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**Studies on
the Epistle
to the Hebrews**

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A FOREWORD

This booklet seeks to be a running commentary on the text of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It does not seek to share other than the fairly obvious meaning and movement of the text. Hence it does not take many of the greatly debated points of the Letter. It is an overview of the whole Epistle, and rarely seeks to link themes and doctrines with other biblical books and doctrine.

For this reason it will be thought, by many, to have weaknesses and deficiencies, and from a typical study of the texts by qualified commentators it may seem to be simplistic. I, however, think not. I think it is the most biblical way of treating text, and feel it will be of great value, not only to highly qualified scholars, but also those who wish to get to the heart of the book, the unveiling of the great ‘mystery of God’ which occupies the full number of biblical books—66.

So I send it out with a prayer and a light commendation. Just to get the ‘big picture’ presented by this book is worthy of every minute of the hours which went into its preparation.

*Geoffrey Bingham,
Kingswood, South Australia, 22nd September 1996*

CHAPTER ONE

The writer has his purpose in this chapter to show his Hebrew-Christian readers/listeners that God was ever active in the past. So he first shows (vv. 1–2) that God communicated to the fathers—that is, of the people of Israel—primarily by the prophets. Whatever power and authority the prophets had is now contrasted to that of God's own Son, Jesus.

At this point the writer not only shows the higher level of God's utterance, but also of the new speaker, his Son. This one is to inherit all things (cf. Rom. 4:13), but he is the one from the beginning, the one through whom God made the world. His excellence—we might say perfection—lay, and lies in the fact that he, as no other, radiates the glory of God, has impressed upon him the very nature of God the Father, and sustains the universe by his powerful word. Speaking from the point of view of the incarnation of the Son and the redemptive work that he accomplished, he says that this Son had made purification for sins, the outcome of which he sat down at the right hand of God—the place of honour and high authority—by which work and place it is evident that he is as much superior to the angels by the name he obtained through his work, as angels are named for lesser works. His then, is the name above all.

In verse 5, the writer justifies the high position he has named for Jesus. Angels would appear to be the highest of all creatures, but God never said to an angel, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you' (as in Ps. 2:7), nor 'I will be his father, and he shall be my son' (as in II Sam. 7:14). In verse 6, the writer introduces 'the first-born' (*prototokos*) and it would seem the readers would understand this term of Christ, but only in the LXX does the injunction occur (Deut. 32:43), 'Let all God's angels worship him'.

In verse 7, God says of the angels ‘Who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire’ (Ps. 104:4), but contrasts the Son to whom God says:

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,
the righteous sceptre is the sceptre of thy kingdom.
Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee
with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades (Ps. 45:6–7).

This means the Son is unique, because to be filled with righteousness can be said of none other than God.

In verses 10–12, he builds up further biblical evidence (Ps. 102:25–27):

Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of thy hands;
they will perish, but thou remainest;
they will all grow old like a garment,
like a mantle thou wilt roll them up,
and they will be changed.
But thou art the same,
and thy years will never end.

These words refer to the Son, the one who he is said (vv. 2 and 3) to have used to create and then uphold the whole creation. Obviously he is eternal beyond creation.

He then goes on to say (v. 13; Ps. 110:1), ‘But to what angel has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet”?’ Then the argument is summed up; the Son is the King’s Son, King himself, and superior to angels. ‘Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?’ The Son sits on the throne; angels are to be servants to those who are the heirs of salvation. Only human beings are such heirs, and angels are, in this sense, their servants.

CHAPTER TWO

In verses 1–4, having shown the Co-creatorship of Jesus, his high position on the throne, his very Sonship of God and that he transcends celestial creatures, the writer now proceeds to warn his readers against drifting from the truth. Angels may be servants to ‘heirs of salvation’, but those who are heirs must not take such things lightly, or carelessly. Under the old dispensation, when angels spoke the word (*logos*, here ‘message’) it was a mighty act and a powerful exhortation, even to the giving of the law (cf. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; cf. Deut. 33:2, LXX). To disobey what one heard meant ‘just retribution’. How is it possible to escape retribution if one neglects the salvation-word first spoken by the Lord himself, then given to the readers by those who had heard them—the apostolic preachers—whilst God confirmed that word by the enacting of signs, wonders and miracles (Acts 14:3; Rom. 15:19) *and* by gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit (cf. I Cor. 12:4ff.)?

Verse 5 brings us to the greatness of Man. Angels are even inferior to Man, and it is not to angels that God offered salvation, and certainly did not subject ‘the world (*ten oikoumenen*) to come’. Psalm 8 shows he subjected the world then to Man, but the ‘to come’ here gives hope for ultimate subjection of the world. The writer then quotes from Psalm 8:4–6:

What is man that thou art mindful of him,
or the son of man, that thou carest for him?
Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels,
thou hast crowned him with glory and honour,
putting everything in subjection under his feet.

In verse 8b, the writer says it is obvious this is not yet the case.

Although initially God set everything under him, excepting nothing, yet this is not the case.

Verse 9 begins a powerful statement which needs to be read time and again, and become digested. We do see *someone*, that is, Jesus. What we know of him that is now told is very powerful. The readers must have known *all* this! Paraphrased, it must be something like this, ‘By line with any other man we see this man made a little lower than the angels’ (Ps. 8), but as one ‘crowned with honour and glory’—the very words applied to Man in Psalm 8—for the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every human being’. Note that ‘taste’ here is not the same as, say, wine-tasting. It is *dealing* with death (see vv. 14–15). Somehow this passage is pointing to the time when all things will be under his feet (cf. 1:1–3; 10:12, 13).

Verse 10 begins with a conjunction, building on the thought of verse 9. It was appropriate, functional and effective that the one who made all things—the Father—should, for the sake of ‘bringing many sons into glory’, make the one who was suffering to be the trail-blazer of their salvation complete (*teleiosai*; ‘perfect’) through what he suffered, that is, make a complete suffering such as was required to effect salvation. There is only one way of effecting salvation. This is, of course, by the Cross.

Verse 11 brings us into the fact that the Sanctifier, Jesus, and those whom he sanctifies, that is, the ones he saves (10:10), are all of one origin, namely the ‘of one blood’ (Acts 17:26), that is, Adam. Jesus is one with ‘those whom thou hast given me’ (John 17:2, 6). This points to his humanity in common with others, but especially the ones he came to sanctify, his elect. So he is not ashamed to

call them *his* ‘brethren’. We note the high calling of these ‘brethren’ seeing—as we are soon to see—he is their High Priest, and they are in the category of fellowship with him who is the Co-creator of the world, who is greater than angels, and uniquely Saviour and Sanctifier. Being all that, he is not ashamed to

call them brethren (cf. Matt. 12:49–50; Mark 3:33–35; Luke 8:21; John 15:14). The writer then gives, in verses 12 and 13, quotations from Psalm 22:22 and Isaiah 8:17–18. Psalm 22 has long been taken as a Messianic Psalm of Christ’s suffering. So, then, this sanctified group of people are both his brethren and his children (*pайдion*; cf. John 21:5 where Jesus uses the term after his resurrection).

Verses 14–15 speak of his becoming human (‘flesh and blood’) as are these brethren, these children, these sanctified, so that as a man he could ‘destroy’ (that is, ‘paralyse’, ‘put out of action’, ‘put out of power’) the devil. The devil has the power (*kratos*; ‘might’, ‘strength’) of death. This ‘might of death’ is ‘the fear of death’ (judgment; cf. I John 4:18, ‘torment’), so that Jesus by his death nullifies the fear and power of death and so delivers his people from ‘lifelong bondage’. What a victory! In order to understand it we have to look at verses 9–10 and 16–18.

Verses 16–18 show that it is not about celestial creatures, that is, of a high order, about which Jesus is concerned, but the ‘descendants of Abraham’. This statement must have stirred his readers, for that is what they were. To help these descendants, it was demanded that he be utterly the same as were they. In 5:1, the writer describes the nature and function of the high priest. ‘Merciful’ here means the high priest has to show himself as ‘merciful’, and this means the people would know their priest to be of that calibre, because he showed himself thus. ‘Faithful’ means (i) that he is dependent upon God, and (ii) trustworthy towards his people. His service to, or towards, God is really his service to his people; namely, making propitiation (not ‘expiation’) for the sins of the people. That is, he bears the wrath that is upon their sins, and so sets them free from sin. As for his suffering, it was primarily in the Cross (cf. v. 10; 5:7–8), but he also suffered as do all humans in that he had been genuinely tempted, and so understood, and thus could help those who suffered—and suffer—the same kind of things.

CHAPTER THREE

In **verse 1**, the writer addresses his readers/hearers with the noun ‘brethren’—a warm address—and with the adjective ‘holy’. In 1:3b, he has talked about ‘purification for sins’. Here he addresses them as sanctified brethren, an unusual term (cf. Col. 1:2; I Thess. 5:27). ‘Heavenly calling’ indicates their calling or election is from heaven, from God. This should alert those who are in danger of drifting towards apostasy. The writer is now seeking to draw their concentrated attention to Jesus, his person and his ministry. ‘Apostle’ is only here in all the NT used for him, but then the verb *apostello*—‘to send’—is used so many times, especially in John’s Gospel. He is also the high priest of our confession. The great theme of high priesthood takes up much of the text of the book. ‘Our confession’ is the gospel, the faith we profess.

