

# Hebrews

F. B. Hole.

## Table of Contents

|                   |    |
|-------------------|----|
| Introduction..... | 1  |
| Hebrews 1.....    | 2  |
| Hebrews 2.....    | 5  |
| Hebrews 3.....    | 9  |
| Hebrews 4.....    | 12 |
| Hebrews 5.....    | 15 |
| Hebrews 6.....    | 17 |
| Hebrews 7.....    | 21 |
| Hebrews 8.....    | 24 |
| Hebrews 9.....    | 27 |
| Hebrews 10.....   | 31 |
| Hebrews 11.....   | 37 |
| Hebrews 12.....   | 41 |
| Hebrews 13.....   | 45 |

## Introduction

A FEW PRELIMINARY words may be useful, before we consider the chapter in its details.

Although in our Bibles the title of this wonderful treatise always appears as, "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews," yet the author of it was led by the inspiring Spirit to suppress both his own name and the name of those to whom he wrote it. Almost every line of it however bears witness that it was addressed to Hebrew believers, and there are in it a number of small allusions which make it pretty certain that it was written by Paul. If so, we have in it that epistle to Jewish believers which Peter, in his second epistle, mentions as having been written by "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Pet. 3: 15).

As we go through it we shall see that the occasion of it was that a certain weariness had come over these saints, their hands were drooping and their knees feeble in the Christian race, and these disquieting symptoms raised fears lest this backsliding tendency might mean some of them falling into open apostasy.

We shall also see that the main burden of it is the immeasurable superiority of Christianity to Judaism, although the latter appealed to sight and the former to faith only. Incidentally also it called upon them to cut their last links with the worn out Jewish system, to which they had such a tendency to cling, as the Acts of the Apostles shows us. It must have been written only a few years before the imposing ritual of Judaism ceased in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The importance of this epistle for the present hour cannot be exaggerated. Multitudes of believers today, though Gentiles and hence in no way connected with Judaism, are yet entangled in perverted forms of Christianity, which consist very largely in forms and ceremonies and ritual, which in their turn are largely an imitation of that Jewish ritual, once ordained of God to fill up the time until Christ came.

It may be that most of our readers are, through God's mercy, free of these systems today, yet most of us have had something to do with them, and almost insensibly the influence of them clings to us.

If our faith is stirred up as we read it; if our spiritual eyes get a fresh sight of the immeasurable glories of Christ, and of the reality of all those spiritual verities which are established in Him, we shall find ourselves thoroughly braced up to "run with patience the race that is set before us."

## Hebrews 1

THE EPISTLE OPENS in the most majestic manner. Hebrews is the only book in the Bible which begins with the word, GOD. We are at once brought face to face with the tremendous fact that God, who had spoken to the fathers of Israel by prophets in former days, had now spoken in divine fulness and with finality in His Son. Just notice in passing that this first verse witnesses that the epistle is to the Hebrews, for the expression, "the fathers," would have no meaning for a Gentile.

God being the *living* God, it is only to be expected that He would *speak*. Before sin came in He spoke freely to Adam, and face to face; afterwards He only addressed Himself to chosen men, who became thereby His mouthpieces. The prophets had to speak just what He gave them, and often they uttered words, the full meaning of which was hidden from them, as we are told in 1 Peter 1: 10-12. When the Lord Jesus came to accomplish redemption God told out all His mind. He spoke not merely *by* Him as His mouthpiece, but *in* Him. The distinction, is not made in our Authorized version, but it should be, for the preposition in verse 2 is not "by" but "in." It is an important distinction, for it at once preserves the unique character of our Lord. When the Son spoke it was God speaking, for the simple reason that the Son was God.

Having mentioned the Son, the Holy Spirit proceeds to unfold His glory, not only that glory which is His essentially as God and Creator, but also that which is His by reason of His redemption work. This leads to a long but very necessary digression, which lasts until the end of the chapter; so much so that all these verses might be placed within brackets. We should then read straight from the word "Son" to the beginning of chapter 2 and find the sense complete. "God . . . hath . . . spoken unto us in His Son . . . therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed." Indeed it is not until we arrive at verse 3 of chapter 2 that we discover what is the main drift and theme of this Divine speaking. It was "*so great salvation* which first began to be *spoken by the Lord*." When God formulated His demands upon men it was sufficient that angels should serve Him, and that a man such as Moses should be His mouthpiece. Now that His great salvation' is the theme the Son Himself comes forth and speaks.

However the immediate theme before us in chapter 1 is the unique glory of the Son. Immediately He is mentioned our thoughts are swept forward to the moment when His glory shall be fully manifested, and then back to the moment when first it appeared, as far as all created beings are concerned. On the one hand He is the Heir not merely to David's throne but of "all things," and this expression covers things in the heavens and not only things on earth. On the other hand when the worlds were made He was the Maker of them. God created indeed, as we are told in Genesis 1: 1, but when the Persons are distinguished, as in this Scripture, creation is attributed not to the Father but to the Son. The Son — whom we know as our blessed Lord Jesus — was the mighty Actor in those creatorial scenes of inconceivable splendour.

Verse 3 brings before us three great things concerning Him. First, we have *what He is*, as the outshining of the glory of God and the exact expression of all that God is. Secondly, we are told *what He has done*. By Himself He has done the work which purges sins away. How He did it we are not told

for the moment, but we know it was by the death of the cross. Thirdly, *where He is* comes before us. He has taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens; that is, He sits in the place of supreme power, from whence everything shall in due season be administrated. How wonderfully these three things go together! The efficacy of the work that He did was dependent upon the fact of who and what He was; whilst the proof and demonstration of the efficacy of His work is found in where He is, in the fact that He is seated in the place of supreme power. If any believer in Jesus is still plagued with doubts and misgivings as to whether his sins are really and effectively purged away, let him look by faith to that seat on high where Jesus sits, and doubt no more!

In verse 3 we also find the wonderful fact that the Son is the Upholder of all things. The previous verse has set Him before us as the Creator of all, and as the One who shall inherit all things, now we discover that all things are upheld and hang together by the word of His power. We may talk sometimes about the laws of the universe. We may observe the working of the law of gravitation, though the real why and wherefore of it is unknown to us. We *may* even, before we are much older, have to listen to fickle "science" altering or overturning all that she had previously asserted as to these laws. Well, so be it! We know that THE LAW of the universe is the word of His power, and this is all that really matters. Any laws which we may observe, or think we observe, are very secondary, and should the leaders of scientific speculation suddenly reverse their pronouncements we shall not turn a hair.

Let us put this together then in brief fashion. The Son is the Creator, the Upholder and the Heir of all things. He is moreover the exact Expression of all that God is, being God Himself, and being that exact Expression He has come forth to be the Divine Spokesman on the one hand, and the Redeemer on the other. Had He spoken only we should all have been terrified; but as He has made purification for sins as well as speaking, we can receive with joy the revelation which He has made.

In verse 4 He is contrasted with angels, and this contrast is not merely mentioned and then dismissed; the theme is elaborated at considerable length, and continues to the end of the chapter. It is very definitely CONTRAST. In saying this we are pointing out one of the characteristic features of this epistle. As we proceed we shall find continued references to the old order of things, established when the law was given by Moses. These old and material things bore a certain resemblance to the new and spiritual things established and introduced by the Lord Jesus, and hence they were designed to act as patterns or types. Yet when these types are put alongside the realities which they typified an immense contrast is seen. As the heavens are high above the earth so the antitype exceeds the type. In our epistle the *resemblance* is taken for granted, and it is the *contrast* which is stressed.

It may be asked however, Why is the contrast with *angels* so elaborated and even carried on into the next chapter? What is the point of it? Well every Jew knew that angels played a very large part in connection with the giving of the law by Moses, though but little is said of them in Exodus. The words of Stephen, recorded in Acts. 7: 53 show this, as also the second verse of our second chapter. This display of angelic might gave a very powerful sanction to Moses and the law he brought them, in the minds of the people. And now there appears amongst men the Divine Spokesman, yet to them He is but Jesus of Nazareth, a humble and despised Man. There is no beauty about Him that they should desire Him or His words nor is there any display of angels to accredit Him. It became therefore of the utmost importance to insist on the true glory of His person as being immeasurably above all angels. Had He been visibly attended by ten thousand times ten thousand, it would have added nothing to Him!

Two things are said in verse 4. First, He has a more excellent name than angels *by inheritance*; second, He has been *made* better than they. The words, "Being made," may also be translated, "Having

become," or, "Taking a place." The first refers to His superiority by reason of His Godhead glory; the second to the place He now occupies in Manhood, as the Accomplisher of redemption. And notice that His superiority is equally pronounced in both, as evidenced by these little words in the sentence, "SO . . . AS." Read the verse again for yourself, and see.

These facts, as stated in verse 4, are supported and proved by a remarkable series of quotations from the Old Testament, extending from verse 5 to the end of the chapter. Let us just notice how the argument runs.

Verses 5 and 6 contain three quotations giving the pronouncements of God when introducing the Lord Jesus to men. They very definitely support what is said in verse 4, especially the statement as to His being better than angels by *inheritance*.

In verse 7 we have a quotation which plainly states the nature of angels and the reason why they exist. They are spirits in their nature and they exist as ministers to serve the Divine will. This is in contrast to what goes before and also to that which follows.

In verses 8 to 12 we get two quotations giving us utterances of God to Christ, in both of which He is addressed as Man and yet He is saluted as God and as the Creator.

In verse 13 comes the quotation giving the decree which has exalted Him to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and this, we are assured, is something which never was said to angels. They are but spirits who are glad to serve, according to the Divine will, such humble creatures as those who once were fallen sinners, but who shall be heirs of salvation. All this, and particularly verses 9 and 13, show us that He is better than angels, inasmuch as He has *taken a place* which is so much higher than theirs.

There are seven quotations in all from the Old Testament in these verses: one in regard to angels and six in regard to Christ. These latter come from Ps. 2: 7, 2 Samuel 7: 14; Ps. 97: 7; Ps. 45: 6, 7; Ps. 102: 25-27; Ps. 110: 1., and each deserves to be separately studied.

The first is deeply interesting for it shows that even as a Man born in time He is the Son of God. These words from Psalm 2 anticipate the virgin birth, and their fulfilment is announced in Luke 1: 35. We may say they give us God's utterance to Christ at His incarnation.

The second is remarkable as showing how the Holy Ghost always has Christ in view. Reading Samuel we might think that the words only referred to Solomon. *Immediately*, Solomon was in view, as the words following those quoted show; but *ultimately*, Christ was in view.

The third gives us the decree concerning Christ at the moment of His reintroduction into the world in power and glory; not His first coming, but His second. We read the Psalm and the "Him" is clearly Jehovah. We read Hebrews and the "Him" is clearly Christ. What does that teach us? Notice also that the term "gods" may be used of any who represent God, whether angels as here, or men as in Psalm 82: 6, — the passage which the Lord Jesus quoted in John 10: 34.

The fourth is what is said to the Son by God at the opening of the Millennial kingdom. He is a Man, for God is His God, yet He is addressed as God. As Man He has His fellows, or companions, yet He possesses a gladness which is above them — and how glad we are that He does!

The fifth gives us the divine word addressed to Him in the moments of His deepest humiliation and sorrow — we might almost say, in the garden of Gethsemane. He who is being cut off in the midst of His days is declared to be the mighty Creator, who shall ultimately consume or change all in creation which needs changing, and yet Himself remain eternally the same.

The sixth turns our thoughts to Christ as the risen One and gives us God's utterance to Him as He ascended into the heavens. Thus we are conducted to the place where Christ is; and we are prepared to see Him there and to learn the meaning of His session in glory when we come to Hebrews 2.

All this wonderful unfolding of the excellence of our blessed Saviour is in order that we may be impressed with the greatness of the One in whom God has spoken to us. He is, as Hebrews 3: 1 puts it, "the *Apostle* . . . of our profession." An apostle is a "sent one," one who comes forth from God to us, bringing the divine message. Our Lord Jesus has thus come forth, bringing us the complete divine revelation; only He is Himself God. This fact at once lifts all that He has said to us on to a plane far above all that went before. The prophets of old were fully inspired of God, and consequently all that they said was reliable and comes to pass, but they could never convey to us the revelation which we have in Christ.

Into the marvellous light of that revelation the Hebrews had been brought. And so have we, thanks be to God!

## Hebrews 2

SEEING THAT GOD has addressed Himself to us in Christ, who is far superior, not only to Moses but also to those angels through whose hands Moses received the law, we ought to give more abundant heed to all that has been said. With this the second chapter opens, and it is impossible to evade the solemn force of it. God's word spoken by angels was by no means to be trifled with, as Israel discovered before they had gone very far on their wilderness journey; what then shall be said as to the word that has now reached us in and through the Son of God?

A better rendering of the first verse is perhaps, "lest at any time we should slip away." To let slip the things heard would mean forgetfulness, but to slip away oneself from them might even mean apostasy. So also in verse 3 the word "neglect" carries the thought of not caring for God's great salvation when they were inside the Christian company as having professed faith, and not merely neglecting the Gospel when it was preached to them. In these words then we have the first of the solemn warnings against apostasy that we find repeated through the epistle; but this being so, the common use of these words in connection with the Gospel is fully justified. If the professor of Christianity who neglects the great salvation will by no means escape, even less will they escape who pay no attention to it when they hear it.

However the point in verses 2 and 3 is that it is more serious to trifle with God's salvation than to transgress His law, for there is no greater sin than that of despising the grace of God. Of old Moses had been the sent one, and had been commissioned to announce salvation out of Egypt to their fathers, and then through Moses that salvation had duly been carried out. The greatness of our salvation may be seen in the fact that He who has announced it is the Lord, whose glory has been set before us in Hebrews 1, and from the fact that the apostles, who confirmed His message after His exaltation into the heavens, were themselves accredited by ample displays of divine power in the energy of the Holy Spirit who had been given to them. Further on we shall find that not only did the Lord Jesus act as the Apostle in announcing the great salvation, but that all is carried out through Him as Surety, Mediator and Sacrifice.

In our chapter we shall find that it is His priesthood that is emphasized. Presently a new order of things is to be established, spoken of in verse 5 as "the world to come." Every Jew expected that new order to be introduced by the advent of the Messiah. Now in that world to come angels will not be the

supreme authority, though they will have certain services to render in it, as other scriptures show. It is in its entirety subject to Christ as the Son of Man, as the eighth Psalm had predicted, and when the Lord takes up His great authority "He shall be a Priest upon His throne" (Zech. 6: 13).

The quotation from the Psalm 8 covers not only verse 7 but also the first sentence of verse 8. In the rest of verse 8 and in verse 9 we have an inspired explanation of how the Psalm applies at the present moment. The quotation begins at the point where David, having surveyed the wonders of the universe, asks what man is worth. He used a Hebrew word which has the sense of "frail man" or "mortal man." Well, what is he worth? Evidently he is worth nothing. What then shall be said of the Son of Man? Ah! now we have a very different story. Even in the psalm David changed the word for man, and wrote "the Son of Adam"; and this we know our Lord was, as seen in Luke 3: 38. He is worth everything. Though once made a little lower than the angels He is to be crowned with splendour and be set in absolute dominion, with all things under His feet.

It is very noticeable that the quotation stops just at the point where, in the psalm, words are added which seem to confine the "all things" set under His feet to all things on earth and in the sea. The Old Testament view of things did not for the moment go beyond that. In our chapter however the moment we turn from the quotation to the explanation a far larger range of things comes before us. We are assured that the little word "all" is to be given its full value, without the least shadow of qualification. Search through the universe and there is to be found nothing which is not put under Him. In that world to come man, in the person of the Son of Man, is to be absolutely supreme.

This is a most wonderful and glorious fact, and it illustrates for us how God always sees the end from the beginning, and is never defeated nor turned aside from His purpose in anything to which He sets His hand. God never made angels to rule: He made them to serve. The only creature, of which we have any knowledge, that was made to rule was man. Only of man was it said, "Let us make . . . and let them have *dominion*; . . . So God created *man*" (Gen. 1: 26, 27). Man fell: he ceased to rule the lower creation in any proper sense; he ceased indeed to properly rule himself. What then? Has God's purpose failed? Not only has it not failed but, when the SON OF MAN comes forth in His glory, the Divine purpose will be seen established with an extended fulness and glory undreamed of when Adam was created, by any save God Himself. Instead of failing God has triumphed most gloriously.

Some may say to themselves — That may be, but there are no very obvious signs of it in the world at the present moment. That is so. We do not yet see all things put under Christ. Even those who profess to be His followers show very little sign of being really subject to Him. The fact is that we are living in a time during which there is very little to see except we possess that kind of telescopic sight that faith gives.

Faith it is that sees. This we shall find elaborated when we come to Hebrews 11, especially verses 8 to 22, and verse 27. These great men of old penetrated by faith into the unseen world, yet they never saw the sight that shines before us — if we really possess faith's keen vision. We see the once humbled Jesus crowned with glory and honour in the highest heaven. Did the Hebrews possess faith's telescopic powers of sight, penetrating to the glory-crowned Jesus, and to the things which are above the sun? *Do we?* If we do we shall not be neglecting the great salvation; we shall not be letting go nor slipping into apostasy. Looking unto Jesus we shall be running the Christian race with energy divinely given.

