age His authority will be openly established over all the earth, and then, too, men will draw near to God through Him. If any buildings are erected on the site of the ancient Jewish temple, as doubtless there will be, they will not be arranged for sacrificial offerings of animals, nor be served by priests of the order of Aaron. No scripture describes such prospective buildings, but we may well believe that the mosque of the Mohammedan invader will disappear (perhaps with the consent of the converted Moslems).

And it would not be inconsistent, so far as we can see, for a beautiful structure to be reared as a place of assembly and worship in the new manner through Christ. Though God dwells not in temples made with hands, and can be approached from anywhere by every true believer, and assemblies in the open by large concourses of people are inspiring, still if a number gather together for worship a suitable building offers many conveniences, and seems to add to the atmosphere of oneness. In the revelator's vision of the New Jerusalem, he *"saw no temple therein"*, another reference to the fact that the Jewish form of worship will not be revived, but, as the whole passage is symbolic, it must not be taken to mean the absence of

buildings on the earth. The New Jerusalem stands for the New Covenant and the true worship, hence no material temple is required. But *“the LORD God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it”* (Revelation 21:22).

### **The Water of Life**

In a sense the water of life began to flow even before the Prince departed from the temple for the last time: in the sense that teaching on the subject was given out by the Lord and His disciples, and those who believed were counted as having *“passed from death unto life”* (John 5:24). The story of how Jesus sat on Jacob’s well and told the Samaritan woman of the living water is most touching. It is also most significant, as one of Christ’s first discourses, and because it links the subject of *“living water”* with the abolition of the Jewish form of worship.

*“Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. ... Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:10-14).

The woman thought He meant some kind of water that would obviate drawing water from wells for domestic purposes. But the Lord went on to explain that the living water was related to the worship of God, and that whoever had the living water was independent of the old forms of seeking God’s favour, represented in the Samaritan worship on the mountain and the Jewish worship at the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish was to be done away as completely as the Samaritan had been.

*“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, **and now is**, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him”* (John 4:21-23).

The water of life, then, is for the sincere worshippers, and those who know *“the gift of God”*, Jesus the sin bearer is that Gift, will come to Him, and ask Him for drink. Thus they will be acknowledging the sanctuary and the altar from which the living water flows. And the promise is quite literally fulfilled to them, that they *“never thirst again”*, at least, so long as they retain their faith and humility.

### **The Living Waters and the Fishers**

Zechariah supplements Ezekiel in regard to the living stream. In Ezekiel it came out of the east gate and flowed to the *“desert”*, more properly the plain of the Jordan, and also to the Western sea. *“And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem: half of them toward the former [or, eastern] sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be”* (Zechariah 14:8).

Jerusalem is the centre, the dividing line between east and west. The message of life spoken by our Lord Jesus was restricted during His ministry to the land of Palestine. From Galilee in the north to Judah in the south, from the banks of the Jordan in the east to the borders of Tyre and Sidon He went, besides sending His disciples, first twelve, afterward seventy, to many of the cities and villages of Judah and Galilee. The gospel was preached from Jerusalem eastward to the Jordan, and westward toward the Mediterranean. But Samaria was omitted from the itinerary. Our Lord said, *“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel”*. *“Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matthew 15:24; 10:6). At the three principal feasts of the year foreign-residing Jews as well heard the gospel preached at Jerusalem. For three and a half years following our Lord’s death the disciples preached the gospel to Jews and Samaritans, and it was not until Peter received his vision that the gospel began to go to the Gentiles, yet always the message was *“to the Jew first”* (Luke 24:47; Acts 8:5-16; 13:46; Romans 1:16).