Jesus’ response to being appointed apostle and high priest was to be faithful, to do what he was mandated to do. Moses was counted to be faithful *in* God’s house, but Jesus was *over* the house *as the one who had built it*. The principle here is that Jesus is greater than Moses. He who builds has greater honour than what is built. So Jesus is greater than Moses. In verse 4, the Father is acknowledged to have built everything, which some take to mean all creation is God’s house.

Verse 5 tells us that *in* all God’s house Moses was to speak of things which were yet to be spoken, but Christ was not only prophetic but also was faithful *over* God’s house as a Son. Verse 6 tells us ‘We are his house’, that is, the Christian church is. Israel had officially rejected Jesus. We as the house have confidence and pride in our hope which Christ has given us through his ministry.

In **verses 7–11**, the writer warns against doing what Israel in the wilderness had done; that is, ceased to be obedient, going against

the promises of God to find their rest in Canaan. Quoting powerful verses from Psalm 95:7–11, he then develops in the rest of this third chapter the danger of falling away from true belief into sin and rebellion, and so death, without even glimpsing the Promised Land. He shows that sin has an inbuilt power of deceit, so that one sins without recognising it is sin.

Here too, we have the first mentions of ‘God’s rest’, a theme he expands and expounds strongly in chapter 4. A whole generation perished because of its unbelief. Only people of faith were permitted to enter Canaan.

CHAPTER FOUR

As we read this chapter, we freshly realise that the writer is speaking directly and in strong terms to those Hebrew Christians who are in danger of losing all Jesus has accomplished for them, especially the reinforced promise of entering God's rest. There needs to be a holy fear of failing to hold fast to the promises and to be appropriately obedient. **Verse 2** tells them that those rescued from Egypt had good news of a coming rest after their labours in Israel. Likewise all who heard the gospel and had become believers had good news of a rich and deep rest. Israel had not heard the good news as men of faith should have done. Some like Joshua and Caleb had heard it with faith. There is no true hearing without faith. Faith, as we will see more and more, is a great theme of this book.

Verse 3 makes it clear that exercising faith is essential to entering the rest. It would seem to cover both a present entering into rest and an eschatological entering into rest. (Some commentators will have it as either *now* or *then*). Verses 3b to 9 resolve into an argument which we shall now attempt to paraphrase. 'God has said that none shall enter into his rest who do not have faith. God's own works were finished from the foundation of the world (cf. 1:31 – 2:3). This God's own rest began at creation and is for all persons of faith, but definitely not for those who do not believe (Ps. 95:11). There is a day and time of rest, but the disbelievers in the wilderness failed to reach this rest. Many years later, David wrote his Psalm which spoke, then, of a rest yet to come. If Joshua had led the faithful remnant into Canaan and given them rest, then Psalm 95 would not have been needed. There must indeed be a sabbath rest still available for the people of God; 'for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labours as God did from his'.

Verse 10 is important: Israel did have a kind of rest which was won from wars (see Deut. 25:19; Josh. 1:13, 15; II Sam. 7:1), yet the condition for entering God's rest is to cease from one's labours as God did. Revelation 14:3 , 'Blessed are the dead . . . for they shall rest from their labours and their deeds follow them', may interpret our present verse; that is, we will have rest after death. Hebrews 4:3 seems to indicate we can enter into rest. Probably the key is the term 'by faith'. By faith we now enter into God's rest as we fulfil the works given us, and eventually those of us who are of faith will obtain the heavenly rest.

The exhortation of **verses 11–13** is reiterating the necessity to keep on living in obedience lest we fall. The famous statement in verses 12–13 about the word of God may be taken generally, but it is surely referring back to the failure to hear God's word and his good news, in faith. Nothing escapes God's word. It is appropriate, then, to be obedient and to enter into God's rest.

The next section, of **verses 14–16**, is by way of encouragement to the readers. The strong exhortation to 'hold fast our obedience and pride in our hope', with the warning against disobedience, is now turned to showing we have a great high priest—the one spoken of in chapter 2—and the fact that he has gone through to the highest place of all, and is at the throne of God. His intercessory ministry (cf. 7:25) is that which will enable us to 'hold fast our confession of faith'. This high priest, sinless as he is, is yet able to understand our weaknesses. He has been beset with temptation but yielded to none. He can sympathise with us, and so we should have confidence (boldness) to draw near to the throne of grace, so that in our times of weakness and failure and resisting sin, we will find both mercy and grace.

CHAPTER FIVE

In this chapter, the writer is taking up the whole matter of Jesus' high priesthood. He has already spoken of its completion in 4:14, and the chapters ahead will spell out the appointing, training, work and conclusion of the ministry of Jesus as high priest.

In **verses 1–5**, the writer is speaking generally of the nature and ministry of Israel's high priests. As verses 1 and 5 indicate, no one dared take upon himself the office of the high priest. He was appointed. His general work was to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. This was a wide ministry, covering many. Because he too was human and failed many times, he was able to deal gently with 'the ignorant and wayward'. Not that the two adjectives do not include 'rebellious', and 'those sinning with a high hand'. 'Weakness' here is the key word. There was no compromise, no failure to deal with their sinning. He himself needed to offer sacrifice for himself, especially on the Day of Atonement. The work of the high priest was essential to the whole order of Israel's life, worship and otherwise.

As **verses 5 and 6** show, just as Aaron did not appoint himself as the first high priest, so Christ did not exalt himself to this office. God appointed him, as Psalm 2:7 speaks of him as 'begotten' as Son, and as Psalm 110:4 shows he was appointed as high priest. The wedding of the two terms, 'Son' and 'high priest', from the two Psalms is highly significant. 'After the order of Melchizedek' is a theme yet to be opened, but is extremely important.

Verses 7–10 now show the authenticating elements for such an exalted position and power. 'The days of his flesh' are most impressive words. They show his genuine manhood, his being one with the human race, his being open to all experiences humans have.

His offering up of prayers and supplications must have been often, seeing the task of being a human being and a high priest—to say nothing of other similar categories—but the mention of 'with loud cries and tears' and the link of them with 'for ever' are extremely important, whilst 'loud cries and tears' speak strongly of his humanity and oneness with the human race. For verse 8, the better translation is 'Son though he was', as it speaks of what the Son of God had to be and do to qualify for his high priesthood. He did not learn to be obedient, but what obedience involved—suffering. 'Being made perfect' (cf. 10:14) is a strong statement, meaning 'perfect for priesthood'. In true priesthood he could then be 'the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him'. 'Obey' is a word used in chapters 3 and 4 regarding entering into rest. If initial obedience is here meant, then it is simply equal to 'believing the gospel' (cf. Acts 6:7; Rom. 10:16; II Thess. 1:8). He obeyed unto death that they might become obedient. Verse 10 tells us he was designated a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. He not only qualified to be high priest as in Israel, but as Melchizedek was, even outside Israel.

Verses 11–14 have to do with the state of the writer's hearers. The mentioning of Melchizedek raises up in his mind the hopelessness of his readers having a deep comprehension of Christ and the gospel, to say nothing of the ideas of holiness and worship. The Epistle to the Hebrews is unique in following this line of teaching, but all should know the significance of chapters 7–10, at least. It is permissible from this passage to realise how dull of hearing were the Christian Hebrews. Timewise, the readers ought to have been teachers, not spiritual toddlers! (See I Cor. 2:5f. and 3:1–3) 'The *first* principles' are virtually explained in 6:1ff. They may not even be Christian *first* principles, but those of the Old Testament. Principles are 'oracles' (cf. Rom. 3:2; I Pet. 4:11). The fact of the qualifying 'first' makes them to be not the fullness of God's word. Verse 14 speaks of mature people, 'those

who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil'. 'Practice' is the key word here. The mature are always practicing living out the word of God, and so their perception becomes keen; they can distinguish good and evil. We ought to note it is not 'the knowledge of good and evil', which is another to discerning 'good' from 'evil'. In one sense now one knows what is good and what is evil. Sin can deceive into making evil look good (cf. Heb. 3:12).

CHAPTER SIX

The conjunction 'therefore' links what follows with the writer's complaints (above) regarding the dullness of his hearers. In verses 1–3, the writer commences, urging 'Let us go on to maturity'. The first step is to leave 'elementary teaching about Christ'. What is this or these? We do not rightly know, but they may be the things he is now saying should not be laid again. If these are the things once laid, then they are foundational—repentance from death-deserving and death-dealing acts; faith towards God (faith in God); instructions about washings and lustrations (plural); the laying on of hands; resurrection from the dead; and an understanding of eternal judgment. Either these dullards had been reiterating these things—going around in a circle of them, so to speak—or they were elements which were a foundation to the deeper things of Christ. They could all have been predicated of actions and beliefs of the Old Testament saints.