But what means this statement in Psalm 8, that the Son of Man is made "a little lower than the angels"? Have we not read in Hebrews 1 that He is "made so much better than the angels"? There is an apparent contradiction here!

These passages where verbal contradictions appear upon the surface do us a good service if they

cause us to pause, *and think*. Viewing them in their context and meditating upon them, we discover harmonies and teaching which otherwise we had passed over. See how it is in the case before us. In chapter 1 the Deity of our Lord is the great point, connected with His Apostleship. Yet He has become a Man, so that God is His God. Seeing however that it is GOD who has become Man, He is of necessity "made so much better than the angels."

In chapter 2 the emphasis lies upon the Manhood of the Lord Jesus. He became a Man with a view to the suffering of death. Man was so created — spirit, soul and body — that he could die, by the spiritual part of him being separated from the body. In this respect man was made a little lower than the angels. Now the Son of God has become the Son of Man in so real a sense that as a Man He has taken up the death penalty and died for men. From this standpoint He has been made a little lower than the angels, for angels never die.

In these wonderful verses one expression is repeated six times: thrice in verse 8, once in verse 9 and twice in verse 10. It is the word for all or all things, and only at the end of verse 9 is it otherwise translated. The Lord Jesus has tasted death for "all" and not merely for the Jew. At the present moment "all" is made subject to Him, and in the age to come we shall see it to be so.

In verse 10 we find a second object that was in view in the sufferings and death of Christ. Not only did He accomplish propitiation for all, but He thereby qualified Himself — if we may so put it — for the position He was to take up according to the purpose of God. God has instituted a new pilgrimage. Of old He used Moses and Joshua to bring a nation from Egypt to Canaan. Now He has set His hand to the mighty task of bringing many sons, gathered out from all the nations, to glory. He will not fail in this glorious enterprise for, firstly, He who has initiated it has all things at His disposal, and secondly, the One to whom it is entrusted as Leader is the risen Christ. He went through all possible sufferings here in order that He might have full experimental knowledge of all the sorrows under which lay those who are now the sons on the way to glory.

Is it not a wonderful thing that the Lord Jesus should have condescended to become the Leader of our salvation? Wonderful as it is, it is a fact. Having died and risen again, He has placed Himself at the head of the great redeemed family that is being gathered out of the nations and led to glory. They are the sanctified ones of whom verse 11 speaks — that is, those set apart for God — but He is the Sanctifier. They are set apart for God by virtue of their connection with Him.

Our connection with Him is of a very close and intimate order, so much so that it can be said of Sanctifier and sanctified that they are "all of one." Of one what? — we may ask. Well, we are not told. But inasmuch as it goes on to say, "*for this cause* He is not ashamed to call them brethren," it would seem that the thought must be that He and they are of one lineage, of one life and nature. The day is now arrived in which we know, according to the Lord's own words in John 14: 20, that He is in the Father, that *we are in Him*, and He in us; as also the day in which, according to John 17: 19, He has set Himself apart in heaven in order that we may be set apart through the truth.

Three Old Testament Scriptures are quoted in verses 12 and 13 in order to show how thoroughly we are identified with Him and He with us, and also that this immense privilege was foreseen, though not realized, in the days before His advent. The first of the three is especially remarkable. It comes from the latter part of Psalm 22, just at that point where the prophecy passes from His death to His resurrection, and the word "congregation" is translated into "church." The church (that is, the *ecclesia*, the *called out ones*) is that to which we all belong, and here it is quite definitely identified with the "many sons" and the "sanctified" of the earlier verses.

But if we were in this marvellous way to be identified with Him, it was necessary first that He

should in His grace identify Himself with us in our need, and this He did in everything, apart from sin. He did not come to save angels but men. Consequently He did not take on Him the nature of angels but of men; and in particular of the seed of Abraham, for, as we know, our Lord sprang out of Judah. The word used here means, "to take hold of," and it has been stated that, "it is constantly used for 'taking up a person to help him,' though in other senses as well." Amazing grace this, when we see that it involved His taking a part in flesh and blood, which is the common lot of mankind; and that this He took in order that He might die.

Verse 14 is as clear on this as verse 9 had been before. Only death could meet the tragic situation in which we were found. Death is possible for man since he is a partaker of flesh and blood. His blood may be shed, his flesh go to corruption, his spirit depart to God who gave it — and all this is impossible to angels. Death is actually passed as the Divine sentence upon all men because of sin, and Satan who at the outset manoeuvred man into disobedience, now wields the power of death in the consciences of men, making them afraid and thereby holding them in bondage. What could destroy (that is, annul or bring to nothing, make of no effect) the devil and the power he wields? One thing only. Nothing but DEATH could annul *death*. And it must be the death of a MAN to annul death for *men*. All this was fulfilled. The Captain of our salvation, by taking part in flesh and blood, became a true Man, and for us He died.

Flesh and blood is a term which describes the state and condition of manhood, without reference to the question of sin. When Adam came forth fresh from God's creating hands he was a partaker of flesh and blood, but his humanity was *innocent*. He fell, and he and his posterity remained partakers of flesh and blood, but theirs is a *fallen* humanity. Our blessed Lord Jesus took part in flesh and blood and His humanity is the very essence of *holiness*.

Yet in all things it befitted Him to be made like to those whose cause He had taken up, as verse 17 declares. A very strong statement this, and the reality that it presents will be a theme of wonder and worship to us throughout eternity. Just think of how it might have pleased Him to stoop and rescue His sinful and degraded creatures without being made like them at all. That however would not have fitted His love, even if it could have been done in conformity with His righteousness. Having taken part in flesh and blood He would be made like them *in all things*. He would be tempted and suffer, as verse 18 says, and thus enter into all their experiences save those that involved sin; and this in view of becoming the High Priest of His people.

All through the latter part of this chapter the Lord is presented in the same light. Whether as Captain of our salvation, or Sanctifier, or High Priest, He is seen as standing on our behalf before God, and not as standing on God's behalf before us; as He is when His Apostleship is in question. As High Priest He acts in things relating to God, as also He is able to succour us in our temptations. Towards us He is ever merciful, while always maintaining the purposes and glory of God with the utmost faithfulness. But while this is so His personal glory and pre-eminence is fully established. He is not ashamed to call us brethren, but nowhere are we encouraged to turn round and use that same term towards Him, as sometimes is done.

Before we leave the chapter notice how everything is cast in a mould suited to Jewish minds. Each point is supported by quotations from the Old Testament, showing how that which is now established in Christ had been foreseen and indicated. This might mean nothing to a Gentile, but it would be very significant to a Jew. Moreover the truth is stated in terms which would instantly remind them of the way in which their ancient religion had foreshadowed these good things to come. The end of verse 17 is an illustration of what we mean, where the work of the Lord Jesus is spoken of as making

"reconciliation" (or "propitiation," as it really is) "for the sins of the people." Why put it thus? Why not say, "for our sins," or, "for the sins of men"? Because then the truth would not have been nearly so striking to Jewish minds. As it stands it would at once turn their thoughts to the well known work of Aaron, and their subsequent high priests, on the great day of atonement; of which we read in Leviticus 16, and which was a striking type of the work of Christ.

No new Testament book throws greater light on the Old Testament than Hebrews; and none shows more clearly how needful it is for us to read and understand the Old Testament. If we read Hebrews apart from this it is very easy to run away with mistaken notions.

## Hebrews 3

THE FIRST CHAPTER has presented to us the Lord Jesus as the Apostle, that is, as the Sent One, who came forth from God to us, bringing us the Divine revelation. The second set Him before us as the High Priest, who has gone in from us to God, representing us and maintaining our cause in His presence. Now we are bidden to consider Him very thoroughly in both these characters. We are to set our minds to it as those who aim at discovering all that is involved.

These Hebrews had taken up a new profession, or, we had better say, they had entered upon the confession of the name of Jesus, who had been rejected by their nation. The national attitude towards Him was summed up in these words, "We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence He is" (John 9: 29). The more these converted Hebrews considered JESUS and studied Him the more certainly would they know from whence He was: they would perceive that truly "He was come from God, and went to God" (John 13: 3).

The Jews made their boast in Moses and in Aaron. God had indeed spoken to the one and made him His spokesman, and He had established the other in the priestly office; nevertheless both were dead. The Christian, and the Christian alone, has an Apostle and High Priest who lives, to be known and contemplated and loved: One who is God and yet Man endowed with all the attributes and glory enumerated in Hebrews 1 and Hebrews 2.

He is worthy of our eternal study. Let us consider Him well, for as we do so we shall the more clearly see how rich is the place we have as set in relation to Him, and how high is the calling in which we partake. Both these things are mentioned in the first verse. Do not pass them over lightly. They are worthy of serious attention.

We are addressed as "holy brethren." This is tremendously significant. It does not merely mean that all Christians are brethren and all set apart for God. The expression must be understood in relation to its context, that is, in relation to what has gone before, and particularly to verses 10 and 11 of Hebrews 2. In the latter of these two verses we have "sanctifieth" and "sanctified," and in our verse "holy." These are all different forms of the same word. We are holy inasmuch as we have come into the wonderful sanctification of being "all of one" with the great Captain of our salvation. For the same reason are we "brethren," since He is not ashamed to call us that. In addressing us as "holy brethren" the Spirit of God is reminding us of the place of extraordinary nearness and honour in which we are set.

As holy brethren we partake in the heavenly calling. We all know how God called Israel out of Egypt and into the land which He had purposed for them. Theirs was an earthly calling, though by no means to be despised. We are not called to any particular place on the earth, but to a place in the heavens.

In the gospels we see how the Lord was preparing the minds of His disciples for this immense

change. At one point in the midst of His ministry He bade them not rejoice so much in the possession of miraculous powers: "but rather rejoice," He said, "because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10: 20). Our names are inscribed in the records of the cities to which we belong, and in these words the Lord indicated that they were entering upon a heavenly citizenship. Later, in His farewell discourse, He spoke to them of His Father's true house which is in the heavens — that house of which the earthly temple was only the pattern and shadow — and He said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14: 2). Our place is there. Our calling is heavenly in its character and it has heaven as its end.

If these early Hebrew converts really took in these mighty facts by faith, they would without doubt have realized how greatly they had been elevated. It was truly no mean thing to have been the people of Abraham and Moses, called to a land flowing with milk and honey; but all that shrinks into comparative insignificance besides such things as being among the "many sons" who are being brought to glory, owned as "holy brethren" by the Lord Jesus, and thus called to heaven. But again, if so great an elevation for them how much greater an elevation for us, who with neither part nor lot in Israel's privileges were just sinners of the Gentiles? Only let us take time to ponder the matter and we shall find abundant cause to bend our hearts in worship of Him from whose heart of love such designs have proceeded.

Holiness and heavenliness characterize our calling, but the great thing for us is that we turn the eyes of our mind upon Jesus and earnestly consider Him. He is both Apostle and High Priest and in His greatness we may read the greatness of our calling. Verses 2 to 6 give us a glimpse of His greatness as contrasted with Moses. When, as recorded in Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, they said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath He not spoken also by us?" That is, they questioned his office as the prophet, or apostle, of that day. Then the Lord bore of him this remarkable testimony, "My servant Moses . . . is faithful in all Mine house." In this he was a type of Christ, who is faithful to Him that appointed Him in a supreme degree.

Yet even so we find that the relation here between type and Antitype is contrast rather than comparison. First, Moses was faithful in God's house as being part of the house himself; whereas Christ is the builder of the house. Second, the house in which Moses ministered was just Israel; he bore the burden of that nation but of that nation alone. The Lord Jesus acts on behalf of "all things." He that built all things is God, and the Lord Jesus is He by whom God built them. Third, in the small and restricted sphere of Israel Moses ministered as a faithful servant; but in the vast sphere of all things Christ ministers to the glory of God. Let us meditate on these points and we shall begin to have large thoughts of Christ.

Still we must not lose ourselves in the immensity of God's mighty universe, so we find that Christ has His own house over which He is Son, and we, the believers of today, are that house. We are His building, and He faithfully administers all that concerns us to God's glory, as Apostle and High Priest.

But, as it says here, we are His house, "IF . . ." That *if* mightily disturbs a good many people. It is intended to disturb, not the true believer, but the mere professor of the Christian religion. And here let us draw an important distinction. When in Scripture we are viewed as those born of God, or indeed viewed in any way as the subjects of God's work by His Spirit, then no *if* is introduced. How can there be? — for perfection marks all God's work. On the other hand when we are viewed from the human standpoint as those who have taken upon us the profession of Christianity, then an *if* may be introduced — indeed it must be.

Here are some who professed conversion years ago, yet today they are far from being Christian in their behaviour. What can we say as to them? Well, we aim at being charitable in our thoughts, so we

give them the benefit of the doubt and accept them as believers, until conclusively proved not to be so. Still *there is a doubt*: an if comes in. The Hebrews, to whom our epistle was written, were many as to numbers and very varied as to their spiritual state. Some of them made the writer of the epistle feel very anxious. The mass doubtless were really converted people of whom it could be said, "But beloved we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation" (Hebrews 6: 9). Still in writing to them all indiscriminately what could be said except that all Christian privileges were theirs, if indeed they were *real* in their profession.

Now it is just this that the second part of verse 6 says, for it is time that tests reality. There is no more certain guarantee of reality than *continuance*. The false sooner or later let things slip, and turn away; the true hold fast to the finish. But then if any do let slip and turn away the real root of the trouble with them is, in one word, *unbelief*.

You notice of course that a parenthesis stretches from the second word of verse 7 to the end of verse 11. To get the sense we read, "Wherefore take heed, brethren, etc." It is an evil heart of *unbelief*, and not of coldness or indifference or worldliness, that we are warned against; bad as these things are for the spiritual health of believers. It was just unbelief that was the root of all the troubles of Israel in their wilderness journey, as the last verse of our chapter says. So the Israel of the days of Moses was in this a beacon of warning to the Hebrews of the Apostolic age.

In the parenthesis we have a quotation from Psalm 95. It is introduced to our notice not as a saying of David but as a saying of the Holy Ghost, who inspired David in his utterance. In the last five verses of our chapter we have the Spirit's comment upon His earlier utterance in the Psalm, and here we have made abundantly plain what we have just stated above. Caleb and Joshua entered the land of promise because they believed; the rest did not because they did not believe. Their carcasses fell in the wilderness.

A further word of explanation is necessary at this point lest we become confused in our thoughts. The history of Israel may be looked at in two ways: firstly from a national standpoint, then from a standpoint more personal and individual. It has a typical value for us whichever way we look at it.

If we take the first standpoint then we consider them as nationally a redeemed people, and that nationally they entered into the land God purposed for them, with the exception of the two and a half tribes, who became typical of earthly-minded believers, who fail to enter into that which is God's purposed blessing for them. From that point of view we do not concern ourselves with the fact that the individuals who actually entered into the land were, with two exceptions, entirely different from those that came out of Egypt. From the second standpoint we *do* concern ourselves with the actual state of the people and of individuals amongst them. Only two of those who left Egypt so believed as to actually enter Canaan. This latter point of view is the one taken in Hebrews, as also in 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13, where we are told that they are also in all this types or ensamples to us. They warn us very clearly of the awful end that awaits those who, though by profession and to all outward appearance the people of God, are really without that true and vital faith which is the mainspring of all godliness.

We are warned therefore against an evil heart of unbelief which departs from the living God, and bidden to exhort one another daily for sin is very deceitful. If believers are to exhort one another daily it means that daily they seek one another's company. This verse then takes for granted that, like the Apostles who, "being let go . . . went to their own company" (Acts 4: 23), we also find our society and companionships amongst the people of God. It also infers that we watch for one another's souls and care for one another's spiritual prosperity. But is this true of us all? The general spiritual health of Christians would be much better if it were. We are far more influenced by the company that we keep

than many of us like to admit.

If however, any of us have professed the name of Christ without reality, then there is still in us the evil heart of unbelief, whatever we may have said with our lips; and the downward course that lies before us, except we be awakened to realities, is plainly set before us. The evil heart of unbelief is easily deceived by sin; and sin itself by reason of its deceitfulness hardens us, so that we become impervious to reproof. Then instead of holding "the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end," we let go and give up. But only the real, who do remain stedfast unto the end, are made partakers, or companions of Christ.

## Hebrews 4

NO WONDER THEN that chapter 4 opens with the words, "Let us therefore fear." This does not for one moment mean that we should always be filled with slavish dread, always doubting whether, enduring to the end, we shall be saved. It does mean that we should accept the warning which Israel's history affords, that we should remember the deceitfulness of sin and the weakness of our own hearts, and have a wholesome fear of in any way following in their steps.