But there was nothing in Zechariah’s vision of the living waters to limit them to the confines of the Holy Land. They went out *“toward”* the east and *“toward”* the west, and they are still flowing. In other words, the message became universal, for the benefits of the *“living waters”* are limited to no district, nation, or people. Nor are they limited by the changing seasons. The message of truth is always in season. Year in, year out, the living waters flow. Wherever and whenever the penitent heart is found, there is one whom the Lord Jesus is willing to receive, and to impart to him this satisfying water of life, with the assurance of sins

forgiven. Ezekiel's statement, that the waters were deep enough to swim in, suggests the all-sufficiency of God's arrangement in Christ. Both as far as the individual and the race as a whole are concerned, God's provision is adequate: there is room for all *in 'the wideness of God's mercy'*.

In reading Ezekiel's description of the fish and the fishers, one is reminded of our Lord's call to the fishermen of Galilee, *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"* (Matthew 4:18-22). In some respects it was not fishing, the gospel being like a huge net that gathered all and sundry, the bad or unsuitable being returned again to the sea (Matthew 13:47-50). But in other respects it is like line fishing, for each individual fish must be considered in its individual capacity. Professing Christians may be gathered together in companies and multitudes for outward forms of worship, but the salvation of each depends upon his individual acceptance of Christ and his personal efforts to do His will. We must personally drink the water of life, we must individually swim (exert ourselves) in the life-giving stream, before we can experience the benefits. We must, with Peter, confess, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God"*, and we must take up our crosses daily to follow in His footsteps (Matthew 16:13-19, 24).

In a secondary sense, living waters flowed from Jesus' ministering in the temple and throughout the country, in that He granted physical healing and raised the literally dead. But while these works were necessary as credentials to establish His Messiah-ship, their effects were only temporary: for those who had been healed and raised eventually went to their long sleep in the tomb.

Likewise those who believed on Him during His ministry had to wait for confirmation of their hope until after He had given the atoning sacrifice for their sins, and was raised from death, as Romans 4:24,25; 1 Corinthians 15:17 and 1 Peter 1:3 declare.

As said before, the full import of the prophecy of the living stream is realised only after the Prince had finished His ministry, been offered on the altar, and raised again to power and glory, and the Mosaic temple left desolate, then the living stream flowed out for the salvation of mankind. The rending of the veil of the temple was the visible token of this desolation and departure, and Paul tells us the way into the *"holiest"* is now through the veil of Christ's flesh (Matthew 27:51; Luke 23:45; Hebrews 10:19,20).

### **The Trees for Healing**

While the mighty torrent pouring from the temple is a most expressive symbol of all these glorious gospel truths, it supplies, as drink, only one of the common necessities. Hence is necessary a symbol to represent food. This we have in the trees which Ezekiel saw on either side of the stream. In line with the suggestion of Psalm 1, that the godly man is like a tree planted by the river, these trees represent men who have accepted the benefits offered, and bring forth fruit in their lives. The consecrated Christian becomes a source of encouragement and healing to others.

This ability to bless others is due to the perpetual contact with the waters of the river, rather than to inherent qualities. This is expressed in Ezekiel 47:12, *"whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, **because** their waters they issued out of the sanctuary"*.

Our Lord in His discourses made the same distinction between the action of the water of life in giving everlasting life to the believer, and the results in that believer's daily manner of living in the present age. He told the woman at the well, *"the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"*. This is the result in the individual's own experience. He receives everlasting life, and, in the case of the over-comers of the Gospel Age, we are given to understand that this means inherent life independent of outside sustenance. *"For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself"* (John 5:26). The over-comers, who are to be made like Christ, will receive the crown of immortality and the gift of incorruptibility, and also this power of self-existence. *"We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3:2; Romans 2:7; 1 Peter 1:4,5).

But when our Lord referred to the effect of this inward experience of faith in the present life of His true disciples, using the same figure of *"living water"*, but flowing out from the believer, this living water represented the Holy Spirit, *"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink, He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"* (John 7:38,39).