Verses 4–8 extend the exhortation-explanation. If 'the foundations' and what are contained in verses 4–5 are of the one piece, then leaving the elementary things is essential for growth to maturity. The writer then speaks of people who have been brought to the place of repentance, although he does not say that they have actually repented. These are folk who have once been enlightened; yes, but to what? The light and power of the gospel? They have tasted the heavenly gift, which probably means they have come to see the gospel. But have they participated in it? What does it mean by being 'partakers of the Holy Spirit'? Does it mean the Holy Spirit has worked on them, or just that he has shown things such as mentioned in 2:1–3? They have tasted the goodness of the word of God, but what is that? True hearing or simply initial hearing? 'The powers of the age [aeon] to come' seem

like signs, miracles and wonders which are part of the new age. What effects have these wrought?

Commentators have debated this material immediately above, saying on the one hand they are persons who have believed and come into the grace of God. On the other hand, some make the point that such have been brought to such a point that to be at this point and yet reject it is blatant, and effectively apostasy.

The writer speaks about possible apostasy, but does he think it happens or may happen? To commit apostasy is to take one's stand with those who crucified Christ. Doing this now is doing it against all that is good which has happened to one. Christ cannot be crucified afresh, but to take the stance of apostasy is to be as though one were crucifying him afresh, crucifying him against the knowledge one has gained in regard to the Cross. This is an act to themselves and an expression of contempt.

In **verses 7 and 8**, the writer is giving the illustration of a piece of land. The whole soil receives the one kind of rain, but one part of the land brings forth good vegetation—fruit and vegetables. The remainder only brings forth weeds, thorns and thistles. The former is land blessed; the latter land cursed (cf. Deut. chs 27 – 30). The rain is poured out as common to both, the response of one is good, the other not good.

The writer now opens his heart. He calls his readers 'beloved', that is, beloved by him and God, and really God's elect. He is sure they have the good things, the things that belong to salvation and not to apostasy. There had been a time—perhaps it was still proceeding—when they had shown love to all the community, serving as saints ought to do and a true labour of love. 'Surely', he suggests, 'you are not the cursed soil. Now that good history you had should awaken and encourage you in "realising the full assurance of hope until the end"'. How, then, can they be dull, sluggish? How can they not be followers and 'imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises'?

Verses 13–20 take up another 'Hebrews' theme and topic, namely 'hope'. We have seen in 3:6 that we are to have 'confidence and pride in our hope', and in 6:11 to have 'full assurance of hope'. Now we are being shown that promise and hope are linked together. God had promised Abraham (Gen. 22:17), 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you'. He swore by himself (Gen. 22:16), having nothing greater by which to swear. Abraham, waiting patiently, received the promise. This must have been the birth of Isaac, because in chapter 11 where the writer emphasises the promises, he yet drew a general conclusion, 'All of these [people of faith] did not receive what was promised'. Not, anyway, whilst alive. Their fulfilment was to be eschatological.

We gather from the passage that two immutable things guarantee the validity of the hope; (i) the promise, and (ii) the oath. So there can be no doubt about the promise being fulfilled, that is, hope is guaranteed. Thus, 'we who have fled for refuge—that is, from the things which do not belong to hope; evil, worldliness, things unworthy of faith and inconsistent with godliness—'might have strong encouragement to *seize* the hope set before us'. That it is 'set before us' is a marvel. In Pauline language, we would say, 'Christ our hope', 'Christ in [us], the hope of glory', and so on. Here the demand is inferred, we should *seize* the hope. Hope is fed by faith and love. Chapter 10:23 has the idea of 'holding fast the confession of our hope without wavering'. Hope is an anchor of the soul, the soul being the very essence of the person. That we are anchored into the Holy of Holies behind the curtain means the place of our hope is to enter this sanctuary—'faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Heb. 11:1). The writer has led these beloved dullards back again to Jesus as high priest, the knowledge of whom and faith in whom, will take them on to maturity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Now the writer is launched into the heart of what he knows as the heart of ‘the confession of our faith’, namely, the person and work of Christ; the priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. He has oriented the hearts and minds of his readers, having highlighted the important person and events of this man of mystery; mystery we say in the nature of biblical mystery. Verses 1–3 give the story which requires little comment. Melchizedek blessed Abraham. Abraham gave him a tenth (a tithe) of everything. His name means ‘king of righteousness’ and his kingdom was Salem (*shalom*), so that he was ‘King of Peace’. Kings were true kings by inheritance or genealogy, but this man was not. There was no such beginning or end to his life. He ‘resembled the Son of God’, was not actually the Son of God, but simply resembled him.

Verses 4–10 now show the greatness of this high priest. He was greater than Abraham in that he received tithes from him. Also he blessed Abraham, the man of all men who had so high and magnificent a promise. Note that ‘the inferior is blessed by the superior’ (v. 7). Even Levi could be said to be in Abraham’s loins as he tithed to Melchizedek, which means that his priesthood transcended that of Levi.

Verses 11–14 seal the superiority of the quality and efficacy of the Melchizedekian over that of the Aaronic. The word ‘perfect’ and ‘perfection’ are very significant in Hebrews (see 2:10; 5:9; 7:19; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23; cf. 6:1; 7:11). If the Levitical priesthood and its accompanying law could have made people perfect, then any other order of priesthood would not be required. Verse 12 may state a general principle—‘For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well’, but the writer is pointing to the need for a priesthood

other than the ineffective Aaronic order, and shows that Christ was descended from Judah which never had anything to do with priesthood of any kind.

Verses 15–22 carry through the argument logically. Another high priest has arisen according to Psalm 110. Levitical priests were so by their being of the tribe of Levi, according to certain legislation. Not, however, this new priest. Levitical priests rose and eventually died. This new priest—Jesus of course—is a high priest after the order of an indestructible life—‘a priest for ever’. As we saw in verse 12, when the order of priesthood changes so does the law, or, as we might say, ‘so does the *cultus*, the system of worship, even the very culture that comes from the new *cultus*'. So, in verse 18, the former commandment (law, system) is set aside because it did not prove effective, that is, ‘made nothing perfect’ (cf. Rom. 8:3). What hope did that law give? Whatever hope may have been with it, ‘a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God’. Again the writer points out that no priesthood is established without an oath. The Levitical priesthood was inherited, not sworn in. In Psalm 110, God speaks to the one who is priest after the order of Melchizedek, ‘Thou art a priest for ever’, and God says he will not change his mind. The strong, rich conclusion the writer draws is, ‘This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant’. A whole panoramic view of the new system, the new *cultus* and its law, is now opened before us and, of course, before the writer’s readers. The mention of ‘a better covenant’ is opening the subject matter of the covenant that was with Israel, and the new covenant which brings forgiveness by a new and different sacrifice—that of the high priest himself.

Verses 23–28 go on to compare the changing Levitical priesthood and the immutable, eternal nature of Christ’s high priesthood. The Levitical priests formed a succession of persons who offered sacrifices, but at some point had to die. This would ever be the case, but the system could by no means be named ‘eternal’.

Christ, being eternally high priest, can continually minister the one ministry to all who need him. One of the rich elements of his ministry is to make perpetual intercession to God for those who draw near to him (God) through this high priest, Jesus. This priest is the only appropriate, effective, functional one, because he is ‘holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens’. When we look at each element described here, we realise there is nothing about him which makes him alien to us.

Note: ‘Separated from sinners’ means that, unlike Levitical high priests who had to separate themselves from all the nation seven days before the sacrifice of the Atonement, this one never has to be separate in that manner. So holy is he that he does not have to have ritual separation. Verse 27 emphasises that he never needs—like Levitical priests—to offer sacrifices daily, firstly for his own sins and secondly for the people. This was done, once for all, when he offered himself upon the Cross. So, concludes the writer, ‘The law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath [Ps. 110] which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever’. No wonder the high priest after the order of Melchizedek surpasses and outmodes any other form of priesthood, even the holy Aaronic one.

CHAPTER 8

The message of Christ as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek —that teaching so essential to turn Hebrew Christian dullards into men of maturity—is now being accomplished. Brilliantly the writer, from verse 1 to verse 7, is showing that this high priest is Christ himself. So in verse 1 he is the fulfilment of Psalm 110:1f. and is the one seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, that is, he is the minister (*leitourgos*) in the heavenly sanctuary, the true tent or tabernacle which is set up not by Man but by the Lord. This is an altogether different sanctuary to the earthly one Israel knew in its tabernacle which later became the temple, built on the pattern of the tent. This high priest who is in the heavenly sanctuary must be like the one in the earthly sanctuary, that as the earthly high priest was there to offer ‘gifts and sacrifices’, so this high priest ‘must also have something to offer’. The high priest in the earthly tabernacle would have to offer prescribed sacrifices—never deviating from them or being innovative—but such offerings were only a shadow and copy of what was in the heavenly sanctuary. They are such because Moses, when about to erect the tabernacle in Israel, was instructed by God to ‘make everything according to the pattern which was shown to you in the mount’—Mount Sinai. The fact of the matter is that Christ has obtained a better ministry than the earthly, Aaronic one. The heavenly ministry is as much better than the earthly one, as the covenant on which the heavenly one is founded is better than the former covenant with Israel, the proof of which is that the new covenant is enacted on better promises than the Sinaitic covenant. Had the first covenant been faultless there would have been no need for the second, the new covenant.