The beginning of the second verse might more accurately be translated, "For indeed we have had glad tidings presented to us, even as they also." It is not "*the* gospel" as though both Israel of old and ourselves today had had exactly the same message presented to us. The glad tidings of deliverance from Egypt and entrance into Canaan was preached to them: the glad tidings of deliverance from sin and entrance into heavenly blessing has been preached to us. But in both cases the word preached does not profit apart from its being received in faith. The gospel is wonderful medicine for the broken heart, but it comes to us in a bottle bearing these directions — To be mixed with faith in those that hear. If those directions be not observed no cure is effected, and the rest of God is not reached.

The believer, and the believer only, enters into the rest of God. This is true whether we think of the typical rest of God in Canaan, which only Caleb and Joshua entered, or whether of the true rest of God which will be reached in a future day; and this is the simple meaning of the opening words of the third verse. The point is not that we, believers, are now entering into rest, are now in the enjoyment of peace with God — though that of course is delightfully true, and emphasized elsewhere in Scripture — but that it is believers, always and only believers, who enter into the rest of God; that rest which was purposed from the time of creation, but which has yet to be realized.

Verses 4 to 9 are occupied with an argument designed to prove that in no sense had the promise of God's rest been realized in connection with Israel's entrance into Canaan under Joshua. (The Jesus of verse 8 means Joshua, as the margin of a reference Bible shows). This argument was necessary for Hebrew readers since they might readily have taken it for granted that everything in connection with the rest had been realized in connection with their forefathers and that there was nothing more to come.

The argument might be summarized as follows: —

1. There is to be a rest, as indicated when God ceased from His works at creation.
2. Israel did not enter into the rest under Joshua, as proved by the fact that God had said, "If they shall enter into My rest" (which is a Hebrew idiom meaning, "They shall *not* enter"); and also by the fact that so long after Joshua as the time of David an offer was again made then; as to entering. Such an offer would not have been made subsequently, if all had been settled under Joshua.
3. But God's promise is not going to fail of its effect; consequently a rest for the people of God —

i.e., for believers — is still awaiting them.

The word used for "rest" in verse 9 means "a keeping of a sabbath." This connects the thought with what we have earlier in the chapter as to God's rest in creation, and also with what we have in verse 10. We shall only enter into the rest of God when our days of work and labour here are over for ever.

The early part of chapter 4 has established the fact that God's rest lies at the end of the believer's pathway. At the present time we are in the position of pilgrims on our way to that rest, just as formerly Israel were pilgrims on their way to the land of promise. When the rest is reached we shall cease our working, but on the way there we should "labour" or rather "be diligent" to enter in, taking warning by the fate which of old overtook so many unbelieving Israelites.

The latter part of the chapter sets before us three great sources of help and guidance which are available for us on our pilgrim way. They are first, the word of God; second, the priesthood of Christ; third, the throne of grace.

The features of the Word of God are brought before us in verses 12 and 13. It is quick (i.e., *living*) and *powerful*. Like all living things it possesses amazing energy. Further it has extraordinary powers of penetration, for it can pierce its way between things most intimately connected — whether in things spiritual or things material — in a way impossible to the sharpest two-edged sword. Again, it is a discerner of the deepest thoughts and motives of men.

It is a remarkable fact that the word translated discerner is the one from which we get our word *critic*. Multitudes there are today who pose as critics of the Word of God, and their foolish criticism only betrays the fact that far from being living they are in spiritual death; that far from being powerful they are very weak, and that their supposed powers of penetration are practically non-existent. They have no real understanding of the Word which they criticise, and the phantom "authors" and "editors" etc., which they conjure up are the result, not of their powers of *penetration* but of a very undiscerning and disorderly *imagination*.

It is not man's business to criticise the Word of God, but to let the Word criticise him. Nothing tests us more than criticism. If we are proud and self-sufficient we bitterly resent it. Only if humble and walking in the fear of the Lord do we welcome the penetrating criticisms of the Word, and they are of the greatest possible help to us in pursuing our pilgrim way. Thereby we are enabled to see ourselves and scrutinize our own motives, and thus avoid a thousand snares.

The Word of God reaches us in the Holy Scriptures. Should someone ask us why we accept the Bible as the Word of God, we might well reply: Is not that word, which lives and is powerful, which penetrates and discerns the hidden and secret things, the Word of God? It is indeed. Is not the Bible marked by exactly those features? Without any question it is. Then what further need of proof have we, that the Bible is the Word of God?

Notice too how almost insensibly we pass from the Word of God in verse 12 to God Himself in verse 13. All is manifest in HIS sight. It is an all-seeing God with whom we have to do.

If the Word of God has full play in our understandings and consciences we shall become very conscious of our own insufficiency, and our weakness in the pilgrim way. How delightful then to turn to the second thing brought before us here — the priesthood of Christ.

In verse 14 we have the greatness of our High Priest emphasized, both as to His position and His Person. He has passed into (or, more accurately, through) the heavens. He did not stop in the first

heaven nor in the second heaven when on His upward way, but into the third and highest heaven He went. Indeed, as another Scripture puts it, He "ascended up far above all heavens" (Eph. 4: 10). Still, the position of our High Priest is expressed here in this way so that Jewish readers might be reminded of Aaron going into the holiest of all. In the tabernacle the court, in which stood the altar of burnt sacrifice, was typical of the first heaven. The holy place typified the second heaven, and the holiest the third heaven in which God dwells. In entering the holiest Aaron passed through the heavens as far as the type was concerned. Our blessed Saviour and High Priest has passed through the heavens, not in type but in glorious reality. He is now in a place of infinite greatness and glory.

As to His Person our great High Priest is no less than the Son of God. This great fact settles everything in the most decisive way. There is no room for failure here. A mere man like Aaron might fail. He did as a matter of fact fail immediately, and the whole system of things which depended upon him failed likewise. Our High Priest will never fail, and all that hangs upon Him will stand for ever. We shall certainly "hold fast our profession" if we really believe this.

Then in verse 15 the graciousness of our High Priest is set before us. Having become truly Man, He passed through all human experiences and temptations, apart from sin. The rendering of our Authorized Version, "without sin." might mislead us by making us think it merely means that He went through all temptations without sinning. It means more than this. He faced all human temptations "apart from sin." He was perfectly and intrinsically holy. "In Him is no sin" (1 John 3: 5), and hence temptations proceeding from the flesh within were necessarily unknown to Him. He had no flesh within. "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jas. 1: 14). But this could not be said of Him.

Hence while He is said to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, He is not said to be touched with the feeling of our sins. Infirmities are not sins but rather those weaknesses which are connected with human condition. In us they may of course lead to sin; in fact they will almost inevitably do so except we seek and obtain help from on high — the help of which verse 16 speaks.

But do not let us leave verse 15 until we have extracted therefrom the sweetness contained in two words. First, that word touched. A man of power and wealth may hand out much help and succour to needy folk, and yet never have time nor inclination to so enter into their sorrowful experiences as to have his heart really touched by them. We in our weakness and need may look to our High Priest in His glory and be sure that His heart is touched on our behalf. Then again that word, feeling. The wealthy man of many charities might go as far as being touched with the knowledge of the needs of the people he helps, but if he has no experimental understanding of their infirmities and struggles he cannot be touched with the feeling of their needs. Now the Lord Jesus has so qualified Himself by all He has passed through that He actually feels. He entered so truly into human life and human conditions, apart from sin, that He now knows from the human standpoint what He always knew from the divine standpoint. He possessed Himself of human feelings about human needs and human sorrows, and though now glorified on high He is still Man in heaven with all the feelings of a Man on behalf of men.

Oh, then, let us come boldly to the throne of grace! That throne is the third of the great helps which our chapter mentions. It is a "throne of grace" because graced by our great High Priest being seated there. Thence is dispensed mercy and grace for seasonable or opportune help, only we must come to the throne in order that we may get it.

What Israelite of old dared approach with any boldness the awful throne of the Almighty God? What Israelite indeed dared approach at all? When Ezekiel saw it in vision there was "the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it" (Ezek. 1: 26), yet he had no boldness but rather fell upon his

face. At the best his vision only pointed on to that which was to be realized in our day. Thank God it is now realized, but do we realize it? The Son of God sits on the throne, but it is the Son of God in true and tender and sympathetic Manhood. Realizing this all fear vanishes and we draw near with boldness.

The whole period of our lives down here is the time of need to us, and coming boldly all opportune mercy and grace is ours. We have but to approach in prayer and supplication. It is guaranteed to us by the character of the One to whom we come — His greatness on the one hand and His grace on the other. How rarely do we find these two things united amongst men. Here, for instance, is a very great man, with much power and ability to help others. But he cannot afford to adopt a very kindly attitude and make himself easily accessible lest he be overwhelmed by applicants. So he hedges himself about with secretaries and porters and other officials. He could do much for you if only you could approach him, but you cannot get at him. Here is another, and a kindlier, more accessible, more sympathetic person it would be impossible to imagine, but when you get at him he has no power to do anything for you. Thus it generally is amongst men; but thus it is *not* with our Lord. Both power and grace are combined in Him.

## Hebrews 5

THE EARLY PART of chapter 5 continues this subject. The high priests of old represented men and acted for them in things relating to God. But then acting for men they had to be compassionate and sympathetic towards men. Hence they were taken from amongst men, being of the family of Aaron. Had God instituted an holy angel to act as high priest on Israel's behalf there might have been great gain Godward, as regards the accuracy and fidelity with which all priestly functions were carried out; but there would have been great loss manward, as regards such a matter as compassion on the ignorant. He who acts for men must understand mankind in an experimental way; and this is a thing pre-eminently true of Christ as we have just seen.

In Aaron's case he had, "as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." In this we again find contrast and not comparison. Christ is indeed an offering priest, for it says later on, "it is of necessity that this Man have somewhat also to offer" (Hebrews 8: 3). But when we read on yet further in the Epistle we shall discover that Christ, "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God" (Hebrews 9: 14). There is all the difference in the world between Aaron offering *FOR himself* and Christ offering *HIMSELF*.

Aaron was also typical of Christ in the fact that he was called into the priestly office by God. Yet though Christ was called of God like Aaron He has not been called after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedec. He who said in Psalm 2, "Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee" (and this was quoted in Hebrews 1: 5), said also in Psalm 110, "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec." If at this point you refer to the psalm you will see that this was said in connection with Christ coming forth from death in resurrection, and being exalted to the right hand of God.

In verses 7 to 9 however we go back to "the days of His flesh"; that is, the days when He was upon earth before He died. Then was the great moment in the garden of Gethsemane, when He came face to face with the sorrows of death, and His cries were heard. He was heard "in that He feared," or, "for His piety." His personal perfections as Man demanded that He be heard. His cry was that He should be saved out of death — for the force of the word here is "out of" rather than "from." He was not saved from death but He was heard and saved out of it by resurrection and by Jehovah saying to Him, "Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool."

Going into death and being saved out of it, two great things were achieved, as presented to us in verses 8 and 9. First, He learned obedience. Let us understand what this means. Far be the thought that there was ever the smallest taint of disobedience with Him. The fact is, that previous to His incarnation He had ever been in the place of supreme glory, where it was His to command. Having become Man He experienced what it was to obey. We believe we are right in saying that King George VI. was in early life a sailor. Going through that naval training, he learned the obedience which is necessary for the smooth running of the whole naval machine.

When we speak of King George learning naval obedience we do not for one moment mean to infer that he started with an insubordinate and disobedient spirit, when as a young prince he became a midshipman. We mean rather to emphasize that he has acquired his naval knowledge not by the study of books but by actual experience. In just that way the Lord Jesus, though the Son of God, has learned obedience by human suffering.

The second thing achieved was on our behalf. His time of suffering and testing came to its close. He was obedient even to death — the death of the cross. Death was the supreme test and there He was perfected: that is, being ever perfect Himself, there His course of obedience came to its glorious finish and climax. But then it was exactly at that point that He effected propitiation, and thereby became the Author of eternal salvation. Not now a deliverance such as that of Israel out of Egypt, which though very wonderful was only for a time but a deliverance for eternity.

And that eternal salvation is received by those that obey Him. The value of faith was so strongly stressed in Hebrews 3, and the beginning of Hebrews 4, that we might have supposed that it would have read, "them that believe." Why does it say, "them that *obey* Him"? The obedience is of course the obedience of faith, but the point is that we should realize that the One who asks obedience from us is the One who has learned obedience Himself. In obedience the Son of God worked out eternal salvation, and that salvation is ours when we come under obedience to Him. Can we not see how divinely fitting this is? He only asks from us that obedience which He has perfectly rendered Himself.

In verse 10 we revert to the great fact established in verse 6. The verses that come between are evidently intended to impress us with the qualifications of our High Priest. Melchizedec is a mysterious personage who appears for one moment in Genesis 14 and then vanishes. Yet he was priest of the Most High God. The One whom he typified is infinitely greater than he — the Son of God, who assumed Manhood, endured suffering, learned obedience, and by death itself became the Author of an eternal salvation to all that obey Him. To ALL that obey HIM — notice! If you obey Him and I obey Him, then we are included. Salvation is ours!

At this point the writer calls a halt to his flow of thought, and a lengthy digression ensues. Melchizedec was so important a type of Christ that there were many things to be said on the subject, and the theme was not an easy one. It required some depth of spiritual understanding if it was to be intelligently received. The thought of this fact very definitely raised the question of the spiritual state of these Hebrew believers, and of ourselves.

In the closing verses of our chapter the writer gently yet firmly upbraids his Hebrew readers because they were still but babes as to their understandings when they ought to have been like full-grown men. If we make spiritual growth our spiritual senses are exercised, we acquire spiritual habits, and we become able to assimilate the "strong meat," or, "solid food," of the truth in its wider and deeper aspects. If we do not grow, though we may have received "the word of righteousness" yet we become unskilled in it. We may even slip so far back that we need to be taught over again the simplest elements concerning foundation truth.

Thus it was with these early Hebrew believers. They doubtless were hindered by their old Jewish associations. Their tendency was to cling to the weak and beggarly elements of Judaism, and this made it very difficult for them to enter upon the simplest elements of the gospel. This may not be exactly our trouble, but we are very likely to be hindered by the elements of the world, and more particularly by the elements of that particular form of **WORLDLY RELIGION** in which we may have been brought up. Let us search and see if this be so; for if it is we too shall be like stunted trees in the garden of the Lord.

Let us also accept the warning of these verses to the effect that if we do not *go on*, the tendency for us is to *go back*. If we are not on the *up grade*, we shall get on the *down grade*. If we do not *advance*, we shall *decline*. We are in a scene of motion, and we shall not succeed in standing still.

## Hebrews 6

"LET US GO ON," is the opening exhortation of our chapter. Movement in the right direction is to mark us. We are to leave "the word of the beginning of Christ," as the marginal reading is, and go on unto "perfection." If we glance back over the last four verses of Hebrews 5 we shall see that the point here is that we ought to grow in our understanding of the faith of Christ. We ought not to be like children staying year after year in the kindergarten, but advance until we assimilate the instruction provided for the scholars in the sixth form.

John the Baptist had brought "the word of the beginning of Christ." He laid the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." He put baptism in the forefront of His preaching, and spoke plainly as to eternal judgement. But things had moved on since his day. Great light shone when Jesus came forth in His ministry; and then, just as His earthly service closed, in His discourse in the upper chamber He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. He told His disciples that He had "yet many things to say" unto them, but that they could not bear them then. He added, "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." (John 16: 13). By the time the Epistle to the Hebrews was written ALL truth had been revealed, for it was given to Paul by his ministry to "fulfil the Word of God." (Col. 1: 25). To "fulfil" in that verse means to "fill out full," or to "complete."

The whole circle of revealed truth then had been completed. Yet here were these Hebrews still inclined to dwell in their minds amongst these preliminary things, quite ignoring the fuller light which was now shining. Are we at all like them in this? In their case it is not difficult to see where the trouble lay. The special place of privilege, which belonged to the Jew nationally under the Old Covenant, had disappeared under the New. True, it only disappeared because a higher order of blessing had been introduced, so that, when converted, both Jew and Gentile are brought into privileges quite unknown before. Yet their hearts clung to the old and exclusive national position, and consequently they became dull of hearing as regards the fuller truth of Christianity. In our case we have no national position to maintain, but there is many a thing which we naturally love and cling to, which is dispossessed by the light of full and proper Christianity; and there is very real danger that we may close our eyes against that light in order to retain the things we love.

Oh, then may we heed this exhortation! May we allow it to repeat itself over and over again in our hearts — Let us go on! Let us go on! LET US GO ON! And then let us join the writer of the Epistle in saying, "This will we do, if God permit."

After this very encouraging word in verse 3, we drop abruptly into a very dark passage extending from verse 4 to verse 8. Though the transition is very abrupt it is not without very good reason. If

Christians do not go on they invariably go back; and if it almost seems as though they *will* not go on, grave fears are aroused lest their unwillingness springs from the unreality of their profession; in which case their going back might proceed to the length of open apostasy. In the case of a Jew it would do so without fail.

It is apostasy that is contemplated in these verses, not just ordinary back-sliding — not the true believer growing cold and falling into sin; not persons, who have once professed conversion without reality, dropping their false profession and going back into the world — but that total falling away from, and repudiation of Christianity root and branch, which is APOSTASY.