The Holy Spirit, which God gives to every true disciple (Ephesians 1:13), is in the believers a quickening power (Romans 8:11), and the manifestations of love, joy, peace, patience and longsuffering are called the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23). These manifestations are not shut up within the believer, but flow out to influence those around him, recommending them to come to the same Saviour to receive the same benefits. The many streams flowing from individual saints do not in themselves give life, but rather direct attention to the Source of life, Christ Jesus.

These words of our Lord were spoken in the temple at Jerusalem, and emphasise afresh the new source of life to which all must come if they would have life. *"If any man thirst, let him come and drink"* of the water the Lord alone can give.

Many Christians limit the operations of the life-giving stream to the present life. Likewise they limit the trees to those who become believers in this life and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. The potentialities in Ezekiel's vision may be gathered from the fact that no limit is set to the flow east and west, and from this we may reason that all men shall experience its benefits.

The New Testament continues the revelation of God's loving kindness toward men, showing us that those whom the living waters have passed completely by, and others who have through ignorance failed to appreciate their worth in this life, shall yet stand on the banks of the stream and have the opportunity to refresh themselves with the living waters and to partake of the healing leaves and sustaining fruits.

### **The River from the Throne of God and the Lamb**

*"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the LORD God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever."* (Revelation 22:1-5).

This wonderful river is represented as flowing not only from the throne of God and of the Lamb, but from the New Jerusalem described in chapter 21, the division into two chapters here being rather unfortunate. The vision of the New Jerusalem applies to the time of the Second Advent of the Great Prince, when the first heaven and the first earth, that is, the present order of things, have passed away, and the new heaven and new earth are established, in other words, to the thousand years' reign of Christ and the Church.

In Revelation 22:4 the Church is spoken of as the servants who serve Him, who see His face, and have His name in their foreheads. The river of water of life, therefore, as pictured in Revelation 22:1, is not for them. They drank of the living water during the Gospel Age, when the joint heirs were being chosen, and now they have a glorious part in the work of the Kingdom Age, to instruct the masses of mankind who have not previously had the opportunity to come to the river of water of life.

The Kingdom Age, or thousand years, is the time set apart for calling forth the dead, that they may stand before the throne and beside the crystal river, and hear the gracious invitation to drink of the water of life freely.

The throne is a symbol of the dominion,\* just as the Holy City is a symbol of the New Covenant, and the river is a symbol of the provision which God has made in Christ for giving life to those who accept the invitation. Because of His dominion and authority Christ can say (Revelation 21:6), *"I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely"*. And He gives authority to the Spirit and the Bride to join in giving out the same invitation (Revelation 22:17).

And the trees by the river? The symbol is the same as in Ezekiel's vision. It represents righteous men who have themselves been refreshed by the river of water of life. Not the Church, because in this vision the Church is in the throne, associated with Christ in the ruling

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\* In Ezekiel's vision the LORD proclaimed the temple as the place of His throne (Ezekiel 43:7). And so it was to the Jews after the captivity as well as before it. In Revelation 21:22, God and Christ are called the *"temple"* of the New Jerusalem. Hence while the *"throne"* symbolises the governing authority, we must always picture it as associated with the mercy seat of atonement and the blood sprinkled upon it.

authority: they having been changed into the Lord's likeness at His coming, and received into their glorious inheritance in heaven.

These trees, therefore, we understand to represent the 'ancient worthies', those holy men and women who served God acceptably in previous ages, and who are to be "*princes in all the earth*" (Psalm 45:16). They believed in Jesus the Messiah prospectively, and when they are raised in the resurrection they will come to understand, more fully than they could do in the dim light of the prophets, the facts concerning the Ransom Price paid, the blood of atonement offered, by the Lamb of God, who is now seated in the throne.

And these ancient worthies, by the manifestation of characters of purity and godliness, will yield fruit and leaves for the healing of the nations. In other words, they will be the earthly representatives of the Kingdom, and by their presence and activities among the resurrected myriads of mankind will assist "*whosoever will*" to an understanding of what Christ has done, and encourage them to drink of the life-giving stream.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be there. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the other faithful patriarchs and prophets, with many more whose names and records are not given, but who endured tribulations "*as seeing him who is invisible*", and who will in that great day receive their reward by holding honourable office in the City of Life and Peace for which they looked (Hebrews 11:27,39; Luke 13:28,29).