At **verse 8**, the writer says that God finds fault with the promises of the Sinaitic covenant and this is expressed in

the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–34. It is clear from the Jeremiah prophecy that the new covenant will outmode the former covenant with Israel. Its elements will be:

- (i) the new covenant will differ from the one made when Israel was delivered from Egypt;
- (ii) in the new covenant God will put his laws into their hearts and plant them in their minds, the result of which will be;
- (iii) that they will be a new people, of God, knowing him and not having to teach one another concerning him;
- (iv) rather, they will all know God, the lowest to the highest, and this will be because;
- (v) God will forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more.

In **verse 13**, the writer concludes that when God speaks of a *new* covenant, it is assumed that the first one is obsolete. In being obsolete and growing old, it is at the point of vanishing for ever. For the Hebrew Christians who may have had some longing for the old, the death knell to that old is sounded.

CHAPTER 9

In **verses 1 to 10**, the writer recounts for his hearers the worship structure of the Sinaitic covenant. Since it is a simple and faithful description of that first covenant it really needs no comment, but we need to read down it, and so we reproduce it here: **(i)** ‘Now even the first covenant had **regulations for worship** and an earthly sanctuary; **(ii)** For a tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place; **(iii)** Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies; **(iv)** having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; **(v)** above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.; **(vi)** These preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual duties; **(vii)** but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people; **(viii)** By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing; **(ix)** (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper; **(x)** but deal only with food and drink and various ablutions, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation’.

In **verses 8–10**, the text begins to show how the Holy Spirit indicates the former sanctuary could not give such worship, gifts and sacrifices, which could give peace and perfection to the worshipper’s conscience. Regulations pertained to the worshipper

'until the time of reformation', that is, until the time of the new covenant, when the old would be reformed into the new which would come. The old, as we have seen, was proved obsolescent.

In **verses 11–14**, as against the pattern and use of the Sinaitic covenant cultus, the new now appears when Christ comes as high priest of the good things that have thus already come with his coming, things we later see to be redemption, cleansing, forgiveness, sanctification and perfection. He now moved through the greater and more perfect tent (tabernacle, sanctuary), one that is not man-made, not part of the terrestrial creation as we know it. Of course the 'old' tabernacle and temple were of the earth, as also were their sacrifices. His entrance was not by virtue of the material blood of goats and calves, but by virtue of his own blood, *having secured* for man an eternal redemption. His penetration—if we may use that word—was to the Holy of Holies, the holiest place of all, hitherto forbidden to all but the high priest, and then he, having been purified, could only enter by virtue of the blood of the Atonement which was then sprinkled on the mercy seat.

Note: The *RSV* and *NRSV* are faulty in saying (v. 12) he took blood into the sanctuary. *NIV* is correct in its translation, 'he entered the Most Holy Place for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption'.

'Eternal redemption' (v. 12) is both a redemption that is valid for all eternity, but also a present experience for true believers, something more than a mere salvation from sin and its consequences. Verse 24 of this chapter is really a commentary on this verse 12.

In **verses 13 and 14**, the writer compares the power and efficacy of the former covenant with that of the new covenant. The old system of purification of defiled persons was by means of the blood of bulls and goats, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a

heifer (Lev. 16:6, 16; Num. 19:9, 17–18). This ritual relieved the conscience of its defilement by matters unclean—moral uncleanness and the touching of a dead person. By comparison, the blood of Christ shed in sacrifice, by the office of the Holy Spirit ensuring it was a pure offering, now has the power to go beyond mere ritual uncleanness to 'purify the conscience from dead works to worship [serve] the living God'. In chapter 10, the writer deals more particularly with the matter of a 'sinful conscience' or an 'evil conscience', but here he is referring to a conscience that was once loaded with 'dead works', that is, sins which brought death and bringing with them fear of death and judgment. The sheer relief of being freed and lightened of all this opens the believing person and community to the true nature of God in merciful redemption, so that now they desire to worship him and serve him as 'the living God'. We need to keep in mind that 'the living God' is the God who acts, who is perpetually *doing*. Here he has effected relief from the old troubling and disquieted conscience. We note from 9:9 that the rituals of the former covenant could not perfect the conscience of the worshipper, so that worship was not worship in the fullest sense.

In **verse 15** and following, the writer has suddenly introduced the matter of covenant. It may seem obvious to comment that the writer is now intent on this great theme. It is the great theme of all Scripture, so it is not surprising that he now traces the death of Christ as the basis of the new covenant. In 7:22, he has been denoted as 'the surety of a better covenant'. This is a comparison of the 'new' with the 'old'. In 8:6–7, Jesus' ministry as high priest transcends that of the former covenant, 'since it is enacted on better promises'. Now the author is saying that Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, so that the covenant-promised inheritance may come to those who are called. Without trying to cover all the subject of 'calling', we know the inheritors are the genuinely called elect. Amazingly this covenant first redeems those

who were transgressors under the Sinaitic covenant. Redemption is understood to deal with debts, slavery and prison incarceration. The writer does not expand these but where necessary—one or all—redemption has been obtained by the mediator of this new covenant. The Hebrew term for covenant, *berith*, is brought through into the New Testament by the Greek word *diatheke*, which covers the Old Testament use of *berith*, but is also related to the word ‘testament’ and ‘testator’. So the author has *berith* very firmly in mind, but he uses *diateke* to introduce the idea of the testator’s death. Verses 16 and 17 are showing that the will of the one who dies comes into action upon his death, for it is static during his life.

In **verses 18–22**, the idea of the necessity of blood-shedding is explored. The principle of ratification of a covenant (here, the will, the *diateke*) requires blood-shedding. Hence, in Exodus 24, where the covenant was ratified, the animals’ blood had to be shed and then sprinkled on the covenant people and the book of the covenant. (Note that in Exodus 24, the altar also had to be sprinkled.) Thus the covenant was sealed. In regard to holy worship, the tent and the vessels of the same were sprinkled with blood. The sprinkling of blood was not confined to these items for, ‘Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins’. We know that the Sinaitic covenant had every facility, through sacrifice, for the forgiveness for sins, but we are startled that the writer, as it were, so suddenly slips this subject into his exposition. Covenant and forgiveness are inseparable. In regard to the new covenant, Christ shows the shedding of his blood is for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:27–28).

In **verse 23** and following, the writer goes back to the origin of the worship tent (Heb. 8:5) and the initial sanctification of tent, furniture, vessels, and priest by the use of blood. What is not difficult to understand is that these things were but the copies of

the heavenly sanctuary realities. Of course they need consecration, for they were to be used in the worship and service of God; that is the meaning of consecration. What, however, is strange and quite difficult to understand, is that those heavenly realities need to be sanctified, and this by the blood of Christ. Before, in regard to **verses 11 and 12**, we denied that Christ took blood into the sanctuary and posed the *NIV* translation against the *RSV–NRSV* interpretation and translation. Now the *RSV–NRSV* seems to be correct in the light of verse 24. Moreover, it seems strange that heavenly things should require such cleansing-consecration rituals. Many have been the interpretations, but to be valid they must explain the need for blood that is better than animal blood: this ‘better blood’, we are told, must be Christ’s. None of this makes sense unless it is that what Christ has done on earth becomes effective in heaven. In Job 15:15, Eliphaz says, ‘Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not clean in his sight’ (cf. Job 5:1; 25:5). We are not sure Eliphaz can be taken as true. It is when we come to the New Testament doctrine of ‘the heavenly places’ that we may find some light. There are battles in heavenly places between good and evil principalities and powers (detectable in Dan. chs 10 and 11). It is in references such as Ephesians 6:12, I Corinthians 1:28, Romans 8:36–39, and Colossians 2:14–15, that we see grounds for the triumph of the Cross as essential for purifying the heavens. Colossians 1:20 says that it was and is God’s will, through Christ, to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or in heaven, by making peace by the blood of his cross’. Again, II Peter 3:10–12 speaks of a fiery purging of the old heavens and earth, and Revelation 21:1 speaks of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’. It is difficult to draw conclusions with this set of references, difficult because we are not sure whether some refer to a material heaven, and now a celestial one—and so on. The one conclusion we can come to is that the shedding of the blood of Christ, that is, the death of the Cross, carries its effects into the heaven of God.