No true child of God ever apostatizes, though not a few professors of the Christian religion have done so. If an Hebrew threw up his Christian profession and wished to get reinstated in the synagogue and amongst his own people, what would happen? He would find that as the price of re-admission he would have to call down a curse upon Jesus as an impostor. He would have in effect to crucify to himself "the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." Now to go to such lengths as that is to bring oneself under the governmental judgment of God, just as Pharaoh did in the days of old when God hardened his heart, so that it is impossible to be renewed unto repentance.

In verses 4 and 5 it is contemplated that those liable to fall away may have shared in privileges common to believers in those times, and that in no less than five ways. We may well ask if it is possible for anyone to share in this way without being truly converted; and this question may well be specially urgent as regards the third of the five. Can it be possible to be a partaker of the Holy Ghost" without being born again?

The answer to that question is, that it is quite possible. Only a true believer can be *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit, but all within the circle of Christian profession, whether truly converted or not, *partake* or *share* in the benefits of the presence of the Spirit. A man may be enlightened without being saved. He may taste the heavenly gift without receiving it. He may taste the good word of God without digesting it in his inward parts. He may share in "the powers of the world to come." (i.e. miraculous powers) without experiencing the real power of the world to come.

The terrible case of Judas Iscariot furnishes us with an illustration of this very thing. He walked for over three years in the company of the Son of God. What floods of light fell upon his path! What tastes he had of the heavenly gift and of the good Word of God! It could not be said of course that he was a partaker of the Holy Ghost, but he was a partaker of the benefits of the presence of Christ upon earth; and he shared, in common with the other apostles, in those miraculous powers which are here called "the powers of the world to come." He was one of the twelve to whom the Lord gave power over unclean spirits, and of whom it is said, "They cast out many devils and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." (Mark 6: 13). Yet the miracle-working Judas was all the while a "son of perdition" and not a saved man at all. He fell away and it proved impossible to renew him unto repentance.

You will notice that the word here, is "*impossible*" and not "*improbable*." This one word is quite sufficient to show that there is no support in this scripture for the idea of a true believer falling away and being lost for ever. ALL those who "fall away" in the sense spoken of in this passage are for ever lost. It is not that they *may* be, but that they *must* be; and there would not be a single ray of hope for any back-slider, did it refer to such.

It refers then to the sin of apostasy — a sin to which the Jew, who embraced the Christian religion without being really converted, was peculiarly liable. By turning back to his ancient and worn out religion, thereby utterly condemning and disowning the Lord Jesus, he proved himself to be utterly

bad and worthless ground. The contrast in verses 7 and 8 is not, you notice, between ground which this season is fruitful and the same ground which another season is unfruitful, but between ground which is essentially good and another piece which is essentially bad. The very form of this illustration supports the explanation just given of verses 4 to 6. Judas enjoyed "the rain that cometh oft," yet he only brought forth thorns and briars and was rejected.

In verse 9 the writer hastens to assure the Hebrews, to whom he wrote, that in saying these things he was not throwing doubt upon the reality of all them, nor even upon the most of them. The opposite to this was the fact. He stood in doubt of a minority evidently, but he was assured of the reality of the mass. He discerned in them features which gave him this assurance. He calls them "things which accompany salvation."

There are then certain things which act as a kind of hallmark upon our Christianity. The hallmark upon a silver article does not make it silver, but it gives us an official guarantee that it is silver. It assures us of its genuineness. What then are these things which assure us of the genuineness of Christians — things which so definitely accompany salvation that if they be present we know that salvation also is present? This question is answered in verse 10. And the answer is — they are many little acts which reveal genuine love for the saints.

Some of us may feel inclined to exclaim: — "How extraordinary! I should have thought that great acts of faith, great exploits of devotion to God would better have revealed reality than that." In so saying, or thinking we should be wrong. Under stress of emotion or sudden enthusiasm great acts are sometimes accomplished which are no true index to the heart. It is in these little things that we reveal our true selves far more truly. Ministering to the saints, who are the people of God, they showed their love toward God Himself.

It is one thing to minister to a saint because I happen to like him or her, and quite another to minister to a saint just as a saint; and it is this latter which is spoken about here. The former is a thing which might be done by an unconverted person; the latter is only possible to one who possesses the divine nature. Now this is just the point here. The things that accompany salvation are the things which manifest the divine nature; and things which therefore prove the reality of faith, in a way that the possession of miraculous powers or the outward privileges of Christianity never can.

Being thus assured of the salvation of the mass of those to whom he wrote, there is but one word of exhortation at this point. The writer urges them to go on doing as they had done — to continue diligently in this good way to the end, in the full assurance that their hope was not misplaced.

Hope has a very large place in connection with the faith of Christ, just as it had in the bygone dispensation. *Then*, whether patriarchs or prophets or just the people of God, they all had their eyes directed forward to the good things to come at the advent of the Messiah. *Now* the good things have been manifested in Christ — full atonement has been made, our consciences have been purged, we have received the gift of the Spirit. Yet even so we are not in the full enjoyment of the good things. For that we await the second coming of the Lord. What we actually have at the present moment we have in faith, and we enjoy by the power of the Spirit, for He is the Earnest of all we shall inherit. We are saved, in hope of all that is to come.

It is very important for us to be clear as to this, and even more important it was for these converted Hebrews to be clear as to it. How often did they get reproached by their unconverted relations! How often taunted with their folly in giving up all the outward glories of the Mosaic system with its temple, its altar, its sacrifices, its priesthood — and for what? For a Master whom they could not see, for He had left them, and for a whole range of things as invisible as He! What fools they

appeared to be! But were they really fools?

They were not. And if instructed in that which our chapter says they would be able to give very good reason for what they had done. They would be able to say, "It is really we and not you who are following in the footsteps of our father Abraham. Promises were made to him and you seem to have forgotten them, settling down as though contented with the shadow system of the law, which was given through Moses as a provisional thing. We have received Christ, and in Him we have the pledge of the fulfilment of every promise which ever was given, and we have fresh, and even brighter promises besides."

We need to have a hope which is resting upon a very well established basis if we are to hold it with full assurance. It is this thought which leads to verses 13-18. Abraham stands before us as a great example not only of faith but of hope also. It was when he had offered up Isaac, as recorded in Genesis 22, that the promise of blessing was given, which culminated in "the Seed," which is Christ, according to Galatians 3: 16. That great promise had behind it not only the authority which always accompanies the bare Word of God, but also the added sanction of His solemn Oath.

How beautiful is this glimpse which we have of God, stooping to consider the feebleness and infirmities which mark even the best of His creatures! Here are Abraham and the later heirs of the promises. How easily their faith may waver! How full of uncertainties is the world in which they find themselves! Then God will condescend to their weakness and reinforce His Word by His Oath, saying, "By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD."

His Word and His Oath. These are two immutable things — things that never change, never shift, never shake. They establish for us the immutability of His counsel. Never, *never*, NEVER, will He fail in any promise He has given, in anything which He has said that He will do.

And all this, you notice, is valid for us today. Verse 18 makes this very clear. What God was for Abraham He is for us. This is the beauty of these Old Testament unfoldings of God. What He is, He is in all times and places, and to all. The strong consolation flowing from these two immutable things is to be enjoyed by us who have embraced the Christian hope.

The Hebrews are said to have "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope." Why put it thus? Because it would at once carry their minds back to the regulations given concerning the cities of refuge, in Numbers 35.

Those regulations had a typical significance which was exactly fulfilled in the case of the converted Jew. He was just like the manslayer who had fled to the nearest city of refuge.

Had Israel's national sin, in crucifying their Messiah, been reckoned as murder by God there would have been absolutely no hope. All must have fallen before the avenger of blood. The prayer of Jesus on the cross was however, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That was just as if He had said, "Father, account this sin of theirs to be manslaughter and not murder." God heard that prayer, so there was hope even for those who encompassed His death. Consequently on the Day of Pentecost Peter preached forgiveness for those who would turn in faith to the risen and exalted Jesus. That day the heavenly city of refuge was opened and there fled to it three thousand souls.

Multitudes of course did not believe, and consequently did not flee for safety, and they fell before the avenging Romans when Jerusalem was destroyed. Their unbelieving descendants in a future day have to face the great tribulation, and the judgment of God. But those who have entered the city of refuge have a hope set before them. It is connected with the moment when Jesus shall come in His glory; when He will cease to exercise His priestly functions after the pattern of Aaron and do so after

the pattern of Melchizedec. Thus will be fulfilled the type as to the change of the priest (See Numbers 35: 25). When that takes place our hopes will be realized with Him in glory, and on earth it will be the time of jubilee, when every man will go back to his own proper inheritance.

The Christian's hope is heavenly; therefore it is said to enter into "that within the veil." *Within the veil* was the holiest of all, typical of the third heaven; that is, the immediate presence of God. *That* within the veil was the ark of the covenant, typical of Christ. Now Christ is entered into the immediate presence of God, and that on our behalf. He is entered as Forerunner and as High Priest. Our hope being centred in Him acts as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast. Our hope has anchored itself already in the glorified Lord Jesus. We are already anchored to the Person and the place, to whom and to which we are going. It is as though an outgoing Atlantic liner found herself securely attached to New York by an anchor pitched in New York harbour, before ever she had got clear of the English Channel!

The fact that Christ has become our Forerunner guarantees that we who are the after-runners shall reach the place where He is. And as High Priest He ever lives to carry us through. That He should be our Forerunner is amazing grace; for in the East where these customs prevail the forerunner is a person of no consequence who clears the way for the important personage who follows after. Think of the Lord Jesus taking a place like that on our account!

## Hebrews 7

IN THE LAST verse of chapter 6 the Lord Jesus has been presented to us in two characters. First, as the Forerunner; His arrival in heaven being the preliminary to the arrival there of the children whom God has given Him. Second, as an High Priest after Melchizedec's order, whose ministry ensures the safe arrival of the children, and the fulness of their blessing. This last verse also has completed the digression which began with Hebrews 5: 11, and has brought us back to the exact point we had reached in Hebrews 5: 10.

Consequently in the first verse of chapter 7 we resume the interrupted flow of thought, and the whole chapter is occupied with the contrast between the Priesthood of Christ and that of Aaron. We are made to see the immeasurable superiority of Christ as a Priest of Melchizedec's order; and we hear at least of some of those things, which were hard to be uttered to a people who were dull of hearing. We, being Gentiles, may not have our minds so filled with the faded glories of the Aaronic priesthood, and hence we may not find the theme so difficult.

In the first three verses of our chapter we are given a most graphic summary of all that is recorded of Melchizedec in the latter part of Genesis 14. We learn that he is introduced there with the design of furnishing us with a type of the Son of God. His very name had a meaning, as is so often the case with Biblical names, and interpreted, it means, King of righteousness. He is presented as King of Salem, which interpreted means peace. In the coming millennial age the Lord Jesus will be manifested in just that double character.

Moreover, in the Old Testament story Melchizedec is introduced abruptly; no genealogy is given, no mention is made of his birth, his death, nor of the number of his years, no hint is given of another arising to succeed him in his priestly office. This is the more remarkable inasmuch as Genesis is exactly the book which does furnish us with just those details in regard to the other striking characters that pass across its pages. Why then were these details omitted as regards Melchizedec? Just that he might be a more accurate type of the Son of God. We believe this to be the meaning of the third verse, and not, as some have imagined, that he was some kind of supernatural personage.

Having then this condensed summary in our minds we are bidden in verse 4 to consider in detail his greatness as contrasted with Aaron or even Abraham; and that firstly, as shown in connection with *the law as to tithes*. This occupies verses 4 to 10.

Aaron and his descendants, who came out of the tribe of Levi, were supported by the tithes which they received from the rest of the children of Israel. Yet the patriarch Abraham, out of whom came Levi and Aaron and all his descendants, paid tithes to Melchizedec. Hence it is argued, Levi and Aaron, who were in this way acknowledged as superiors by the rest of Israel, themselves acknowledged Melchizedec as their superior, by Abraham their father.

And further, Abraham, who paid tithes to Melchizedec, also received blessing from him; and it is said, "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." So in this way also the superiority of Melchizedec to Abraham and his descendants is established. The point here, be it remembered, is not that Melchizedec was a greater man than Abraham as to his character, or that he knew more of God — as to that we have no information, one way or the other — but simply that he must be acknowledged as holding from God a higher position; and in that higher position or order he was typical of Christ.

Verses 11 to 14 are occupied with another point of the argument, based upon the fact that our Lord sprang out of Juda, and hence had no link with the priests of Aaron's order. He was an altogether *different* priest and of *a different order*. What did this show? It showed that perfection had not been reached by the Levitical order of things, and it indicated that a change had come in as regards the whole law-system of which the Levitical priesthood was a part. We shall find rather more detail as to that change when we read the next chapter.

In verses 14 to 19 the argument is enforced by another consideration. Aaron's priesthood was instituted in connection with the law. Christ's priesthood is sustained in the power of *endless life*. The law is here spoken of as, "the law of a carnal commandment," inasmuch as its commands were all aimed either at curbing and suppressing the evil tendencies of the flesh, or at bringing out of it the good that pleases God. But then, as we are told in the epistle to the Romans, the flesh is not subject to the law of God, and in it no good dwells.

Hence the commandment going before Christ has been set aside, as verse 18 informs us. Though in itself holy and just and good, it was rendered weak and unprofitable by reason of the bad and impossible nature of the flesh with which it had to deal. Verse 18 does not for one moment mean that the holy demands of God have been abated, or that they have been set aside so that now men may just act as they please. But it does mean that the whole law system has been set aside in favour of something much higher and better.

In order that this may be plainly seen we quote the passage as rendered in the New Translation by J. N. Darby, "For there is a setting aside of the commandment going before for its weakness and unprofitableness, (for the law perfected nothing,) and the introduction of a better hope by which we draw nigh to God." As in Hebrews 6, so here, Christianity is described as "a hope." Only it is "a better hope." When Israel entered the land of promise, they took it as a foretaste of better and larger things to come with the advent of their Messiah. We Christians have entered into good things of a spiritual sort. We have the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the gift of the Spirit; yet they are but foretastes of the fulness of heavenly blessing which is to come. A better hope has been introduced, and by that hope — since it centres in Christ, who as High Priest has gone for us within the veil — we *draw nigh to God*, instead of being kept at a distance as was the case with the most eminent saint under the law. This thought we shall find greatly amplified when we come to chapter 10.

The law, as we are reminded here, made nothing perfect. God was not perfectly made known in

connection with it, nor was redemption perfectly accomplished, nor were believers perfected as regards their consciences. It came in by the way as a provisional measure, filling up the time until Christ came. Now, Christ being come, it is superseded by something which goes far beyond it, both in the standard it sets, and in what it gives and accomplishes.

In verses 20 to 22 we go a step further. Our attention is drawn to the fact that the Lord Jesus was instituted as Priest for ever by *the oath of God*. There was no such impressive and solemn word when Aaron was instituted in the priest's office. This indicates that there is a better testament, or covenant, connected with Jesus. Moreover He stands related to that covenant in a way that neither Moses nor Aaron ever were to the old covenant. He has become the Surety of it, that is, He has accepted full responsibility in regard to it, has become bail for it, so that should anything go wrong the cost of it would fall upon Him. This is of course full guarantee that nothing will go wrong with it to all eternity. All that is established in connection with the new covenant will abide.

Another contrast is brought before us in verses 23 and 24. Aaron and his descendants exercised their office one after the other and died. The Lord Jesus abides for ever and consequently His priesthood is *unchangeable*, that is, *it never has to be transmitted to another*. The happy result which flows from this is stated in verse 25. Those that avail themselves of His priestly services, coming to God by Him, are saved "to the uttermost," or, "completely," because He always lives to make intercession for them. The salvation here spoken of is that daily, momentary salvation from every adverse power, which every believer needs all the way home to glory.

This verse is often quoted to show that the Lord is able to save the worst of sinners. That is most happily true, and the verse that states it is 1 Timothy 1: 15. Had that been the point here our verse would doubtless have ended, "seeing He died for them and rose again." But the word is, "seeing He ever liveth." The salvation therefore is that which flows to us by His life of unbroken priestly intercession.

Suppose a distressed Jew had applied to the high priest of his day for that compassion and help which he should be ready to give him, according to Hebrews 5: 2. He finds him perhaps a most kindly and helpful man. But on going a little later, just when the crisis of his case has arrived, he learns that he has that very day died! You can easily imagine the Jew's distress. Another man who knows nothing of his case, and possibly of an entirely different disposition, becomes high priest. There was no salvation to the uttermost for him in the former high priest, and if he now gets any salvation at all he can only get it by beginning all over again with the new man. Thanks be to God, no experience at all akin to this can ever befall us. Our High Priest lives eternally.