The wilfully perverse will have no place in that Kingdom, as our Lord's words in Luke 13:28,29 indicate. But none will be considered hopeless until he has heard the invitation and had a full opportunity to believe, repent, and obey the King of kings and His earthly representatives.

Those of the Jews who did not 'hear' Christ when He was raised up unto them as the great Prophet foretold by Moses were 'cut off' from among His people, and not accepted into the high calling, or ruling position in the Kingdom (Acts 3:23). And if their obstinacy is continued after the setting up of the Kingdom and the resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, leaving them without excuse for their perversity and unbelief, they shall not be allowed to enter the Kingdom even as subjects.

The "*wall*" of the "*city*" will exclude the "*fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars*", who shall have their part in the lake of fire; that is, they will be destroyed in the second death (Revelation 21:27,8; 22:15).

But none will be considered among those truly wicked persons until they have first had every opportunity to learn the truth and reform their lives. Hence we may expect that many who in the present life were not what they should be (and who is?) will under the gracious rule of the Kingdom established on earth recognise the mistakes of their past, and acknowledge their indebtedness to the Lamb who died for them and sets before them the offer of life.

Is it reasonable to suppose that the Lord would set up His Kingdom of righteousness and peace on earth, send forth the river of life, and an earnest invitation to partake of its life-giving waters, all to no purpose? But Ezekiel's and John's visions picture a glorious future for redeemed men under the "*reconstitution of all things*" in an earth from which every vestige of the curse will be removed.

## Chapter 17

### IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP

Dark sayings and enigmatic utterances in great numbers fell from our blessed Saviour's lips in the years of His earthly ministry, and the following passage records one of the most notable of these, *"Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said (John 2:18-22).*

So great was the impression made by this saying of our Lord, that it was remembered and was made the basis of a false accusation against Him before the high priest, just before His crucifixion (Mark 14:57,59; 15:29).

Those who believe that Jesus raised Himself from the dead regard this portion as a veritable Gibraltar of their faith. But this opinion, that Jesus raised Himself from death, is not tenable, because it contradicts the testimony of the apostles, that **God** raised Jesus from the dead. They Don't say that He raised Himself, but always attribute His resurrection to the power of a being who was not dead, namely, the Father, as the following scriptures show:

*"This Jesus hath **God** raised up" (Acts 2:32);*

*"And killed the Prince of life, whom **God** hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15);*

*"Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom ye crucified, whom **God** raised from the dead" (Acts 4:10);*

*"But **God** raised Him from the dead" (Acts 13:30);*

*"The promise which was made unto the fathers, **God** hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that **He** hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Acts 13:32-37);*

*"The working of his mighty power, which **He** wrought in Christ, when **He** raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:19,20).*

The scriptural testimony on this subject is clear and beyond controversy. It shows that Jesus did not raise Himself from the dead. Moreover, the scriptures show that He could not have done so, and the reason He could not was because of the scriptural description of physical death, which makes it clear that the dead are incapable of raising themselves, *"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything. ... there is **no work**, nor device, nor knowledge, **nor wisdom**, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10).*

In His perfection and sinlessness our Lord differed from the Adamic race, and He differed in that, being sinless, there was no cause of death in Him. As a perfect, sinless human being, our Lord was entitled to live forever under the terms of the Law Covenant (Galatians 3:12; Leviticus 18:5). But having voluntarily given up His life as a sacrifice on behalf of mankind, having (as the prophet foretold) poured out His soul unto death, death meant the same to Him as to the race for whom He died, namely, a condition in which work of any kind was impossible.