In **verses 24 to 28**, we see his presence in heaven is primarily on our behalf. Some see this as blood purifying the people, the house of God, heaven itself. However that may or may not be, the writer insists that the Cross was a once-for-all happening. No annual Atonement by a succession of priests, but a *hapax*, a once and only *once* happening. It is interesting that the writer shows the absurd alternative would have to be Christ's appearing 'from the foundation of the world', continually offering sacrifices. No: 'he has appeared once for all [*hapax*] to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself'. The idea is stunning, beyond comprehension unless we are 'in the mystery of it all'. Verse 27 tells us of another *hapax*, Man's *hapax*, namely his death which is 'once for all time'. After death comes the judgment, that which humanity dreads. Christ having been offered once (*hapax*) for the purpose of bearing the sins of many, will appear once more; not to deal with sin, since it has been dealt with, but to save completely those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Thus this section of the writer's gospel wisdom holds the believers enthralled. What action, and what results!

CHAPTER TEN

Having brought the covenant into full view, the necessity for the death and the new freedom of the people of God, the writer draws his readers back to the matter of the law as given at Sinai. He is now on the function of the law—to be a shadow of good things to come—and, at the same time, to show its inadequacy to bring peace to the conscience of its covenant members. In verses 1 to 4, he deals with the shadow and the inadequacy. He is dealing with the problem which faced the Hebrew Christians—the deficiencies of the law and, at the same time, its functional value. It is often said that *culture* comes from *cultus*, and culture is what we like, what we move in comfortably for the most part. Now the law is presented as being only a shadow of things to come. Even so, being such a shadow it is of great importance. There were 'things to come', but these belonged to the new covenant. If the sacrifices offered from year to year were wholly adequate then they would not need to be offered continually, as against the *hapax*—the 'once for all' we have seen of Christ's sacrifice. Instead of rescinding guilt, they acted as a constant reminder of the worshippers' failures. So the simple conclusion is drawn, 'For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins'.

Verse 5 begins a long, though simple presentation of the inefficacy of the sacrifices, and the efficacy of the new, true sacrifice. A re-run of Psalm 40:6–8 is given to us. The Psalmist has cried to God that the old sacrifices and offerings are not what God now wants. He speaks of 'a body thou hast prepared for me'. We are reminded of 8:3, 'it is necessary for this high priest to also have something to offer'. No high priest is worthy of the title who cannot offer a victim for sacrifice. Now Christ has something to offer,

his own body which is his very self. Taking the portion of the Psalm for himself, the Offerer (Christ) interprets it as referring to himself: ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God’. He claims the book, the written prophecy, is referring to himself. In Psalm 40, the words are ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God’. When the Psalmist had said God was not interested in the ritual offerings Israel generally offered as prescriptions of the law, he adds, ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will’.

In verse 11, the continuity of the argument is apparent, ‘He abolishes the first in order to establish the second’, and whilst he does not define ‘first’ and ‘second’, it is clear enough that the first is the former sacrifices and offerings, the pattern of the law, and the second is ‘the will’ of verses 2 and 9. The will is, of course, shown throughout the Epistle; namely, that this person superior to angels, Moses, and the priests of Israel, is to be a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, an order that is eternal and powerful to redeem. It involves the giving of his body, himself, as the perfect victim to effect salvation and all involved in that work. The will is not merely something to be done, as say Abraham was tested as to his willingness to sacrifice his son. It was to accomplish the sanctification of his people through the offering of the body of Jesus once-for-all (*ephapax*).

Note: Sanctification is a theme often not wholly understood, but it is in line with God’s intention to consecrate all things, to have them to be accounted as holy for ever, so that what is sanctified may worship and serve him as the living God, for ever. Whilst sanctification is linked with purification and the forgiveness of sins, it is that act of God which first consecrates us and then helps us to live a practical holy life.

In **verse 11**, the futility of the old sacrifices and the priestly system is again shown—since the sacrifices could not actually, *per se*,

effect forgiveness. By contrast with the repeated sacrifices is the one clear act of Christ in the Cross, ‘But when Christ had offered for all time [in perpetuity] a *single* sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God—all work having been accomplished—then to wait until his enemies were subjugated for ever (cf. I Cor. 15:24–28; Ps. 110:1), for this was what the high priest after the order of Melchizedek had been promised. The writer then condenses into one marvellous verse the act and accomplishment of this high priest, ‘For by a *single* offering he has perfected for all time [in perpetuity] those who are sanctified’. In and by this *one* act, Christ has perfected for ever those whom he has sanctified. Whilst, no doubt, there are eschatological connotations to being perfected and being sanctified, they are nevertheless, realities of the people of God.

In **verses 15–18**, right on the heels of describing this magnificent and totally successful work of the Cross, the writer calls Jeremiah’s prophecy of 31:31–34 into play as proof of the totality of the forgiveness of sins. Whilst it is a shortened form of the original, it misses nothing of its promises of the internalisation of the law, linked with God’s utter forgetfulness of our sins in full forgiveness. So, in verse 18, he can conclude, ‘Where there is forgiveness of these [sins], there is no longer any offering for sin’.

As a result of all this, there now comes in **verses 19 to 22**, a beautiful invitation which is also an injunction, the writer calling to his readers—readers both then and now—to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus. One is to do this with confidence or holy boldness. Once, in the earthly copy of the heavenly, only the high priest could do this. He could not invite the congregation to follow him. The only assurance that our entry is valid is that it is ‘by the blood of Jesus’. He, having shed his blood and given his flesh as the true sacrifice, has now opened the curtain on which the warning, guardian cherubim were once inscribed, to take it to the heart of the Most Holy Place, where the Most Holy One, the

True Presence is dwelling. We need not fear, though by nature and habit we may tremble to do so, because we are brought back to the truth that *this is the house of God!* Over it is the True Priest, the Son of the Father. No, let there be no lack of pure boldness because now we have true hearts and are entering in with the full assurance of faith. Our hearts are sprinkled by that blood which gives us a pure conscience—we being liberated from a conscience that brings the dreadful sense of sin and evil. Baptism has washed us outwardly, whilst God has washed us inwardly. What a glorious and liberated and liberating entrance! The writer of the book will make further representations regarding Christ as our high priest, and it is comforting to know he is ever over the house of God, ever interceding for us.

Verses 23 to 25 is a second injunction, but at first sight it seems to have no connection with what has gone before. In fact it has had everything to do with it. The whole Epistle up to this point has been intended to awaken the readers to the glories of Christ and the gospel, and to grip them afresh in its greatness, power and uniqueness. The writer does not intend to close at this point of climax. He intends to use what he has said to awaken and encourage, as well as to warn and admonish the Hebrew Christians who had become dull and were somehow still gripped by their Jewish past—its *cultus* and culture. So this passage is exhortation. Note the words, confession (profession), hope. It is the confession of hope we saw in 7:13–27. ‘He who promised is faithful’, is telling again of the trustworthiness of God. The scene shifts slightly. It is within the fellowship of the saints. First they are to ‘consider one another’ (cf. Phil. 2:1–8). Then they are to stir one another up to love and good works—the fruit of ‘consideration’. Love has not hitherto been mentioned, but its stimulation must come from the ministry of salvation by the three Persons of the Trinity who have been involved. Where there is true faith there is true love, and likewise hope forms part of this inseparable triad.

Doubtless, the Hebrew Christians—as also some of us—have been tardy in worship and fellowship. Where the gospel is seen as weak, fellowship is also deficient. Perhaps they wavered between two *cultuses*. Mutual encouragement has always been needed in the face of evil’s opposition and the flesh’s tendency to take the easy way. The signs of the Day—the Day of the Lord—are of beauty and joy to anticipate. However, it will also be a time of reckoning for the spiritual delinquents.

In **verses 26 to 31**, we seem to be back in the first part of Hebrews 6. Even so, it is as serious, if not more serious, than that. Verse 26 seems to be speaking about an impossible matter. All Christians sin after they have received the knowledge of the truth (cf. I John 2:1–2), but here the sin is that of apostasy. The knowledge of the truth is a full presentation and confrontation of the gospel—the things the writer has presented up to this point in his Epistle. The context shows that all the sense of forgiveness, the gifts of redemption, sanctification and perfection, have vanished. How strong the word, ‘a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries’! The author has been encouraging with his pictures of God’s wonderful grace; now he is presenting God’s wrath, ‘a fury of fire’ (cf. Isa. 26:11) at the rejection—or neglect—of grace. Taking these Hebrew readers back to the old law, he shows how ruthless it was where sin was exposed and testified to by two or three witnesses. It was ‘the law of Moses’, but the gospel is really ‘the law of Christ’, the one greatly greater than Moses.