Let us not leave verse 25 without noticing that in it believers are described as those "that come unto God by Him." It is a very prominent thought in this epistle that the Christian has boldness and liberty to come to God, whereas in the former dispensation all true access to God was forbidden. These words also indicate that the great objective in all Christ's priestly service is to bring us to God, and to maintain us there. On the one hand there is no access to God save BY HIM. On the other, all His compassionate service on our behalf, sympathizing, succouring, saving, is a means to an end. The end being this, that thereby lifted above the things that otherwise would overwhelm us, we might be maintained in the presence of God.

The last three verses of our chapter seem to clinch the whole argument and to sum up the situation, and we find that everything hinges upon *the greatness of the ONE who is our High Priest*.

What an extraordinary statement is made in verse 26! We should certainly have reversed it, and stated that seeing our High Priest was so wonderful a rather remarkable people were suited to Him. But

no, the statement here is, that an High Priest of this remarkable character was suited to us! As the Holy Ghost views things, the many sons being led to glory, the Christian company, bear such a character that no less an High Priest becomes them.

The character of our High Priest is presented to us in a seven-fold way; and each item gives us a point of contrast with the priests of old. The first three items, holy, harmless, undefiled, present no difficulty. It is obvious that none of these three things characterized in an absolute way any priest of Aaron's race.

The fourth is, "separate from sinners," or, more accurately, "separated from sinners." It refers not only to the fact that He was ever wholly separate to God in His spirit and ways, even while eating and drinking with publicans and sinners, but to the fact that now in resurrection He is apart altogether from the whole scene where sinners move. "In that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God" (Rom. 6: 10). We may quote also the Lord's own words in John 17: 19, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." The root meaning of "sanctify" is *to set apart*, and the Lord was alluding to the place He was about to take up in resurrection and in glory. In our verse, the thought of His glory comes in the fifth item which closes it, "Made higher than the heavens." Our High Priest is not merely a risen Man, but exalted above all. The heavens and all that they contain are beneath His feet. If we consider these five items alone, we can see that no high priest constituted under the law is worthy of mention beside Him.

But there is more. A sixth contrast fills verse 27. They offered up daily sacrifices, not only for the sins of the people but for their own sins as well. He offered one sacrifice, and He offered it once for all. It was for the people truly, but it was not for Himself. It was "HIMSELF," instead of being for Himself. He was the Sacrifice as well as the Offerer! Here we have the great truth alluded to, which we shall find expanded in all its glorious details when we come to Hebrews 9 and Hebrews 10.

Seventhly, and lastly, there comes the contrast between the persons who held priestly office under the law, and the Person who is our High Priest today. They were just men, with the usual infirmities of men. He is the Son Himself. This of course is the bed-rock fact upon which all stands. WHO HE IS, settles everything. It carries with it all the contrasts which have been dwelt upon in the chapter. Let us dwell upon it — He is the Son, who is consecrated for ever more.

The word "consecrated" is really "perfected," as the margin of a reference Bible will show. Here we get that word, *perfect* again, which we had in Hebrews 5: 9. There it was stated that His whole course of testing and obedience on earth having been brought to completion in death and resurrection, He became the Author of eternal salvation. Here we find that in the same way He became High Priest. The Son was eternally with the Father. He was Creator and Sustainer of all things. But it was not then that He assumed this office. It was when He had become Man, tasted all possible sorrows, endured all possible testings, suffered death and reached perfection in His risen glory, that He was constituted High Priest by the oath of God.

Now let us just meditate upon these things, giving them time to sink into mind and heart, and surely we shall be filled with confidence in His ability to save to the uttermost, and have our hearts filled with praise and thanksgiving to God.

## Hebrews 8

CHAPTER 7 HAVING set before us in full detail the contrast between the temporary priesthood of Aaron and the abiding priesthood of Christ, chapter 8 opens with a summary of the whole matter. In

this summary, occupying verses 1 and 2 there are four things which we shall do well to note.

Firstly, the Lord Jesus is "*such* an High Priest," that is *such an One* as chapter 7 has shown Him to be. We need therefore to refresh our minds as to all those points of contrast which show forth the infinite superiority of Christ, as expounded in that chapter.

Secondly, being *such* He has taken His seat at the highest point of glory. The supreme Majesty has His throne in the heavens, and on the right hand of that throne He is seated — that is, in the place which signifies that all its executive functions are vested in Him. There is no weakness, no infirmity, in Him. The place He fills indicates that He wields all power. We learned that this exalted place is His when we had only read so far as Hebrews 1: 3; but there we saw Him seated in glory as the answer to His finished work in the purging of sins. Here it is as the Priest that He is crowned with glory.

Thirdly, His priestly ministry concerns itself, not with the holy places on earth, constructed and pitched by Moses, which were the scenes of Aaron's ministry, but with that real sanctuary and tabernacle which came from the hand of God. The real sanctuary is the heaven of God's immediate presence: the true tabernacle is that mighty universe of created things, wherein the third heaven of God's presence lies. Christ's priestly service has to do with God and His presence as its centre; whilst within its circumference it embraces the whole creation of God. What a stupendous thought is this! How paltry do Aaron's glories look beside it!

Fourthly, *such* an High Priest as this is *ours*. "*WE have such an High Priest*"; while Israel had priests of Aaron's order. This one fact, apart from all other considerations, indicates how far in advance of Judaism is Christianity. These Hebrews, as we have seen, were inclined to slackness; some of them showed signs of going back. Let them lay hold of this, and how it would encourage them to hold fast, and keep on in the path of faith. Let us lay hold of it and we too shall feel its encouraging power.

Our thoughts turn from the High Priest Himself to His service and ministry when we read verses 3 to 6. It is helpful to notice that verse 5 is really a parenthesis; the whole verse might well be printed within brackets. The sense follows straight on from verse 4 to verse 6.

Though the Lord Jesus is not a priest of Aaron's order yet in many a way He exercises His ministry after the pattern set forth in Aaron. So it is necessary that He should have something to offer in the presence of God; and that something cannot be a gift of the kind that was customary in connection with the law, for had He been on earth He would have been no priest at all, for He did not spring out of Levi or Aaron. His priesthood is of an heavenly order. Only as risen and glorified has He formally assumed His priestly office.

What the Lord has to offer in His priestly capacity we are not told at this point; but we believe that the reference is, not to the fact that He offered up Himself, as stated in verse 27 of the previous chapter, but to what we find when we reach Hebrews 13: 15. It is "*by Him*" that we offer the praise of our lips to God. He it is, who offers up to God as the great High Priest all the praises springing from those who have been constituted priests by the grace of God. What we *are* told is that His ministry is more excellent than any that was entrusted to Aaron; and that its superiority is exactly proportioned to the superiority of the promises and the covenant of which He is the Mediator.

Before considering this, however, let us make note of two things. First, that the last clause of verse 4 shows us that this epistle was penned before Jerusalem was destroyed, when the Jewish offerings ceased. "*There are* priests," it says, not, "*there used to be.*" This same fact confronts us when we come to the last chapter; and the importance of it is made manifest there.

In the second place notice that in the parenthesis (verse 5) it is made quite plain that the

tabernacle and all its appointments were only a shadowy representation of heavenly things; and *not the things themselves*. This no doubt was a hard saying to a Jew, for he was very apt to think of these visible things in which he boasted as though they were the great end, beyond which nothing was needed. He should not have thought of them in this way, for from the outset they were declared to be but a representation of the things God had before Him. Moses was not to deviate one hair's breadth from the pattern shown to him in the mount. Had he deviated he would have misrepresented instead of representing the great realities which had to be shadowed forth.

This fact being digested we at once see that the Old Testament types, connected with tabernacle and offerings, are worthy of our earnest consideration. The study of them is not, as some may think, an intellectual pastime giving scope to a lively imagination, but a pursuit in which there is much instruction and profit. They must be interpreted of course in the light of the heavenly things themselves, which are revealed in the New Testament.

The ministry of Christ as Priest, the new covenant, of which He is the Mediator, and the promises on which that covenant is founded, are all brought together in verse 6.

It could hardly be said that the old covenant of law was established upon promises at all, though there were certain promises connected with it. It was established rather upon a bargain, in which Israel undertook in all things to obey, and God guaranteed certain blessings conditional upon their obedience. The bargain was hardly concluded before it was broken by Israel making the golden calf. The fact that the new covenant is established upon *promises*, that those promises are *God's*, and that they are *better* than anything proposed under the law, at once differentiates it sharply from the old. To gain some idea of these better promises you must read the latter part of our chapter, which is quoted from the passage in Jeremiah 31 — where the new covenant itself is promised — verses 31 to 34. God's "I will," is the characteristic feature of it. All is a question of what God is going to do, and of what consequently Israel is going to be and have.

Now of this better covenant Christ is the Mediator. We might well ask, On what ground can God thus scatter blessings upon unworthy men without infringing the claims of righteousness? The only possible answer to this is found in the mediatorial work of Christ. As Mediator He has given Himself "a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2: 6). As Mediator too He administers the covenant which has been established in His blood.

The Lord Jesus is presented to us in this epistle in a variety of characters. We sometimes sing,

*"How rich the character He bears,  
And all the form of love He wears,  
Exalted on the throne."*

but do we stop sufficiently to consider the richness of His character in all its variety? We have already had Him brought before us as Apostle, High Priest, Forerunner, Surety, Victim, and now as Mediator. All these offices He holds in connection with the new covenant and those who come into new covenant blessing. As Apostle He announces it. As Surety He assumes full responsibility for it. As Victim He shed the blood that ratifies it. As High Priest He sustains it. As Mediator He administers it. As Forerunner He guarantees the arrival in glory of all those blessed under it in the present dispensation.

What flaw can be discovered in this? None whatever! Where is the loophole through which evil or failure may creep? No such loophole exists! All new covenant blessing is rooted and grounded in the

mighty Son of God and is as flawless and perfect as He. Is not this magnificent? Does it not fill our souls with assurance and triumph?

The first covenant of law was not faultless as verse 7 indicates. There was no fault in the law, but the covenant was faulty inasmuch as all was conditioned upon faulty man. Hence it is set aside in favour of the second, which is based upon God's purpose and God's work. As the last verse of the chapter puts it, the very fact that He speaks of a *new* covenant shows that the first has grown *old and* is ready to disappear.

Jeremiah's prophecy, which is quoted here, shows us that the new covenant is to be formally established with the house of Israel and the house of Judah; that is, with restored and reunited Israel. Under it they will enter upon the blessings of the millennial reign. By the new birth the law will be written on their hearts, so that it will be as natural to them to fulfil it as now it is natural to them to infringe it. Moreover their sins will be forgiven; they will have the knowledge of God, and be His people. But the gospel today brings us just these blessings upon an exactly similar basis.

The fact is that everyone converted today, no matter from what nation they come, is blessed upon new covenant principles, though as yet the new covenant is not formally established at all; and when it is established it will be with Israel, and not with the nations, nor even with the church. We have it, in the spirit of it, and thus we anticipate what is to come. At the same time we must carefully note that Christian blessings are by no means confined to those promised to Israel under the new covenant. On the contrary we enjoy blessings which go far beyond them. Such, for instance, are the blessings spoken of in the epistle to the Ephesians.

## Hebrews 9

CHAPTER 8 ends with the ominous words, "ready to vanish away." Thus it was that the Holy Spirit, who inspired these words, prepared the minds of the Jewish disciples for the disappearance of their venerated religious system, which came to pass within a very few years by the destruction of Jerusalem. The temple being destroyed, the priesthood slain, the sacrifices stopped, Judaism has become but the pale and bloodless shadow of its former self. And in itself, and at its best, it was only a shadow of good things to come.

Yet we must not underestimate the value of the shadows connected with the law. They had very great value *until the moment came in which the realities typified were revealed*; just as the moon is of much value until the sun rises. At the heart of this typical system lay the tabernacle and its furniture, and the first five verses of chapter 9 summarize the details connected with this. It was the sanctuary, where God placed the cloud which signifies His presence, but it was a worldly one. So also were all the ordinances of the divine service connected with it. Hence it was not the object of the writer to speak particularly of these details.

His object was rather to point out that the tabernacle was in two parts, the holy place, and then the holiest of all, and that while the priests of Aaron's line had full liberty to enter the former the latter was forbidden to them; into it they had no admittance at all. When once the divine glory had taken possession of the holiest no human foot trod there, with one exception. One man alone might enter, and he only once every year, and that under one stringent condition; he must approach, "not without blood." If we turn to Leviticus 16 and read it, we shall get all the details of that solemn occasion.

What did it all mean? It doubtless foreshadowed the fact that the blood of Christ is the only ground of approach to God, yet what the Holy Ghost was really saying in the whole arrangement was

that in the old dispensation there was no real approach to God at all. The way in was not yet made manifest. We shall find the wonderful contrast to this when we reach Hebrews 10: 19. But as long as the first tabernacle had a standing before God the rule was *no admittance*.

We might say then that the law instituted *the religion of the holy place*, whereas the *holiest of all* characterizes Christianity. It was not that all Israelites had access to the holy place. We know they did not, as the sad case of Uzziah, king of Judah, recorded in 2 Chronicles 26, shows. But the priests, who were the representatives of all Israel, had free access there. Still, even so, the real value of the whole thing lay in its typical significance, as we have seen.

This fact is again emphasized in verses 9 and 10, where the tabernacle is "a figure for the time then present," and the gifts and sacrifices are but meats and drinks and divers washings; all of which were but ordinances of a fleshly type as opposed to anything of a spiritual nature. Out of this there flow, as a result, two things.

The first thing is, that these sacrifices could not make perfect the one who approached by their means. Here again we meet with that word *perfect*; and this time not referring to Christ but to ourselves. The Jewish sacrifices, by reason of their very nature, could not make us perfect; and this fact we shall find repeated in Hebrews 10: 1. Then passing on to the fourteenth verse of that chapter we find stated, by way of contrast, the glorious fact that, "by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." The law not merely *did not* accomplish it, but *could not*; whereas Christ *has done* it.

But what is this perfection which has to do with ourselves? That question is answered for us here. It is a remarkable fact that the first time the word is used in this connection it is carefully defined for us by the Holy Spirit. The perfection has to do with our consciences. As we read on into Hebrews 10 we shall see more clearly what this signifies. It means having the whole weight of sin as an accusing load completely lifted off, so that the conscience is *perfectly* cleared in the presence of God.

Now this was something quite unknown under the law. If a Jew sinned it was his duty to bring to the tabernacle the appropriate sacrifice; and having done so he was clearly entitled to enjoy the relief afforded by the words, "it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 4: 31). That one particular sin was forgiven when once the prescribed sacrifice was offered; but that was all. If he sinned again, again he had to bring a sacrifice: and so on and on, all through life. There was no such thought as a sacrifice being offered which could settle once and for ever the whole question of sin, and so perfect the sinner's conscience.

The second thing is that the law with all its ordinances was only imposed upon Israel "until the time of reformation," that is, until the time of "setting things right." The law was after all a provisional measure. It proved beyond dispute that things needed setting right, by proving how wrong they were, but it did not put them right. When presently God blesses Israel under the new covenant the time of setting things right will have arrived. Meanwhile, as we have just seen, we have been blessed upon new covenant principles, as the result of the sacrifice of Christ; and there is no setting things right upon any other basis than that.

Verses 11 to 14 furnish us with the contrast to that which we have in verses 6 to 10. If we analyze the verses with a little care we shall see how complete and far-reaching the contrast is.

In the first place CHRIST is set before us, in contrast to the high priest of Aaron's order.

Then, the Aaronic priest just had to administer the things that existed under his hand. Christ is an High Priest of *good things to come*.

Christ has entered into the *true* holiest in the heavens, a greater and more perfect tabernacle than that made with hands in the wilderness; and He entered in *once*, instead of every year, as with the high priest of old.

Not by the blood of goats and calves, which can never really put away sins, did He enter; but by *His own blood which* obtains redemption.

The blood of the sacrificial animals did sanctify to the purifying of the flesh: the blood of Christ alone can purify *the conscience*.

The purifying of the flesh which was accomplished by the Jewish sacrifices was but temporal: the redemption obtained by Christ is *eternal*.

Notice, moreover, the majesty which characterizes the one offering of Christ. All three Persons of the Godhead stand related to it. The spotless Son of God offered Himself. It was to God that He offered Himself; and it was by the eternal Spirit He did it. No wonder that all sin comes within its scope, and that its results abide for eternity.

The immediate effect of it, as far as we are concerned, is the "purging" or "cleansing" of our consciences. By that cleansing they are perfected and we turn from the dead works of law — dead, because done with the object of *getting* life — to serve the living God. If our consciences need cleansing from *dead* works, how much more do they need cleansing from wicked works!

The argument of the opening verses of chapter 9 reaches a climax in verse 14, but the Spirit of God does not immediately carry us on to the results which flow from it. Instead of that He elaborates with great wealth of detail the point He had just been making; so that when we reach Hebrews 10: 14, we find that we are back again at the point we had started from in 9: 14. And only then do we proceed to the consideration of its results.

From this we may learn the very great importance that attaches to the truth concerning the sacrifice of Christ. It lies at the foundation of everything, and until it is thoroughly apprehended by us we are not able to appreciate what follows from it. Let us pray for the understanding heart as we consider these verses, in which the main point of the Holy Spirit is so fully developed and supported.