That He knew He was going down into this state of unconsciousness in death is indicated by His last prayer to the Father, *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? and Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:46).* And His Father, whom He after His resurrection acknowledged (John 20:17), and will to all eternity acknowledge (1 Corinthians 15:28), as His **God**, did raise Him from death.

There is only one passage in the New Testament that would at all seem to conflict with the testimony of the other portions of the New Testament. It is John 10:17,18, *"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may **take** it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to **take** it again. This commandment have I **received** of my Father".*

In this passage, the words *take* and *received* are translations of the same original word. The word *taketh* in verse 18 is from a different word. *Power*, in verse 18, is from a word meaning authority, liberty, or privilege, but not physical power. This word occurs in John 1:12. It thus becomes evident that the KJV rendering of John 10:17,18, is seriously in error.

J. B. Rotherham's translation reads, *"For this reason my Father loves Me, because I lay down My soul [see Isaiah 53:10], that again I may receive it. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. Authority have I to lay it down, and authority have I again to receive it: this commandment received I from My Father"*.

We conclude, then, that Jesus did not raise Himself from death, but received the resurrection life as a gift from His heavenly Father. John 2:19 should not be held to teach what is manifestly contrary to all scripture, but should be understood in harmony with all other testimonies of God's word.

### **Was Jesus Raised from the Dead a Human Being?**

Those who believe that Jesus was raised from the dead a human being take John 2:21 as authority for their belief, because it says, *He spake of the temple of His body*, by which they understand that the Lord meant His body of flesh, as the man Christ Jesus. But this view, like the preceding one, is by no means required by the text itself, and it does violence to the general testimony of the scriptures, which is clearly expressed in the following passage, *"Who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared"* (Hebrews 6:7).

Why should the apostle speak of a time before our Saviour's death, and limit that time as *"the days of his flesh"*, if Jesus were still flesh, after being saved from death? Now He is not flesh; now He is the *"exact impress of the Father's substance"* (Hebrews 1:3; literally rendered). And none would be so hardy as to say that God the Father is flesh. *"God is a Spirit"*, said Jesus, when telling the woman at the well how to worship Him.

Furthermore, *"It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3:2).

To be like Jesus, and to become His joint heir, is the grand hope set before those who, in the present age, follow in His footsteps of suffering (Romans 8:16-18). The particulars of this glory are not yet made known to us. With our present limited brain capacity we should not be able to appreciate them, and with our exceedingly limited organs of touch and sight we could not comprehend them. Therefore it is written that the great inheritance is *"reserved in heaven"* (1 Peter 1:3-5); and therefore the apostle John says, *It "doth not yet appear what we shall be"*.

But if Jesus were still a human being, it would have appeared what we shall be, and John could not have written such words. Our Lord was made flesh, a *"little lower than the angels"* (Hebrews 2:9), for a definite purpose, namely, *"that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man"*. Having accomplished this, He has been exalted by the Father to a position far above angels; *"Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named"*, in heaven or on earth, excepting always the Father's Name, and He is as much superior to them in nature as He is in name (Ephesians 1:21; Hebrews 1:4; 1 Peter 3:22).

It is also written that, *"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 15:50). But our Lord Jesus is the Heir of the Kingdom, and is seated with the Father in His throne. This is then another evidence that He is not now a human being, but a *"quickening [or life-giving] spirit, the Lord from heaven"* (1 Corinthians 15:45,47).

This evidence is further substantiated in that it is written of those who are to become His joint heirs, *"And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. We ... shall all be changed"* (1 Corinthians 15:49,51).

The only conclusion we can come to consistently with all these positive scriptural statements is that our blessed Lord was not raised from death a human being, but a glorious immortal spirit being.

This conclusion is further fortified by the scriptural teaching that He was *"put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit"* (1 Peter 3:18), or, as in the Greek the definite article is absent, literally, *"put to death, indeed, in flesh, but made alive in spirit"* (Rotherham). Our Lord spoke of *"my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world"*, and He did not receive it back again (John 6:51).