Look at what the apostate person has done: **(i)** he has spurned the Son of God, an incredibly shameful and arrogant act towards ‘the Lord of glory’—that is, he has ‘trampled underfoot’ this great high priest; **(ii)** he has ‘profaned the blood of the covenant’ (see Exod. 24:8; Heb. 9:20; 13:20). To profane is not only to take away the holiness of the covenant—perhaps its most wonderful element—but to make that blood an unholy thing, an

unclean and vile thing. It is also a jeering against the act and purpose of the blood-shedding. The blood that has sanctified the (seeming) believer he now despises and scorns; and (iii) he has ‘outraged the Spirit of grace’. It is an insulting of this great Holy Spirit who is eternal, and the one who has been involved in the work of Christ (9:8, 14), the work of redemption. ‘Spirit of grace’ may mean ‘gracious Spirit’, but it seems here that he is the one through whom grace is achieved and is brought to humanity. The term comes from Zechariah 12:10, and is significant there in the light of prayer, for he is the Spirit of intercession. Verses 30 and 31 show us that God is not passive in the face of the horrible sin of apostasy. The writer says, ‘For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay”’ (Deut. 32:35–36). This statement is made in the light of the dangers which attend ‘human payback’, and in any case any sin against another is firstly sin against God (Ps. 51:3–4; 135:14; Rom. 12:18–21). Commenting on God’s active vengeance the writer says, ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’. We remember that the term ‘living God’—used many times in the Old Testament and at least seventeen times in the New Testament—means the never inactive God, the one who sees all and leaves nothing unjudged or unrewarded.

The section of verses 32 to 39 reminds us of chapter 6, where in the first portion of it, there is a dire warning against apostasy, but by contrast the second section virtually is a denial by the writer that his readers would fall into such a dreadful state. There he encourages them with the proof of their true believing, even if they may show signs of immaturity and a certain sluggishness. Here, then, the author of the Epistle encourages them to press on. He contrasts the *possibility* of apostasy with the *facts* of their early faithfulness to Christ and the truth. We feel the throb and life of those early days and we ourselves take heart—whether or not we have become sluggish. The passage begins with a strong ‘

but’: ‘*But* recall the former days’. Then they had been faced with persecution. Being a Christian was not easy. We sense much of their suffering may have come from their fellow Jews. The abuse and its accompanying shame had often been public. They had stood alongside others who were suffering ignominy, not ashamed of the further persecution which would come to them. By ‘having compassion on the prisoners’, he means helping those who were prisoners for the gospel’s sake (cf. Gal. 6:10, ‘So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith’). Instead of being indignant at the loss of their goods, they had taken the spoiling of them cheerfully, always having in mind the better possession which was and is an eternal one. In this we have a forecast of the faith and acceptance principle of Hebrews chapter 12.

In **verse 35**, there is a rallying cry like some trumpet sounded when the victory is in sight, and lagging, battle-worn spirits need cheering. He is saying, ‘Because all things are as they have been and will be, don’t cast away your confidence, which has a great reward’. ‘Confidence’ is a word often used, as also the phrase ‘confidence of hope’; hope being a great theme, as we have seen. Yes, those who persevere will receive ‘great reward’. ‘Reward’ is another good promise in both Old and New Testaments. Israel had faced a dire judgment at the time of the prophet Habakkuk, and God had spoken sternly to them the prophetic words of 2:3–4 (here vv. 37 and 38). ‘For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and not tarry; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him’. ‘The coming one’ was the marauding Babylonian army, but in the midst of persecution and being plundered, the faithful one—God’s true people—would live by faith. ‘Yes’, says the author, ‘we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep [save] their souls’.

These last verses contain strong warnings and an urging to

live by faith. They are a fitting close to a great chapter, and they are equally powerful as an introduction to the next chapter, namely, chapter 11—the chapter of faith. In them is an awareness of the need to persevere and not to lose faith in the face of suffering. Nor is there any false ‘triumphalism’. It is quiet faith which conquers.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Verse 39 of chapter 10 is really the point from which chapter 11 is launched: ‘But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls’. The writer has virtually set up Habakkuk as the man of faith who came to have full faith in God in the face of the troubles which were to come upon him and his people. All the men and women mentioned in chapter 11 are those who had faith in much the same way. Sometimes called ‘heroes of faith’—a not very apt title, for they would not have seen themselves as heroic—they certainly form a ‘great cloud of witnesses’, not of themselves but the life of faith, that such faith is possible and is required by God, as 10:39 states.

Verses 1 to 3 give us the author’s account of the nature of faith, ‘the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’, which we could restate as, ‘faith is the substantial basis for hope, the tested conviction of things not as yet seen’. Verse 2 adds, by having faith ‘men of old received divine approval’. A person without faith is one without substantial hope. We who are people of faith understand that the world, which is now seen, was created out of that which was unseen. This must mean that we do not see what was unseen, but we are sure the word of God was the power by which all things came into visible being. If we speak of a ‘how’, the answer is ‘by the word of God’ (cf. Ps. 33:6, ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth’; Ps. 104:30, ‘When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created’; ‘For he commanded and they were created’). Men of old and present persons of faith have this view of creation.

The description of faith in verses 1 to 3 speaks much about hope, the nature of which we have seen throughout the Epistle.

So there is no faith without hope; no hope without faith. Thus the list of faithful people—men and women—whom we now embark on a description of, actually believed that that which their faith had grasped was to happen. For example, Abel believed in the proper outcome of his act of sacrifice. Indeed, he believed the action of his sacrifice was appropriate to God's plan, hence he offered his sacrifice by faith. Had there been no faith, the sacrifice would have been unsubstantiated as a proper action. In a real sense Abel was here 'justified by faith'. This means he must have known the nature of God, of sacrifice, and of his obligation to 'faith it up' in the situation. Here we have the one comparison of two persons; Abel a man of faith, and Cain a man of disobedience. The latter saw his disobedience as obedience. We could say he expected justification by his work. All people of faith see their faith-action connected with the future outcome of their believing. In verse 5, we find that Enoch had faith that he would not die as do others, and this proved to be the case. His faith so pleased God in this case that he 'took him'. The general principle 'to have faith is to please God, and without faith it is impossible to do so', becomes the living criterion of faith. One must believe that he *is* and that he rewards those who diligently seek him. It is not so much believing that 'there is a God', but the true nature of the God who *is*, including the fact that he rewards those who seek him with all their hearts, that is, in faith.

In **verse 7**, Noah believed the warning concerning unseen things which would happen and he did what was patently absurd to men who lacked faith; he built an ark, the result of which all but his elected family were condemned—condemned not only for their sin, violence and corruption, but for their unbelief. Noah became a 'possessor of what God has promised', that is, he was justified by his faith in God. He is the first person to be called 'righteous', and this description is what we might call 'Pauline'. See also I Peter 3:20, for another view of his righteousness.

In **verses 8 to 22**, we see faith exercised in the Abrahamic family, that is, the family of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob. The description of faith in verses 1 to 3 is certainly apt to their lives. Knowing as we do that migration was not a commonplace or dynamic matter—that families or nations kept to their cultures, and that they had a relationship with the land in which they lived (cf. Acts 17:26)—it was an extraordinary thing for Abraham to have faith regarding his future in transferring his family from Mesopotamia to Canaan, with all the movement to and from Egypt and living within foreign cultures and even sharing in international warring. Living in the Promised Land was as living in a foreign land. By faith, Abraham looked to a sure inheritance midst all this chopping and changing; he looked for a city to come, which we know now to be 'the holy city whose builder and maker is God'. Sarah had faith to conceive although it was against reasonable believing. Who, apart from faith, would believe in descendants as many as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand of the sea-shore.

Verses 39–40 show that none received the fullness of the promises in which they had faith. So verses 13 to 16, within our pericope of 8–22, reiterates strongly the working principle of faith, namely *not* that 'seeing is believing', but rather that 'believing is seeing that which is as yet invisible'. Hence what God has prepared for them transcends what they can see, and possibly, even obtain, were they that way minded. 'But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one'. God's response is that 'God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city'. This is the living God and all the writer's observations remind us of the Sermon on the Mount. The story of the offering up of Isaac and, figuratively speaking receiving him back, is a powerful reminder of the immense strength of faith in the life of men, who left to themselves are weak. We think, 'The conies are a little people', but they live, so to speak, in the rugged rocks of

faith and are safe by contrast with the jubilant triumphalists. By faith the blessings passed from Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob and to Joseph's sons. Joseph's heart was not primarily in Egypt, so that the directions by faith for his bones to be taken to the Promised Land, were a parable perhaps of his resurrection in the celestial Promised Land, the Holy City (cf. Gen. 50:25–26).

In **verses 23–28**, the story of another prince of faith—Moses—is told. His parents and family were folk of faith, from the basket in the bulrushes to the crossing of the Red Sea, and even beyond. ‘He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked for the reward’. Under the judgment of death because of the king’s wrath, ‘he endured as seeing him who is invisible’, a beautiful statement of faith comporting with the first few verses of this chapter. For all Israel’s faults, it was a people of faith, especially within its leadership. Faith was in action for the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh’s army, the destruction of Jericho and all its dynamic, cultural artefacts. The heathen were stunned by the act of faith exercised by their enemies in encompassing the walls seven days. Rahab the harlot was a woman of faith, assured that God would destroy the city but save her and her family.