The main point, then, is that the blood of Christ completely purges the believer's conscience so that he is enabled to serve and worship the living God. Now this was an end utterly unattainable under the old covenant; hence it follows, as verse 15 tells us, that the Lord Jesus became the Mediator not of the old but of the new. And hence, too, His death had a twofold bearing: bringing in redemption as regards the transgressions under the old covenant, and becoming the basis whereon is fulfilled the promise connected with the new. Something had to be done for the removing of the mighty mountain of transgressions which had accumulated under the law: and equally something was needed if God was to call people with an eternal inheritance in view. Both these great ends are reached "by means of death," and that the death of Christ.

Verses 16 and 17 are a parenthesis. The word translated *testament* here, and *covenant* in Hebrews 8, has both those meanings. Used in relation to God it is "a disposition which He has made, on the ground of which man is to be in relationship with Him." In this short parenthesis the writer uses the word in the sense of a testament or will, which only is of force when the testator is dead. If viewed in this way, again we see the absolute necessity of the death of Christ.

There was no "death of the testator" under the old covenant, yet the necessity for death to take place was acknowledged in a typical way. If we turn to Exodus 24: 7 and 8, we shall find the incident

referred to in verses 19 and 20, and we may note a remarkable fact. Exodus records only the sprinkling of the people with blood; Hebrews adds that the book of the law was also sprinkled.

The significance of the sprinkling of the people would seem to be that they were thereby reminded that death was the penalty of disobedience. Any breach of its demands meant the death penalty *on them*. The significance of the sprinkling of the book would indicate, on the other hand, that death was necessary as the basis of everything. Hence even the law system was not dedicated without blood; and this fact is added here by the inspired writer since it is just the point of the argument in this epistle.

Moreover at different times in connection with the sacrifices the tabernacle vessels, and indeed "almost all things," were purged with blood; and all this was intended to drive home into men's hearts the all-important lesson, that, "Without shedding of blood is no remission."

In our twentieth century we might almost call this great statement — *the most hated fact of Holy Scripture*. Nothing so moves to wrath and contempt and ridicule the soul of the "modern" theologian as this. And why?

Not because his delicate sensibilities are shocked by the idea of blood being shed, for the average modernist enjoys his slice of roast beef as much as other average people. But because he knows what this fact really signifies. It means that the death-sentence lies on mankind as creatures hopelessly lost; and that only *death* can lift this death-sentence so that remission can reach the fallen creature. The solemn witness borne to the modernist, that as a sinful creature he is under the death-sentence before God, is what his soul loathes with an intensity that amounts to hate. The prouder he is the more he hates it.

Do we not all understand this quite well? Did we not all share those feelings until grace subdued our pride and brought us into an honest frame of mind before God? The modernist, of course, deludes himself into thinking that his aversion to this truth arises from his superior aesthetic or moral sense, and we may never have victimized ourselves with that particular little piece of vain conceit. If so, we may well thank God! The moment we were brought to honesty and humility of mind we grasped the absolute necessity of *the death of Christ*.

Of that necessity verse 23 speaks. The blood of goats and calves sufficed to purify the tabernacle and its furniture, which were but patterns; the heavenly things themselves needed a better sacrifice. We might be surprised that *heavenly* things should need a sacrifice at all, did we not remember that Satan and the fallen angels have had their seat in the heavens, and have introduced the taint of sin there; and also that we, who are sinners and had our seat here, are destined as the fruit of redemption to take our seat in the heavens. As the fruit of the work of Christ not only shall there be purification wrought on earth but in the heavens also.

Consequently, in verses 24 to 26 we are introduced to the work of Christ from a most exalted view-point. He appeared once at the consummation of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and now, in virtue of His blood shed, has gone into the very heaven of God's presence on our behalf. Let us mark that word, "to put away sin." How comprehensive it is! The expiation of our sins is of course included, but it is not limited to that. The judgment of sin is included, but it is not limited to that. It includes sin in all its ramifications and bearings. Sin, the root, and all the sins which are the fruit; sin as it has affected man and the earth, and sin as it has affected the heavens; sin, in its totality; all put away by His sacrifice. And His sacrifice was the sacrifice of *Himself!*

In these verses again, the work of Christ comes before us as contrasted with the service of the

high priest of old, and this it is which accounts for the way things are put in the last verse of our chapter. When the Jewish high priest had entered the holy place made with hands on the yearly day of atonement, carrying the blood of the goat, the people stood outside waiting for his reappearance. Very possibly they waited with a certain amount of trepidation for they knew that to enter wrongfully into the presence of God meant death. For him they were waiting, and they hailed his appearance with a sigh of relief. Now we, Christians — and this specially applies to the converted remnant of Jews, who were addressed in this epistle — are waiting for the re-appearance of our great High Priest. We "look for" or "await" Him, and when He comes it will be "without sin" or "apart from sin." He so effectually dealt with sin at His first coming that He will have no need to touch that question at His second coming. He will appear unto the salvation of His people, and the deliverance of a groaning creation.

Thus we can see what a striking analogy exists between the actions of Aaron on the day of atonement and the great work of Christ; only with this complete contrast, that whereas Aaron's actions were typical and confined to the patterns of heavenly things, and oft repeated, Christ has to do with the heavenly realities and His work in offering for sin has been accomplished once and for ever. It is the lot of sinful men once to die, and then to face the judgment of God. In keeping with that, Christ has once been offered to bear the sins of many, and therefore those that await Him look forward not to judgment but to salvation.

You notice that here it speaks of Christ bearing the sins of *many*, not of *all*. It is true that He died for all, as far as the scope and intention of His work is concerned. When however the actual effect of His work is in question, then He bore the sins of *many*, that is, of those who believe. You will notice also that the words, "look for Him," have not really got the meaning so often imported into them, by which they are made to support the idea that only certain believers who are watchful are going to find salvation when the Lord comes again. The force of the whole passage the rather is, that sin has been so perfectly put away, and believers so perfectly cleared as to their consciences, and as to all liability to judgment, that they are left awaiting the coming forth of their High Priest from the heavenly sanctuary to their salvation from every adverse power.

With this thought before us, the opening words of chapter 10 carry us back to the days of the law, that once more we may realize the glory of the gospel as contrasted with it. Twice already that contrast has been laid open before us; first in Hebrews 10: 6, 14, and then again in verses 23 to 28. In the earlier of these two passages the great point of the contrast seems to be as regards the *nature* and *character* of the law sacrifices contrasted with the sacrifice of Christ. In the later passage the contrast seems more to lie in the *absolute sufficiency* of Christ's sacrifice, which is therefore *one*, and not a repeated thing like the sacrifices of old.

## Hebrews 10

IN THE PASSAGE now before us both these contrasts reappear, but coupled with them is a third — the *supreme glory of Him who became the sacrifice*, as contrasted with both priests and offerings of old. We see Him stepping out of eternity that He might accomplish the will of God in the work that He did. The passage starts with the reminder that the law with its shadow sacrifices could NEVER make the worshippers perfect. It ends with the glorious statement that the offering of Christ *has* perfected them FOR EVER.

It is not that the law sacrifices *did not* perfect anyone as to the conscience, but that they *could not*. Their very repetition showed this. Could they have availed to cleanse the conscience, so that the offerer got complete relief as to the whole question of sin, they would have ceased to be offered;

inasmuch as we never go on *doing* what is *done*. In point of fact their effect was in just the opposite direction. Instead of removing sins from the conscience as no longer to be remembered, they were formally brought to remembrance at least once every year. The blood of sacrificial animals had no efficacy to take away sins. The thing was impossible, as verse 4 says.

The statement of that verse is clear enough. Some of us, however, remembering what is said as to the forgiveness of various sins, or as to cleansing from sin, in Leviticus 4, 5 and 16 may feel that there is apparently a contradiction, and that a further word of explanation is needed. The solution of the difficulty is not far to seek, and we may reply by way of an illustration.

Here is a trader hard pressed by a creditor. He is short of cash in these hard times, though he knows well that in three months' time he will have ample funds. What does he do? He offers his creditor a three months' promissory note for £500, and his creditor well satisfied with his integrity, gladly accepts it. Now our question is this — What really has the creditor got?

That question may with equal truth be answered in two ways, apparently contradictory. Thinking of it as regards its intrinsic value, we should reply: — He has got a small piece of paper, whereon certain words are traced in ink, and in the corner of which is embossed a red government stamp, and the total value of the whole thing would be *less than a penny*. Thinking of it in its relative value — that is, of what it will be worth at its due date in view of the character of the man who drew it, we should be quite right in replying, *Five hundred pounds*.

The sacrifices of old were like that promissory note. They had value, but it lay in that to which they pointed. They were but paper; the sacrifice of Christ alone is like fine gold. In Leviticus their relative value is pointed out. In Hebrews we find that their value is only relative and not intrinsic. They can never take away sins. Hence in them God had no pleasure, and the coming of Christ was a necessity.

Hence in verses 5 to 9 we have the quotation from Psalm 40 and its application. It is quoted as the very voice of the Son of God, as He enters into the world. The Psalm mentions, "Sacrifice and offering . . . burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin;" that is, offerings of four kinds, just as there are four kinds of offerings mentioned in the early chapters of Leviticus. There was no pleasure for God in any of them, and when the Son of God came forth to do the will of God they were supplanted and taken away. In the body He took, the whole will of God was done, and by the offering of it up in sacrifice we have been set apart for God once for all.

The thing being accomplished what further need is there of the ineffectual shadows? The fine gold having appeared what use have we for the scrap of paper? That great word, "He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second," might almost be taken as the whole drift of the epistle to the Hebrews, stated in few words — put into a nutshell, as we speak.

Once more are we brought face to face with the contrast in verses 11 to 14. On the one hand, there are all the priests of Aaron's race. On the other, "this Man" in His solitary dignity as the Son of God. There, the daily ministering, and the constant offering of the ineffectual sacrifices that can never take away sins. Here, the one perfect offering, which is perfectly efficacious, and the Offerer seated at the right hand of God. There, the priests were always standing. No chair or seat of any kind was provided amongst the furniture of the tabernacle. It was not needed for their work was never done. Here, the Offerer has by His one offering perfected for ever the sanctified ones, and consequently He has taken His seat for ever at God's right hand.

The words, "for ever," occur in verses 12 and 14. In both cases they have the significance of, "as

a perpetual thing," or, more briefly, "in perpetuity." Those set apart for God having been perfected as to their consciences in perpetuity, He has taken His seat at God's right hand in perpetuity. For one thing only is He waiting, and that is for His enemies to be made His footstool.

We would like to think that all our readers have entered into the tremendous significance of all this. Oh, the blessing and establishment of soul that comes when we really lay hold of it! Its surpassing importance may be seen in the way that the Spirit of God dwells upon the subject, and elaborates it in its details. Note too, how again and again it is stated that the sacrifice of Christ is one, and offered once and for ever. Six times over is this fact brought before us, in the passage beginning with Hebrews 9: 12, and ending with Hebrews 10: 14. Search that passage and see for yourselves.

And then may the truth contained in that passage enter all our hearts in its soul-subduing, conscience-cleansing power!

It has often been pointed out that in the early part of Hebrews 10 we have mention of, firstly, the will of God; secondly the work of Christ; thirdly, the witness of the Holy Ghost. The work of Christ for us has laid the basis for the accomplishment of the will of God *about us*, and in order that we may have the assurance of both there is the witness of the Spirit *to us*. In verse 15 of our chapter this last is brought before us.

How may we know that, as believers who have been set apart for God, we have been perfected in perpetuity? Only by relying upon an unimpeachable witness. And where is such a witness to be found? Suppose we put our feelings in the witness box, and subject them to a little cross-examination on the point. Can we arrive at anything like assurance? By no means, for they hardly tell the same story twice running. If on certain occasions they would seem to testify to our being right with God, on other occasions their witness would be in exactly the opposite direction. We must dismiss them from the witness box as utterly unreliable.

But the Holy Spirit condescends to take the place of Witness, and He is utterly reliable. It is not here His witness in us as in Romans 8: 16. In our passage He is viewed as testifying from without *to us*, and we are immediately referred to that which is written in Jeremiah 31. The words of Jeremiah were the words of the Spirit; his writings the writings of the Spirit. The witness of the Spirit to us is found in the written Word of God. The burden of His witness in favour of the believer is, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

Is there some reader of these lines who lacks assurance? Are you a prey to doubts and fears as to your salvation? What you need is to receive the witness of the Spirit in "full assurance of faith," as verse 22 puts it. Could more reliable witness be presented to you than that of God, the Holy Ghost? No! Could His witness be presented to you in a more stable or more satisfactory form than in the Scriptures of truth, which He has inspired? We venture to say, *it could not*.

Supposing God dispatched an angel to you with tidings of your forgiveness. Would that settle everything? For a short time perhaps. Angels however appear for a moment and then they are gone, and you see them no more. The memory of his visit would soon grow faint, and doubt enter your mind as to what exactly he *did* say. If you were granted a wonderful inrush of joyful feeling; would that do? It would soon pass and be succeeded by a corresponding depression, for when waves run high you cannot always ride upon their crests. Bring forward any alternative you please, and our reply will be, that though more spectacular than the Scriptures they cannot be compared with them for reliability. If you cannot or will not receive the witness of the Holy Ghost in that form, you would not receive it in any form whatsoever.

The witness of the Spirit to us is, then, that our sins are completely remitted, and being forgiven there is no more offering for sin. In verse 2 the question was asked, "Would they not have ceased to be offered?" — that is, had the Jewish sacrifices been able to make the worshippers perfect. In verse 18 we learn that Christ's one sacrifice having perfected us, and the Holy Spirit bearing witness to it, there is no further offering for sin. When these words were penned Jewish sacrifices were still proceeding at Jerusalem but they were valueless as offerings for sin, and very shortly they were all swept away. The Roman armies under Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem and utterly scattered the Jews, were really God's armies (see, Matt. 22: 7) used by Him in judgment to make their sacrifices impossible any longer. And yet a very large part of Christendom is continually bowing down before what they call, "the sacrifice of the mass." How great the sin of this! Worse really than the sin of perpetuating the Jewish sacrifices, had that been possible.

Verse 19 brings before us the great result that follows from the one perfect sacrifice of Christ. We have "boldness to enter into the holiest." No Jew, not even the high priest, had boldness to enter the holiest made with hands: we have boldness to enter the holiest not made with hands; in spirit now, and in actual presence when the Lord comes. The converted Hebrew reading this would at once say to himself — This must mean that we are constituted priests in a far higher sense than ever Aaron's family were priests of old. He would be right! Though in this epistle we are not told that we are priests in so many words, the truth enunciated plainly infers it. In 1 Peter: 2, the truth of Christian priesthood is plainly stated, and that epistle is also addressed to converted Hebrews.

Our boldness is based upon the blood of Jesus, since through His flesh, by means of death, He has opened up for us a new and living way into God's presence; but then we also have Himself as High Priest living in the presence of God. Verse 21 mentions this, but He is there really called, not an High Priest, but a "*Great Priest over the house of God.*" Earlier in the epistle we read of Him as both Priest and Son, and then it added, "Whose house are we" (Hebrews 3: 6). We are God's house, God's priestly family, and over us is this Great Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we have full access to God. Verse 22 exhorts us to avail ourselves of our great privilege and draw near.

We are to draw near, "with a true heart in full assurance of faith." These two things are what we may call the necessary moral qualifications *which we ought to have*. Converted we may be, but if there be not that simplicity of faith in the work of Christ, and in the witness of the Holy Ghost as to the complete settlement of the question of our sins, which produces full assurance in our minds, we cannot enjoy the presence of God. Nor can we, except our hearts be true; that is, marked by sincerity under the influence of the truth, and without guile.

The latter part of verse 22 reverts again to that which *we have* as the fruit of the grace of God — and not to that which we ought to have. We have boldness by the blood of Jesus: we have a Great Priest over the house of God: we have hearts sprinkled and bodies washed, as verse 22 says.

These two things may present a little difficulty to our minds, but doubtless to the original Hebrew readers the allusions would have been quite clear. Aaron and his sons had their bodies completely washed with pure water, and they were also sprinkled with blood before they took up their priestly office and duties. Now we have the realities which were typified in this way. The truth of the death of Christ has been applied to our hearts, giving us a purged conscience, which is the opposite of an evil conscience. Also we have come under the cleansing action of the Word of God, which has renewed us in the deepest springs of our being. It was to this that the Lord Jesus alluded just before He instituted His supper in the upper chamber, when He said, "He that is washed (bathed) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." The word He used signifies to *bathe all over*, as the priests were

bathed at their consecration. But even so they needed to wash hands and feet every time they entered the sanctuary.

We, thank God, have received that new birth which corresponds to the bathing with pure water. The "true heart" spoken of earlier in the verse would correspond pretty closely with the washing of hands and feet which was needed every time the priest entered the holy place.