The diverse appearances of our Lord, in the several manifestations of Himself after His resurrection, also lead to the conclusion that He is different now from what He was before His death, and that the bodies in which He manifested Himself after His resurrection were assumed

for the purpose. Angels, who are inferior spirit beings, have had the power to appear as men, so would not our glorious Lord be similarly able to assume, or clothe himself with, a body of flesh, when desiring to appear to the disciples?

The apostles, even before Pentecost, understood, as afterward stated by Peter in the above quoted reference, that our Lord had been raised a spirit being, for on one of the occasions on which He manifested himself they *"supposed that they had seen a spirit"* (Luke 24:37). The Master speedily convinced them that what they saw was not spirit, it was flesh and bone. Therefore, though they realised that Jesus was raised from the dead a spirit being, they were not to suppose that they were beholding a spirit body, His own proper body, but were to remember that *"a spirit hath not flesh and bones"*, as they saw and felt Him having, and by which tangible and visible evidence they were to be convinced that He had really been raised from death (Luke 24:39,40).

### **The Apostles Believed the Word**

Some who can travel thus far with us have suggested that the passage in John 2:21, *"But he spake of the temple of his body"*, should be understood as referring to Christ's *body*, the Church, which is to be raised early in the morning of the Millennial day. But the record plainly says that the resurrection of Jesus himself brought this saying to the minds of the disciples, *"and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said"*.

This being so, we must not seek to locate the fulfilment of this word of our Lord some two thousand years subsequent to the time of His resurrection, we must recognise His resurrection as being the fulfilment of the word which brought conviction to the minds of the disciples. When they saw Him alive again they believed His word, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"*. This brings us to the query, exactly what did our Lord mean was destroyed, and what was raised up again?

### **The Temple Destroyed**

It is evident that our Lord was referring to the temple symbolically, for the literal temple was not destroyed for nearly forty years after His resurrection. What, then, did the temple symbolise?

According to New Testament interpretation, the Temple typified the presence of the divine Majesty among His people, the privilege of worshipping Him, and His requirements of those who would be reconciled to Him, and would draw near to worship \* (1 Kings 8:12-61; Psalm 5:7; Exodus 29:42-46; 40:34-38; John 4:21-24; Hebrews 9:21-24; and especially Hebrews 9:1-10, compared with 10:11-26).

Our Lord's words in John 2:19 should be understood as a prediction that the worship of God, as symbolised by the temple at Jerusalem, would be destroyed.

The fulfilment of this prediction occurred on the day of the Lord's crucifixion, at the moment of His death, when the veil of the typical temple was miraculously rent, the Holy of holies exposed to view, and the typical sanctity of the temple and its furniture destroyed.

As God had commanded that the temple in Jerusalem should be the place where He should be worshipped, and had given no other instruction, it is clear that at the time of our Saviour's death, when the veil of the temple was rent, the facilities for the worship of God according to that manner were destroyed (Matthew 27:50,51; Deuteronomy 12:5-14; 16:5,6; John 4:20).

### **The Temple Raised Up Again**

But was the worship of God to remain forever destroyed? No, it was not to remain so, but the true worship of God would not again be conducted according to the requirements of the typical temple, with its typical high priest and its typical sacrifices. Our Lord had not only predicted the restoration of divine worship, He had also predicted that Jerusalem would cease to be the chosen place, and that another method of worship would be commanded,

*"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. ... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:21-24).

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\* By analogy, the individual believer and the believers collectively are also spoken of as temples of God, or the temple of God, because the Spirit of God dwells in them (1 Corinthians 6:18-20; 3:16,17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; 1 Peter 2:4,5). But this is not the temple our Lord referred to in the words under consideration.