The pericope of **verses 32–38** in some ways defies an objective commentary of the author’s writing. We include it for our own reading-in-amazement. Yet faith does not baulk at these running descriptions of life-in-faith:

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains

and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

We are amazed at, and grateful for, the rewards of faith. It is no wonder the next chapter points out that these folk are all witnesses to the power, necessity and indispensability of faith. The writer does not mean, primarily, that they are onlookers and witnesses to *our* faith, but rather to the reality of faith itself. We repeat: what is remarkable about faith is not even its amazing workings amongst the people of God, but the fact that none of the promises were really wholly fulfilled in all these men and women of faith. The author explains why in verses 39–40: ‘And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect’.

That is to say that the promises will reach their fulfilment at the one and same time, when the Day of the Lord appears. The first three verses of this chapter tell us that faith has its goal. It believes that the hope held by faith will reach its ultimate completion.

CHAPTER TWELVE

There are two possible meanings to the first section of verses 1 and 2. It could mean there is a cloud of witnesses, an audience from the past which is cheering us on, witnessing to the way we run and the goal we seek to achieve. These are encouragers, but when we ask, ‘Who are they?’, then our second understanding comes. They are not witnesses to *us*, but to *faith*. These are the ones who have succeeded in faith. The fact that they have succeeded is the greatest encouragement we could receive. Seeing this wonderful group of faith people we are ‘encouraged to put our everything into it’. We throw off anything which impedes our running. In fact, in the Olympics of the day they ran naked. It is not a physical race, however, it is a spiritual race. It is not clothes which will impede us but things which are not appropriate, for even of our good can evil be spoken. No: we must see that nothing is a weight upon us. Sins, with their intrinsic power to deceive (cf. 3:13) can entangle us in our faith-running. That faith, from beginning to end, depends upon Jesus. He is the initiator and the completer of our faith, so we must keep our eyes on him, looking unswervingly to him, whilst the cloud of witnesses meantime encourages and urges us on to better and better running. II Corinthians 3:18 shows that our constant considering of Jesus brings us from one stage of glory to another. Here the principle is much the same. We see what a person he was and is, one who did not withdraw from the terrible work of the Cross but saw its outcome, the joy of what it would accomplish in us, the joy of salvation. He did not count the Cross too great a thing to endure, and he disregarded its shame, thus earning and taking his place at the right hand of God. This, we can say, was the completing of our faith—our faith arising from his victory.

Verses 3–4 call on the readers to ‘consider Jesus’. It is almost saying, ‘calculate on Jesus’ (*analogisasthe*). The considering is deep and earnest. They must remember the opposition Jesus faced. This is necessary, for the Epistle has shown us that the Hebrew Christians have sometimes been hesitant, on the verge of withdrawing. ‘When it comes to the facts’, the writer says, ‘You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood’. They need to see that Jesus did, and to be inspired by his example to do the same.

Now the exhortation widens and deepens. From verse 5 to 11, the thought is that discipline is needed from outside them. Quoting Proverbs 3:11–12, the writer shows that God disciplines them as he should. If this is legitimate for earthly fathers to do, then how much more appropriate and legitimate is it for the Heavenly Father to do so. Human discipline within a family is beneficial, but the wisdom of God in disciplining is on the highest level. Human fathers gave us limited discipline at their own will and for our benefit. The Heavenly Father disciplines us for our good also, but the outcome is ‘that we might share in his holiness’. To ‘share in his holiness’ is a wonderful outcome. Holiness is unique to God: sharing in it is a marvellous privilege. The conclusion is, therefore, ‘For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it’.

Note: At this point we review the Hebrew Christians and their action in the life of the church and the truth, and we see they may have mistaken much of the action of God their Father. Perhaps there was some disappointment, some self pity, some misreading of God’s disciplinary action. At every point the writer of the Letter has been disclosing their part in the gospel, in the life of the community. Now, it may be, he has come to the crux of their problem—mistaking the pain of discipline as some punitive action of God. The pain of discipline is not simply the pain of punishment

regarding which the believers are bewildered. No: it is to produce a sharing in the Father's holiness and to produce in them and for them 'the peaceful fruit of righteousness' (cf. James 3:18; Rom. 14:17).

Verses 12 to 18 continue naturally as an exhortation. On the basis of the purpose of discipline, they must now 'pull themselves together'. Despair often weakens and paralyses the subject of discipline. Yet its purpose is the opposite. Faith will result in a freshening of action. In this case it is a community to whom the writer is speaking. They must not only revive in endeavour, but also must set up the best conditions for their fellow-believers, faint as they may be. The paths in which they walk must be tidied and levelled or made straight. Better walking will result. Discouragement will give way to encouragement. In verse 14, living in peace, in reconciliation, is something for which they should *strive* and with it they should *pursue* the life of the holiness to which the writer has just alluded as one of the goals of discipline. He teaches that without this holiness no one will see the Lord. In 10:10–15, he has shown that all believers have the category of sanctification. Here, in 12:14 he shows that those who refuse to live in holiness will never see the Lord (cf. Titus 1:15; Matt. 5:8; Rev. 22:4, 11). Verses 15–17, are surely linked with 'peace with all men and holiness'. The writer proceeds with a 'see to it', though whether he is speaking to the elders he will mention in the next chapter, or is talking about a congregation as a whole, we cannot say. What they are to be, to do, and not to be, and not to do, is clear. They are to obtain the grace of God and not to fall short of it (II Cor. 6:2), in all the means which God uses, and the results he expects in his people. A 'root of bitterness' must not be allowed a place in their fellowship because such spreads like a contagion. Deuteronomy 29:17–18 (cf. Gen. 27:34) speaks of a bitter root linked with idolatry, and there may be a similar reference here.

'Strive for peace with all men', seems to be the opposite of bitterness by which a church can be defiled. There is a warning against immorality and irreligion such as Esau typifies. He was not holy, not even clean, but was profane, secular, as was shown by his selling of his birthright for food. Hungry though he was he belittled the birthright, and although later 'he sought repentance' the matter was not easy. Whether, in fact he sought Isaac's repentance and a change of blessing is not known, but it may have been that. If he was still secular in mind then he could not effect genuine repentance which is always a work initiated by God. People can weep with remorse without that act being genuine repentance.

Verses 18–24, are some of the most remarkable verses in the book, contrasting as they do the worship at Sinai and the worship linked with the new covenant. Passages which outline the first are Exodus 19:12–22; 20:18–21; Deuteronomy 4:11–12; and 5:22–26. Verses 18–21, describe the terrifying and awesome event, the voice of God being intolerable to them. The contrast in verses 22 to 24 is most beautiful. Starting with the adversative 'but', the believers are told that they have not come to Mt Sinai but to Mt Zion, with all that this holy mountain conjures up in the readers' minds. It is 'the city of the living God'—the God who acts, and is presently acting—and it is the heavenly Jerusalem. In this city there are myriads—innumerable—angels which are in festival joy, commemorating what God has done, done beyond Sinai, done in Christ. This assembly has the 'first born' enrolled in it, and God as Judge has attended to the matter of 'the spirits of just men made perfect'. We have also come to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood which speaks of better things than Abel's.

*Abel's blood for vengeance
Pleaded to the skies;
But the blood of Jesus
For our pardon cries.*

It seems clear enough that the present worshipping church is one with the church down through the ages. If this is what the writer means—and we think it is—then terrestrial and celestial worship are as one. We are all worshipping together, however that may work out, and the ‘working out’ is not told to us.

Verses 25–29, bring the contrast of the Judaism of the writer’s day and the Christian gospel as he expounds it. He has shown how superior the new is to the old. By the time we have reached this point in the letter, the author is showing that his readers are to hear the voice of him who is speaking. Repeating somewhat the first verses of chapter 2, the Hebrews of the church are warned against refusing to hear. The Lord had spoken on earth from Sinai (Deut. 5:28–29), and his prophets had driven the message home. At the time of Sinai the mountain had shaken (Exod. 19:18; Judg. 5:4–5; Ps. 68:8; 77:18; 114:4, 7). Even so, they were warned against a shaking to come (Hag. 2:6), ‘Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with splendour, says the Lord of hosts’. This ‘once more’ will be a shaking far greater than at Sinai, for the whole world will be shaken. Only what is unshakeable will remain. What, then, is shakeable in all the world? All that is not the kingdom of God. So, then, the Hebrew Christians, and all Christians are members of this kingdom. They have received it. ‘So’, says the author of the letter, ‘let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe’ (cf. 12:22–24; 13:15–16). He is speaking, of course, of their worship of the new covenant under the great high priest Jesus, and all the people of God assembling themselves together.

The 12th chapter closes with the strong statement, ‘for our God is a consuming fire’. Taken from Deuteronomy 4:24—‘the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God’, which is aimed against idolatry; the people are here warned from retreating from the gospel of Christ. Sometimes the fire utterly destroys, but here also it can mean that what is shakeable will be shaken, and what is unshakeable will remain; the perishable will burn up, but the genuine will not be perishable and will remain. In this sense it may also be that ‘God is love’ equals, ‘God is a consuming fire’.