But, having all, let us draw near. Let us take up and use and enjoy our great privilege of access to God. It is the great feature that should characterize us. We are people put into this nearness, having unrestricted liberty in approach to God, and that at all times; though doubtless there are occasions when we may specially enjoy the privilege, as for instance when we gather in assembly for the Lord's supper or for worship. Still it is by no means restricted to such occasions, as is plain when we remember that this epistle is silent as to the assembly and its functions; to find instruction as to that we must turn to the first epistle to the Corinthians.

The presence of God should really be the home of our hearts, the place to which in spirit we continually resort. The point here is not that we resort there with our needs and present our prayers; that came before us at the end of chapter 4. It is rather that we draw near in the enjoyment of all that God is, as revealed to us in Jesus, in communion with Him, and in the spirit of worship. We draw near not to get any benefit out of Him, but because we find attraction in Himself.

The three exhortations of verses 22 - 25, are very closely connected. We are to hold fast the profession of our faith, (or, our *hope*, as it really is), without wavering, since it hangs upon One who is wholly faithful. We shall most certainly do this if we enter into our privilege and draw near. We shall also find there is much practical help in the companionship of our fellow-Christians, and in the exhortation and encouragement they give. When believers begin to waver and draw back, their failure is so frequently connected with these two things. They neglect the twofold privilege of drawing near to God on the one hand, and of drawing near to their fellow-believers on the other.

It is a sad fact that today there are thousands of dear Christian folk attached to denominations in which the great truths we have been considering are very little mentioned. How could they be when things are so organized as to altogether obscure the truth in question? Services are so conducted that the individual saint is put at a distance, and he can only think of drawing near by proxy, as though he were a Jewish worshipper. Or perhaps the case is that he finds all the service conducted for him by a minister, and this of necessity tends to divert his thoughts from the supreme importance of his drawing near for himself, in the secret of his own soul.

Others of us have the inestimable privilege of gathering together according to the Scriptural form prescribed in 1 Corinthians 11-14. This is indeed calculated to impress us with the necessity of drawing near to God in our hearts. But let us watch lest we lose our spiritual exercises and lapse into a frame of mind which would take us listlessly to the meetings, expecting to have everything done for us by "ministering brothers." And perhaps we get quite annoyed with them because they do not perform their part as well as we think they ought to do! Then it is that, instead of holding fast, we begin to let go; the first symptom of it being very probably, that we begin to forsake the meetings and the society of our fellow-believers generally. We become very critical of both meetings and people, and consider we have very good grounds for our criticism!

If instead of holding fast we begin to let go, who can tell whereunto our drawing back will take us? Who indeed, but God Himself! He alone knows the heart. All too often this drawing back, which commenced, as far as human eye can see, with forsaking Christian company, never stops until utter apostasy is reached. This terrible sin was much before the mind of the writer of this epistle, as we saw

when considering Hebrews 3 and Hebrews 6. He greatly feared that some of the Hebrews to whom he wrote might fall into it. Hence he again refers to it here. The rest of our chapter is taken up with it. In verse 26 he speaks of sinning "wilfully." In the last verse he speaks of drawing back "unto perdition."

To "sin wilfully" is evidently to forsake the faith of Christ, with one's eyes open. No true believer does this, but a professed believer may do so, and it is just this fact, that we have reached perfection and finality in Christ, which makes it so serious. There is no more sacrifice for sins. This fact which seemed so unspeakably blessed in verse 18, is seen in the light of verse 26, to have a side to it which is unspeakably serious. There is beyond nothing but judgment. And that judgment will be of a very fearful character, hot with indignation.

Some of us might feel inclined to remark, that such judgment seems to be rather inconsistent with the fact that we live in a day when the glad tidings of the grace of God is being preached. So we do, but it is just that fact that increases the severity of the judgment. Verses 28 to 31 emphasize this. Grace makes known to us things of such infinite magnitude that to despise them is a sin of infinite magnitude, a sin far graver than that of despising the law of Moses with its holy demands.

In the gospel there is presented to us, first, the Son of God; second, His precious blood, as the blood of the new covenant; third, the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of grace. Now what is it that the apostate does — especially the Jew, who having professed Christianity, abandons it, and reverts to Judaism. He treads under foot the first. The second he counts an unholy thing. The third he utterly despises. He treats with the utmost scorn and contempt the very things that bring salvation. There is nothing beyond them, nothing but judgment. He will deserve every bit of judgment he gets. All this, be it noted, is a vastly different thing from a true believer growing cold and unwatchful and consequently falling into sin.

In verse 32, we again see that, though for the sake of some these warnings were uttered, yet the writer had every confidence that the mass of those to whom he wrote were true believers. He remembered, and he called on them to remember, the earlier days when they suffered much persecution for their faith, and he appealed to them not to cast away their confidence at this late hour in their history. An abundant recompense was coming for any loss they had suffered here.

One thing only was necessary, that they should continue with endurance doing the will of God. Then without fail all that had been promised would be fulfilled to them. Their very position was that they had "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us," (vi. 18). That hope was abundantly sure, but its fulfilment can only be at the coming of the Lord, as is indicated in verse 37.

For the third time in the New Testament that striking word from Habakkuk 2 is quoted. That "the just shall live by faith," is quoted both in Romans 1 and in Galatians 3. But only here is the preceding verse quoted. Take note of the alteration in the words made by the Spirit of God. In Habakkuk we read, "IT will surely come IT will not tarry;" the "it" referring to the vision. But in our days things have become far clearer, and we have the definite knowledge of the Person to whom the indefinite vision pointed. Hence here it is, "HE that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

It is a striking fact that the word *faith* only occurs twice in the Old Testament. Once in Deuteronomy Moses uses the word negatively, complaining of the people that they were "children in whom is no faith." In Habakkuk alone does the word occur, used in a positive way. It is equally striking that the New Testament seizes upon that one positive use of the word, and quotes it no less than three times. How this emphasizes the fact that we have now left behind the system of sight for the system of faith. Judaism is supplanted by Christianity.

The point of the quotation here is, however, not that we are justified by faith, but that by faith we LIVE. Faith is, as we may say, *the motive force* for Christian living. We either go on to the glorious recompense or we draw back to perdition. No middle ground is contemplated.

Do not miss the contrast presented in the last verse of our chapter. It lies between drawing back to perdition and believing to soul-salvation. This furnishes additional proof, were it needed, that the contrast in Hebrews is not between believers who do well and believers who do ill, and who consequently (as is supposed) may perish; but between those who really do believe unto salvation, and those, who being mere professors, draw back to their eternal ruin.

Thanks be to God for that living faith which carries the soul forward with patience to the glorious recompense which awaits us!

## Hebrews 11

WE NOW ARRIVE at the passage which is pre-eminently the faith chapter of the Bible, and it is easy to see how thoroughly it fits into its place in the whole scheme of this Epistle. Judaism as a religious system largely appealed to sight, whereas the great realities of Christianity are unseen and only appeal to faith. The object of the Epistle being to deliver the converted Hebrews from the grave-clothes of Judaism which clung to them, and to establish them in the liberty of Christianity, the Holy Spirit naturally dwells long upon faith.

How fitting all this is! We do well to dwell long upon it, that the wonder of Divine inspiration may more and more appear to us. We may notice also how the great *love* chapter of the Bible is 1 Corinthians 13, and the great *hope* passage is 1 Thess. 4: 13 - 1 Thess. 5: 11. Now 1 Corinthians is as we may term it, the Epistle of the local assembly, and it is just in the local assembly that all the friction is created amongst believers, and the trying disagreements and disagreeables take place, and consequently *love is so much* needed. So also 1 Thessalonians is the Epistle where the saints are seen suffering at the hands of the world, and in these circumstances nothing sustains the heart more than *hope*.

The whole of our chapter is like a commentary on that little sentence from Habakkuk — "The just shall live by faith." We are shown that from the very outset of the world's history that which pleased God in His people was the outcome of faith. This may seem very obvious to us, but it doubtless was a rather revolutionary idea to the average Jew, for he had accustomed himself to consider that what pleased God was the ceremonials and sacrifices of Judaism, and the works of the law connected therewith. But here the Spirit of God goes behind the activities of these Old Testament believers to bring to light the faith that moved and inspired them. Their works were not the works of the law, but the works of faith. In this connection you might do well to refresh your memories as to the contents of Romans 4 and James 2, noticing well how Paul excludes the works of the law from our justification, and how James insists on the works of faith as evidencing the vitality of the faith we profess.

The first verse defines, not what faith *is* in the abstract, but what it *does* in practice. It is "the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The *New Translation* gives this rendering together with a footnote saying that the words "assurance," or "firm conviction," might be substituted for "substantiating." Faith then is the telescope that brings into our view the unseen verities of which God speaks; making them real to us, giving us assurance of them, and turning them into solid substance in our hearts.

Before however we are led to review how faith wrought in "the elders," we find one word is to

*ourselves*. Verse 3 begins, "Through faith WE understand . . ." and the things seen in creation are brought before us. This is a very significant statement! In apostolic days it was evidently the common faith of Christians that "the worlds were framed by the Word of God." Is it the faith of all Christians today? We have just seen that faith is "the conviction of things *not* seen." We now discover that only faith can give us a proper understanding of the things that we *do* see. Nineteen centuries ago the philosophic world was full of weird theories as to the origin of creation. Equally weird theories fill philosophic minds today. All these theories, both ancient and modern, take it for granted that things that are seen *were* made of things that do appear; and the process, by which they think they were made, has received the name of *evolution*. The philosophers are very clever men, and they have provided themselves — especially in these modern days — with a really wonderful equipment for their researches. They only lack *one* thing. But that one thing is the *only* thing that counts! They lack the faith that enables anyone to understand. Through faith we understand the origin of creation. Without faith we do not understand it at all.

All the readers of this little paper have, we trust, the faith that understands creation, and so we are prepared to understand the faith which actuated the elders, the recital of which begins with verse 4.

The story seems naturally to fall into three parts. First, we have in verses 4 to 7 the three great worthies of the antediluvian world, and in them faith is seen as that which sets in right relation with God, and consequently *saves*. Second, we have the patriarchs of the postdiluvian world before the law was given. They illustrate faith as that which brings into view unseen things — the faith that *sees*. Third, beginning with Moses, the law-giver, we find the faith that gives energy in spite of all obstacles — the faith that is prepared to *suffer*. In so saying we merely allude to that which seems to be the prominent thought of the Spirit in each section, for of course no one can have faith at all without its effects being known in all three ways.

Abel's faith led to the "more excellent sacrifice" and to the knowledge that he was righteous before God; which knowledge he got by faith in God's testimony. He offered his sacrifice, not by chance nor by some happy inspiration, but by faith. Faith in what? we may ask. Doubtless in that which God had already shown as to the value of the death of a sacrifice by the coats of *skins*, about which we read in Genesis 3: 21. God testified to the value of his gift by accepting his sacrifice; and Abel knew that in accepting his sacrifice God declared him righteous. Many a professing Christian today is saying that it is impossible in this life to have the knowledge of sins forgiven; but lo! here is a man living some four thousand years before Christ, and he possessed this very thing. And may not we possess it who live nearly two thousand years after the great atoning work has been done?

Abel died; but in the case of Enoch, the next on the list, translation took place and he never saw death. And further he had the testimony, not merely of being right with God, but of pleasing God. In this connection we are reminded that without faith we cannot please God at all. Faith is the root out of which spring all those fruits that delight Him: just as in 1 Timothy 6: 10, by way of contrast, money is said to be a root out of which every kind of evil springs.

In the case of Noah we see faith which saved from judgment and condemned the world. When warned of coming judgment he took God at His word. When instructed to build the ark he yielded the obedience of faith. Thereby he was separated from the world. He received righteousness and reached God through sacrifice in the renewed earth, while the world was cut off in judgment.

The case of Abraham occupies verses 8 to 19, with the exception of one verse which is occupied with Sarah, for had she not been a woman of faith Isaac, the promised seed, had never been born. Abraham's faith was so exceptional that the Apostle Paul speaks of him as "the father of all them that

believe" (Rom. 4: 11); so it is not surprising that in this chapter more is said as to him than of any other individual. What is said seems to fall under three heads. First, the faith that led him to respond to the call of God at the outset. He started forth from a city of civilization and culture without knowing where he was going. When he did know it proved to be a land of less culture than the one he had left. Yet all this mattered not. Canaan was the inheritance God had chosen for him, and he moved at the call of God. GOD was before his soul. That is faith!

Second, when in the land of promise he had no actual possession therein. He sojourned there as a stranger and pilgrim, content to dwell in tents. Finally he died in the faith of the promises without ever receiving them. His course was indeed a most remarkable one; and what accounted for it? *Faith* — the faith that endows a man with spiritual eyesight. He not only desired a better and heavenly country, but he "*looked for*" a heavenly city far more enduring than Ur of the Chaldees. Verse 13 tells us that he *saw* the promises, though they were far *off as we count time*.

Third, his faith seemed to reach a climax and express itself most fully when he "offered up his only begotten son." Isaac was a child of resurrection even as to his natural birth: he became doubly so after this event. Yet the faith was the faith of Abraham, who reasoned that the God who could bring into the world a living child from parents who were physically dead, could and would raise him from the dead. When Abraham believed in the Lord and He counted it to him as righteousness, as Genesis 15: 6 tells us, he believed in a God who could raise the dead, as the end of Romans 4 shows. The offering up of Isaac demonstrated this faith of his in the clearest fashion. It was the special work in which his faith wrought, as the latter part of James 2 declares.

After Abraham we find Isaac, Jacob and Joseph mentioned. In each case of the three only one detail in their lives is mentioned, and in two cases out of the three that detail is the closing one. Reading Genesis we should hardly recognize any faith at all in the blessing that Isaac bestowed upon his sons, and we might not see much in the way Jacob blessed his grandsons; yet the keen eye of the Spirit of God discerned it, and He notes it for our encouragement. If He had not a keen eye like this, would He discern faith in the details of our lives? We may well ask ourselves this.

The case of Joseph is more distinct. Egypt was the land of his glory, but he knew by faith that Canaan was to be the land of Messiah's glory, so he commanded that ultimately his bones were to rest not in Egypt but in Canaan.

Verse 23 speaks of the faith of Moses' parents rather than of Moses himself. The faith of Moses occupies verses 24 to 28. The first great display of it was when he refused to continue any longer in the splendid circumstances into which the providence of God had brought him. Faced with the alternative of suffering along with the people of God or enjoying the temporary pleasures of sin, he deliberately chose the former. He cast in his lot with the people of God, though he knew that, being at that moment just down-trodden slaves, it meant reproach for him. Indeed he esteemed that reproach as treasure, even greater than the treasures of Egypt, and how great those treasures were recent discoveries have reminded us. The reproach Moses endured was in character the reproach of Christ, inasmuch as it was a faint foreshadowing of the infinitely greater stoop of Christ when He came down from heaven and identified Himself with a poor and repentant people on earth, as we see for instance in Matthew 3: 13-27.

We saw that in the case of Abraham faith acted like a telescope, bringing into his view things that otherwise he had never seen. We now discover that in the case of Moses it acted like an X-ray apparatus, bringing to light things that lay beneath the surface and enabling him to see through the tinsel glory of Egypt. In this way he got down to the real root of things, and he found that "the

recompense of the reward" was the only thing worth considering. It was evidently this that governed him in the whole of his remarkable career.

Having a view of the divine recompense he was able to form a correct estimate of Egypt's treasures and he ranked them far below the reproach of Christ. If Egypt's glory is not to be compared to the *reproach* of Christ, how will it look in comparison with the *glory* of Christ? Faith's penetrating sight led to faith's estimation, and this in its turn led to faith's choice and faith's refusal.

From Moses we pass on to the people of Israel in verse 29 and to Joshua — though he is not named — in verse 30, and we reach Rahab, a Gentile, one of an accursed race, in verse 31. Had it not been for this verse we might never have discerned that faith was the root of her actions and words. Reading Joshua 2 we might have supposed that she was a woman of poor morals and no principle, who was anxious to escape her doom. But the fact was that her eyes had been opened to see *God*. The Canaanites merely saw Israel. "*Your* terror is fallen upon us," said she, "all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you." (Josh. 2: 9). Her attitude however was this: — "I know that *the Lord* hath given you the land." This was faith; and her actions expressed the fact that she dared to side with the God of Israel. This courageous faith did not mean suffering for her since God was at once intervening in power.

Usually, however, God does not intervene at once and then suffering is entailed. So after the mention of Rahab we have a list of names in verse 32 and a further recital of the triumphs of faith and then especially of the sufferings of faith. Multitudes of saints, of whom the world was not worthy, have been through every conceivable form of persecution and suffering. They endured, not accepting deliverance which might have reached them had they recanted or compromised. Faith suffered, but it carried them through.

Verse 39 brings us back to the point from which in verse 2 we started. They obtained a good report when their "term time" was over. They emerged "the finished article," from God's school. An intimation of the recompense that awaits them in the great "prize-giving day" is furnished by the statement that although they suffered at the world's hands, the world was not worthy of them. They were infinitely its superior.