Divine worship was restored on the third day after our Lord's death. On His resurrection from the dead, the Saviour Himself, as the High Priest of a new confession, restored it, or raised it up. But how different is the new worship from the old. Instead of God being present in a temple of stone, to meet the worshippers and to give His favour, He is receiving their worship through Christ, hence no one is reconciled or acceptable to God, except he have come unto Him through Jesus, the only Mediator. Even a devout Cornelius was not 'saved' until he had believed the words of the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:21,22; Acts 11:14; 10:36,43).

And so the apostle's explanation of the worship of God, as raised up by our Lord Jesus, is that Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins forever, and that by this one offering He perfects forever them that are sanctified, and the sanctified are those who set themselves apart by contrite faith in Jesus, the one and only offering for sin, thus accepting His sacrifice as offered on their behalf, even as the Israelites, to receive the benefit of the Day of Atonement offerings, were obliged to accept them as offered for them individually (Leviticus 23:27-32; Acts 26:17,18). And having been accepted in Him and forgiven our iniquities under the terms of the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit is given as a token of God's love and favour (Ephesians 1:13; Romans 5:1-5; 8:14,17).

And thus we have in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts a continual witness that the New Covenant is in operation, the divine law being put into our hearts and written on our minds, and our sins and iniquities being remembered no more. The fact that sins can be forgiven is the evidence that the offering for sin is finished and complete. (Hebrews 10:11-18). Then he shows how we worship God according to the new method, raised up by our Lord since His resurrection, saying,

*"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; **let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised); And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching".* (Hebrews 10:19-25).

The "temple", or worship of God, according to the Law Covenant and the Levitical order of service, was destroyed when Jesus offered Himself as the efficacious sacrifice, thus doing away with the worship of God which the ancient temple stood for. The "temple", or worship of God, was raised up again by our risen Lord, as the High Priest of a new confession, He being at once the ever-efficacious Sacrifice, the Priest who sprinkles the blood on behalf of the true worshipper, and the 'new way', dedicated for us through the veil, His pierced and riven flesh being the veil which excludes unbelievers, while it admits believers into the Presence. "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

### **The Disciples Believed the Scripture**

The fact of Jesus' resurrection convinced the disciples that a New Covenant between God and believers was being arranged, and it brought to their minds the words of Jesus we have just been studying. It was a sign to them, if not to the Pharisees. The disciples were convinced, and their hopes revived (1 Peter 1:3). They believed the word that Jesus had spoken (John 2:22).

But we also read that they "*believed the scripture*". What scripture was that?

At that time the New Testament had not been written, and scripture referred to the holy writings of Moses and the prophets and the psalms, hence the scripture referred to must be in the Old Testament.

The scripture they believed was Zechariah 6:12,13. They believed that Jesus Christ was the **branch** there foretold, that should build the *temple*, or true mode of worship of the one true God, that He alone should bear the glory, and should sit and rule as a "*priest upon his throne*". Only in the Melchisedec priesthood did the high priest sit on a throne (Psalm 110:1-4), being both king and priest, and they saw that Jesus Christ was High Priest after that order, consequently that remission of sins in **his** name should now be preached, not only in Jerusalem, but everywhere. (Compare 2 Samuel 7:12-14 with Hebrews 1:5; Luke 24:44-48.) Even a Thomas worshipped the risen Lord, and through Him worshipped the Father (John 20:28). So strong was the conviction of all of them, that they went forth, announcing the new worship of God, preaching Jesus and the Resurrection.

As ambassadors for Christ the apostles went in every direction, beseeching men to become reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, their Redeemer and Mediator. To those who became believers it was indicated that they also were to be ambassadors, because the word of reconciliation was committed to them. And so the gospel activities have been passed on from one generation to another, even until now. To all who in the present day worship God in spirit and in truth through Jesus Christ is committed the same word of reconciliation to be held forth in the same manner. Happy are we to be privileged to act as stewards of divine favour! Blessed shall we be if we acquit ourselves in such manner as shall be acceptable to Him who has committed to us this sacred trust.