CHAPTER 13

The argument of the first 12 chapters proceed without wavering from beginning to end so the conclusion binds the hearers into a people revived in the truth, liberated from their old culture, and grounded in the great work of Christ in the Cross—a people redeemed, sanctified and perfected, comprehending true worship. Now we come out into a somewhat different atmosphere, and the writer assumes that they need to be reminded of what they must have heard, time and again, in regard to true behaviour. Verses 1–6 are filled with injunctions and exhortations. ‘Let brotherly love [*philadelphia*] continue’, means they know what brotherly love is, and that it has been in their midst. We have seen that love is little mentioned in the Epistle (cf. 10:24). It is a strong term in the New Testament. John Calvin once said, regarding this verse, ‘We can only be Christians if we are brethren’. Of course the term implies Father and Family. John’s First Letter speaks much of it. Love continually proceeding, the life of the church will be healthy. It may be noted here that *agape*—God’s love—is no less and no more than *philos*, often called affection. Some see a distinction between the two in John 21:15–17, but this can scarcely be proved.

When **verse 2** enjoins us to be eager to entertain strangers (*philoxenia*; ‘love of strangers’), we need to remember that it is not simply a law of social hospitality. Almost certainly it goes back to the age-old principle in Israel of looking after the strangers or sojourners in the loneliness they knew. Almost certainly this refers to Christians who are driven by persecution and have no ‘safe-house’ in which to be strengthened, loved and encouraged. ‘Entertaining angels unawares’, may be a known proverb, may refer back to the times when Abraham and Sarah gave hospitality

to their heaven visitors, and may have reference to the mystery of angels being servants to the heirs of salvation.

Verse 3 speaks of ‘visiting those in prison’ (cf. Matt. 25:36, ‘I was in prison and you came to me’). This scarcely means ‘I was in prison for a crime’, though it may well include that. The prisoners are generally those early Christian who were being punished and persecuted for their faith. Probably the story of Matthew 25:31ff. is about Christ’s intimate brethren, Christian folk. Even so, the principle of Galatians 6:9–10 are also indicated. ‘Ill-treated’, would generally refer to Christians, though not exclusively.

Verses 4 to 6, bring us to the theme of moral purity. ‘Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous’, covers the whole sweep of what we today called ‘marriage and fidelity’. Paul says that demons denied marriage to their devotees. The distinctions between marital purity and permissiveness were no less then than now—virtually non-existent. The writers of the New Testament letters found it necessary to keep hammering away on the subject because of the pagan views of sexual practice (cf. I Cor. 5:10–11; Eph. 4:19; 5:3–5; I Thess. 4:3–6). Covetousness is often a passion for security, arising from fear of death, being egged on by greed. Its defeat is trust in God’s unfailing providence (see Ps. 118:6). The little song of Psalm 118:6 is of great encouragement to the believer. It is nothing to be worked up, or up to—this comfort of God being with his children. Angels are there to help, and also the leaders whom God uses to bring such assurance of his presence.

Verses 7–17, bring up the understanding and exposition of leadership. Other ideas are linked with the matter of leadership, but first of all the writer says, ‘Remember your leaders’. We ask why these Christians need such leadership as the writer of the Epistle is given. Somewhere along the line they must have missed

quietly and trustingly obeying the leadership. Perhaps we can understand some lack of confidence, since leaders are often not without fault. They are not perfect, but here the readers are reminded that these leaders have spoken to them the word of God. What else to speak of? What more powerful action to affect the listeners? The proof of their godliness, as well as their need of grace, was lying in their fruitful life. This ‘outcome’ may even have been their death, so that they are reminded of leaders of the past, as a group. Yet present obedience to them (v. 17) is demanded of the readers. Without doubt these leaders were worthy to be imitated, as Paul would claim for himself in I Corinthians 11:1, ‘Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ’. The word ‘leader’ is linked with the Greek verb *hegeomai*, from which we get our English word ‘hegemony’, and it relates to control over a group of people, or an area of human living—and so on. These leaders are not called elders, though they probably were. I Thessalonians 5:12 gives us more than a hint,

‘But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work’.

Again, here, they are not called elders, nor does it matter. Plenty of teaching is given to those called ‘elders’ (presbyters), ‘bishops’ and ‘overseers’, as these seem to be synonyms.

It may seem strange that in verse 8 the writer suddenly—and seemingly unrelated to all gone before in this chapter—says, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever’. We remember he is speaking to Hebrew Christians who have been confronted in a most powerful way with the reviving teaching they needed. The Jesus they knew in the apostolic accounts, in the exhortations of their original leaders, is still the same Jesus. As ever he was, he still is and will be ‘unto eternity’. So they can live on this reality as did the man of Psalm 118:6. They can hear of

him, and see him in action in his leaders. So then they have this reality and living example always before them conveyed through their elders, so they must not swerve aside from the elders and what they teach. To make foods the source of their life instead of the grace of which they have heard wonderfully and have now read or heard afresh powerfully, is to reject the heart of the truth and the new life. Undoubtedly, the faithful of God consume spiritual food for their faith life, but in this case it is not just the communion table bread and wine, but the Cross. None outside Christ is permitted to minister at, and eat of, this altar. It is, indeed, the only authentic and truly powerful altar, and it is for Christians alone. Verse 11 takes up the fact the victim animals brought into the sanctuary by the priest are not burned in the sanctuary, whether it be ‘the Holy Place’ or ‘the Holy of Holies’ (‘Most Holy Place’). Jesus was not sacrificed on the Jewish altar but ‘outside a city wall’. Admittedly it is difficult to fit all these ideas together but what emerges is, (i) he was not an accepted sacrifice in the Jewish holy sanctuary, (ii) animals were killed inside the wall, that is, the red heifer which was said to be a kind of sin-offering, to sins being laid on the scapegoat outside the wall, and (iii) however the figure or parallel is seen, the primary fact is that the blood of Christ (shed outside the city wall when he was rejected as a true sacrifice) was spilled in order to sanctify his elect, his true people. Whilst there was seeming ignominy in this kind of killing, yet it achieved effective sanctification for ‘the Israel of God’, something the yearly rituals could not accomplish. ‘Therefore’, urges the writer, ‘let us go forth to him outside the camp [Mt Zion’s sanctuary] and bear the abuse he endured’.

Verses 14 to 16 remind the readers, powerfully, that that city—Jerusalem—is no longer the city of the Hebrew Christians or all Christians. Like all the other people of chapter 11, the saints seek the city that is to come, the one substantial and built by God, the True City, the Holy City. Through Christ, then (cf. I Pet. 2:4–5),

they are to offer up continually ‘a sacrifice of praise to God’, that which is the overflow from the heart, through the lips of true worship. The blood shed has done away with the shedding of further blood. These ‘lips that acknowledge his name’, are used for such bloodless sacrifices. What, in practice, are the sacrifices? ‘To do good and to share what you have’. Such sacrifices are the ones God desires, and such actions happened from the hours of Pentecost onwards, down through all the action of the church.

Now, in **verse 17** the writer comes back to the matter of the leaders. Can there be a leaderless church? Do leaders take such ministries on themselves? (See I Tim. 3:1–13; 5:1–7, 17–20; Titus 1:5–9; I Pet. 5:1–5; Acts 20:28–31.) Is it not true that all leaders should understand ‘the mystery of godliness’? The writer says, ‘Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you’.

Verses 1–19, come with the apostolic request to be prayed for. When we say ‘apostolic’, we do not mean the writer is an apostle in the primary sense, but all leaders—and others—coveted the prayers of their folk. The calm claim ‘we have a clear conscience’ comes with force after the teaching the author has given on conscience. ‘Desiring to act honourably’, would be the outcome of a good conscience. ‘I urge you the more earnestly to do this’, is his word since he wishes to be *restored* to them the sooner. ‘Restored’ must mean he has been away from them. It also tells us that he was an honourable and respected, and we trust, loved leader.

The **doxology of verses 20 and 21**, is filled with praise and good theology, practical to the last. Themes such as ‘the God of peace’, ‘the Lord Jesus’, ‘the blood of the eternal covenant’, ‘the will of God’, ‘the will working in them’, and ‘prayer through Jesus Christ’—the Great Intercessor—all join here in this magnificent praise and prayer. The adding of ‘the great shepherd of the sheep’, links it with other Epistles. Doxologies always seem to

flow with a passion not often as well expressed in straight prose. ‘To whom be glory for ever and ever’, awakens at the last the great principle of glory with which the Epistle began.

Verses 22 to 25, bring the magnificent Epistle to an end. Firstly there is a gentle ‘Bear with me brethren with my word of exhortation’, mention of a Timothy who is ‘our brother’, a greeting to ‘all your leaders and all the saints’, which shows there was no ‘priest and lay’ division. Another statement which cannot be pinned down, ‘Those who come from Italy send you greetings’. The steady apostolic blessing, ‘Grace be with all of you. Amen’.

So a great Epistle, to be read, pondered, studied, discussed and kept in the heart, is now finished. We doubt that all the sluggish brethren can be any longer sluggards. We, with them, will not be continually on the alert, having discovered—or rediscovered—the treasures of the truth, that is, of the Triune God.