And yet they, one and all, did not receive the things promised. In due time, according to God's wise plan, another company was to be gathered and constituted, spoken of as "us" in the last verse of our chapter. Note the contrast between the "they" and the "us" — between Old Testament and New Testament saints. The saints of old days had much, but "some better thing" is provided for Christians, and we shall all reach final perfection in glory together. The perfecting in glory of Old Testament believers waits for the completion of the church and the coming of the Lord.

This verse makes it abundantly plain that God's people are found in more families than one. The saints of Old Testament times form one family; Christians form another. Saints of the coming age, when the church has been removed, will form a third. We find different companies distinguished in such passages as Revelation 4: 4; Revelation 7: 3-8; Revelation 7: 9-17; Revelation 14: 1-5; Revelation 19: 7, 9. Much depends upon the revelation of God, in the light of which we live, and upon the purpose of God in regard to us, according to which is the calling wherewith we are called. Here however, the contrast is between that which God purposed for the saints who lived *before* Christ came, and for those whose great privilege is it to live *after*.

In Christianity the "better thing" has come to light. Indeed the word "better" is characteristic of this epistle, since, as we have seen, the great point of it is to show that proper Christianity wholly transcends Judaism. Already we have had before us, a *BETTER* Apostle, Priest, hope, covenant,

promises, sacrifice, substance, country and resurrection. Run over the chapters and note these things for yourselves.

## Hebrews 12

THE OPENING WORDS of chapter 12 bring us face to face with the application to ourselves of all that has preceded in chapter 11. All these Old Testament heroes of faith are so many witnesses to us of its virtue and energy. They urge us on that we may run the race of faith in our day, even as they did in days before ours.

In 1 Corinthians 9 Christian service is spoken of under the figure of a race; here Christian life is the point in question. It is a figure very much to the point since a race requires energy, concentration, endurance. So here the exhortation is, "let us run with patience," and patience has the sense of *endurance*. The normal Christian life is not like a brief sprint of 100 yards, but rather like a long distance race in which endurance is the decisive factor.

In this matter of endurance there were disquieting symptoms manifested amongst these Hebrew believers, as the latter part of Hebrews 10 has shown us. Verse 36 of that chapter begins, "For ye have need of patience." Then faith is mentioned as the energizing principle of Christian life, and this is followed by the long dissertation on faith in chapter 11. Thus Hebrews 11 is a kind of parenthesis, and in the words we are considering in the first verse of Hebrews 12 we are back again on what we may call the main line of the exhortation.

We can only run the race with patience if we lay aside every weight and the sin which entangles. Sin is a very effectual hindrance. It is likened to an obstacle which entangles our feet so that we fall. In the first place however weights are mentioned, as though they were after all the greater hindrance. Many things which could by no means be classified as sins prove themselves to be weights to an earnest Christian; just as there are many things quite right, and allowable to the ordinary individual, which are wholly discarded by the athlete. He strips himself of everything which would impede his progress to the goal. And every Christian should consider himself a spiritual athlete, as 2 Timothy 2: 5 also shows.

We have heard Hebrews 11 spoken of as "the picture gallery of faith," and the opening words of the second verse of our chapter as setting before us "the great Master-piece which we find at the end of it." As we walk down the gallery we can well admire the portraits that we see, but the Master-piece puts all the others into the background. No other than JESUS is the Author — i.e., the beginner, originator, leader — and Finisher of faith. The others displayed certain features of faith; flashes of it were seen at different points of their career. In Him a full-orbed faith was seen, and seen all the time from start to finish. The little word "our" in the A.V. is in italics you notice, since there is no such word in the original, and here it only obscures the sense.

The One who was the perfect exemplification of faith is set before us as our goal, and as the Object commanding our faith. In this we have an immense advantage over all the worthies mentioned in Hebrews 11, for they lived in a day when no such Object could be known. We have noticed that faith is the eye, or the telescope, of the soul; that it is faith that *sees*. Well, here faith looks to Jesus. If He fills the vision of our souls we shall find in Him the motive energy that we need for the running of the race.

Moreover He is our Example. Every kind of obstacle confronted Him when He trod on earth the path of faith. There was not only the contradiction of sinners to be faced but also the cross, with all the

shame that it entailed. The shame of the cross was a small thing to Him: He despised it. But who shall tell what was involved in the cross itself? Some of us used to sing,

*The depth of all Thy suffering  
No heart could e'er conceive,  
The cup of wrath o'erflowing  
For us thou didst receive  
And oh! of God forsaken  
On the accursed tree:  
With grateful hearts, Lord Jesus,  
We now remember Thee.*

Yet though we cannot conceive all that the cross meant to Him, this we know, that He *endured it*.

In *the* enduring of these sufferings for sin the Lord Jesus stands absolutely alone, and it is impossible to speak of Him as an Example. In the lesser sufferings which came upon Him through men He is an Example to us, for in one way or another we suffer as following Him. He went to the extreme limit, resisting unto blood rather than turning aside from the will of God. The Hebrews had not been called to martyrdom up to the time of the writing of this epistle, nor have we been up to today; still we need to consider Him.

In this connection another thing has to be taken into account. We are so apt to consider suffering as something in the nature of a very awkward liability — as being all loss. But it is not this. It may rather be written down on the profit side of the account, since God takes it up and weaves it into His scheme of things, using it for our training. This thought fills verses 5 to 11 of our chapter.

Three words are used in this passage: — chastening, rebuking, scourging. The last does of course mean a whipping, and the second means a reproof. But the first, though it may sometimes be used for a beating, primarily means discipline in the sense of child-training; and it is worthy of note that, whereas each of the other two words is used but once in these verses, this one is used no less than eight times. This then is the predominant thought of the passage. We ARE children of God and hence we come under His training, and must not forget the exhortation addressed to us in that capacity.

The exhortation quoted comes from the third chapter of Proverbs. Turn up the passage and you will see how Solomon addresses the reader as, "my son." Here however it is assumed to be the voice of God Himself addressing us, just as again and again in the first chapter of our epistle we had the words, "He saith," introducing a quotation of Old Testament Scripture. We might say perhaps that it is the voice of the Spirit of God, for later in the Epistle we have had such expressions as, "The Holy Ghost saith," "The Holy Ghost this signifying," "The Holy Ghost is a Witness to us." The point however is this, that what looks like being but the advice of a Solomon to his son is assumed by the New Testament to be the Word of God to us.

We are then to take this chastening from the hand of God as being the normal thing. It is a proof to us that we are His children. Hence when we come under His chastening we are neither to despise it nor to faint under it, but to be exercised by it, as verse 11 tells us. If we are naturally lighthearted and optimistic, our tendency will be to disregard the troubles, through which God may see fit to pass us. We put a bold face on and laugh things off, and do not recognize the hand of God in them at all. In so doing we despise His chastening. If, on the other hand, we are naturally pessimistic and easily

depressed, our spirits faint under quite small troubles and our faith seems to fail us. This is going to the opposite extreme, but equally with the other it means the losing of all the profit, into which our troubles were designed to lead us.

The great thing is to be *exercised* by our troubles. Chastening means trouble, for we are plainly told that "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." And exercise means that we turn our troubles into a sort of spiritual gymnasium; for the Greek word used here is the one from which we have derived our English word, gymnasium. Gymnastics for the body have in them some profit, as 1 Timothy 4: 8 tells us. Gymnastics for our spirits have in them great spiritual profit in the direction of both holiness and righteousness. By them we become partakers of the very holiness of God Himself; and we are led into paths of righteousness. Righteousness itself bears fruit which is peaceable, even though the disciplinary process, through which we passed in order to reach it, was of a stormy nature.

The tendency with the Hebrews evidently was to faint under their troubles, hence in verse 12 comes the exhortation, in the light of these facts about God's chastening, to renewed energy in the race. Observe those runners at the start of a Marathon race. Their arms are firmly lifted by their sides: their step is elastic, and their knees strong. Now look at them as they approach the finish an hour or two later. Most of them have run themselves out. Their hands hang down and their knees tremble, as doggedly they stumble on.

"Wherefore lift up . . ." We are to renew our energies just because we know what God's discipline is designed to effect. We might have imagined that to talk to a poor feeble stumbling believer about God's chastening would be just the thing to cast him down, whereas it is just the thing, if rightly understood, to lift him up. What can be more encouraging than to discover that all God's dealings have as their object the promotion of holiness and righteousness, and also our being preserved from the sin and the weights which would impede our progress in the race?

Moreover we are to consider the welfare of others and not merely our own. Verses 13 to 17 turn our thoughts in this direction; and two classes are spoken of — the lame and the profane. By the former we understand believers who are weak in faith; and by the latter those who may have made a profession and come amongst Christians, but all the while they really prefer the world. Verses 16 and 17, in fact, contemplate just that class that already has been alluded to in this Epistle — Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10 — who cannot be renewed to repentance, and who have nothing but judgment in prospect. Esau is the great Old Testament example of such, and Judas Iscariot is the example in the New.

We need to watch against those profane people lest they damage others beside themselves, by becoming roots of bitterness. If we read John 12: 1-8, we may see how very easily Judas might have become a root of bitterness, had not the Lord at once intervened. Those who are spoken of as lame need however very different treatment. We should aim at the healing of such and take every care that straight paths are set before them. We all need these straight paths, and we are to *make* them. There are some, alas! who seem to find a joy in making things as difficult and complicated as possible, whereas the path of righteousness and holiness is ever a very straight and simple one. And all this we are to do because we are come, not to the order of things connected with the law, but to that connected with grace.

The two systems are summed up for us in verses 18 to 24 — Sinai on the one hand and Sion on the other. Now the forefathers of these Hebrews had come to Sinai, and the Hebrews themselves, before their conversion, had come to it in this sense; that it was to God, known according to the display of Himself at Sinai, that they came, when they drew near to Him, as far as they might do so in those days.

But now all was changed, and in drawing near to God in the wonderfully intimate way which the Gospel permits, they came upon another ground, and in connection with another order of things entirely. Mount Sion had become symbolic of grace just as Sinai had become symbolic of law; so that believing the Gospel, and standing in the grace of God, we may be said to have come to Sion.

It is not easy to see the connection between all the things mentioned in verses 22 to 24, but it may help us to notice that the little word "and" divides the different items the one from the other. Hence for instance, it is the innumerable company of angels which is spoken of as "the general assembly," and not the church which is mentioned immediately following.

We are regarded here as being under the new covenant, and hence as having come to all that which is clearly revealed in connection with it. Eight things are mentioned, and each is stated in a way calculated to bring home their superiority, as compared with the things which the Hebrews knew in connection with the law.

The Jew could boast in the earthly Jerusalem, which was intended to be the centre of Divine rule on the earth: but we have come to the heavenly city whence God's rule will extend over heaven as well as earth. The Jew knew that angels had served in the giving of the law: but we have come to the universal gathering of the angels in their myriads, all of them the servants of God and of His saints. Israel was God's assembly in the wilderness and in the land: but we belong to His assembly of firstborn ones whose names are written in heaven. A heavenly citizenship is ours.

So too, Moses had told Israel that, "The Lord shall judge His people" (Deut. 32: 36): but we have come to God as the Judge of all — a vastly greater thing. The old order dealt with just men living on the earth: we have come to the same, but as made perfect in glory. Lastly, for us it is not Moses the mediator of the law covenant, and the blood of bulls and of goats, but Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and His precious blood of infinite value.

To all this have we come in *faith*, and we await the hour of manifestation which is surely drawing nigh. Israel came to Sinai in a visible way and were greatly affrighted. Our coming in faith to Sion, and all connected therewith, is no less real, and in coming we are greatly comforted and established.

Yet there is a serious side to this matter, inasmuch as it adds great emphasis and solemnity to all that God says to us today. He spoke in time past to the fathers through Moses and the prophets, but now He has spoken from heaven. The fact that He has now spoken in His Son, making known to us His grace, does not lessen the solemnity of His utterance but rather increases it, as we saw when reading the second and third verses of Hebrews 2.

If we turn away from His heavenly voice we certainly shall not escape. At Sinai He spoke, formulating His demands upon men, and then His voice shook the earth. Now He has spoken in the riches of His mercy. But in the days between these two occasions He spoke through Haggai the prophet, announcing His determination to shake not only the earth but the heavens also. He will in fact so shake that everything that can be shaken will be shaken. Only the unshakeable things will remain. Our God — the Christian's God — is a consuming fire, and everything that is unsuited to Him will be devoured in His judgment.

Can we contemplate that day with calmness of spirit? Indeed we can. The feeblest believer is entitled to do so, for we receive, one and all, a kingdom which cannot be shaken. And just because we have an immovable kingdom we are to have grace to serve God with reverence and true piety. Let us all take it to heart that reverence becomes us in our attitude towards God, even though He has brought us into such nearness to Himself. Indeed it becomes us *because* we are brought into such nearness.

Also let us take note that we are exhorted to serve God acceptably, not in order to have the kingdom made sure to us, but because we have received it, and it never can be moved. The very certainty of it, far from making us careless, only incites us to serve.

## Hebrews 13

THE FIRST VERSE of our chapter is very short but very important. The word *continue* is virtually the same as the word *remain*, which closes verse 27 of the previous chapter. Only the things which cannot be shaken are going to remain when the great day of shaking arrives; then, let brotherly love remain amongst the saints of God today. It is one of the things which will remain unshaken in eternity.

Let us recall that in the early part of the epistle believers are spoken of as the "many sons" being brought "unto glory." Christ was seen to be "the Captain of their salvation," who is "not ashamed to call them brethren." Hence most evidently Christians are brethren, and the love existing between them, the fruit of the new nature divinely implanted, is to be cultivated. In fostering it we shall not be like children building a sandcastle to be washed away by the next tide, but like those who build for eternity.

Verses 2 and 3 indicate two directions in which brotherly love is to express itself. First, in hospitality; that is, in the love of strangers. The world is usually prepared to receive those they esteem as important or influential, and thus to do honour to the distinguished guest. We are bidden to rise above merely worldly motives and to receive brethren unknown to us simply because they *are* brethren. This is true brotherly love in manifestation: a manifestation all too often but very little seen in our land. Second, it is to come out in the remembrance of brethren in adversity, particularly of those suffering imprisonment.

The word, remember, means to recollect in an active way; not merely to call to mind, but to do so with active sympathy. If one member suffer all the members suffer with it, we are told elsewhere; and what we find here is in keeping with that fact. True brotherly love would lead us so to remember all such sufferers as to sympathetically support and succour them, as far as we are able.

In verse 4 natural love is in question, and that in the world has been sadly perverted and marred. By Christians it is to be preserved intact as a sanctified thing, which originated in God. In verse 5 another "love" comes before us — the love of money. The Christian's manner of life is to be characterized as being without this altogether, since this is a love which never originated in God at all. Only when man had become a fallen creature did he lose all love for God and enthrone in his heart earthly objects, and more particularly the money which enabled him to pursue them.

The word for us is, be content with "such things as ye have," or, "your present circumstances." A very searching word it is too! The world is filled with covetousness as much as ever, perhaps more than ever. God is not in all its thoughts, which are concentrated upon material gain. Out of this spring all the strifes. Envy, jealousies, heart-burnings, quarrellings are everywhere! Oh, let us so live as to present a very definite contrast to all this! May it be manifest to all that we are actuated by another love than the love of money!

"But," it may be said, "in these days of competition we must bend all our energies to the making of money, else we shall not long retain such things as we have, but shall sink into poverty." The answer to this thought is however immediately anticipated in these verses. We have the definite promise of His unfailing presence and support; consequently we may boldly count upon the Lord for all our needs, and have no fear of man.

There are two points of great interest about verses 5 and 6. The first concerns the way in which the Old Testament Scripture is quoted. It was to Joshua that the Lord said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." We might very properly say to ourselves, "But I am no Joshua. He was a very eminent man of faith, and I am a very insignificant and often a very feeble believer. Would it not be a rather forward and impertinent thing for me to calmly assume that a promise made to him is equally valid for me?" It is delightful to discover from these verses that such an application of this ancient promise is not the boldness of presumption but the boldness of faith. The fact is, of course, that what God is, He is towards His people in all time and circumstances. There is no variableness nor shadow of turning with Him. He will not be less towards His people in this dispensation than He was in a past dispensation. We may wholly count upon Him.

The Christian poetess has said,

*"They that trust Him wholly,  
Find Him wholly true."*

This of course is so, but it is well when quoting these happy words to lay the stress on the *word*, *find*; since it is equally a fact that He is wholly *true* to those who do not *trust* Him wholly. Their defective faith will never provoke Him to defective faithfulness. No! But their defective faith will obscure their view of His faithfulness, and possibly they may never FIND Him wholly true, — never really wake up to it, as a realized and enjoyed thing — until they discover it in glory.

The second point of interest is not so much the application of this Old Testament text but rather the reasoning which is based upon it. The skeleton outline of the reasoning runs thus, "He hath said . . . so that we may boldly say . . ." If God speaks we may accept what He says with all confidence. More than this, we may assert what He asserts with all boldness. And we may do even more than this. For if He asserts things concerning Himself in regard to His people, we may, since we are of His people, assert these things boldly *as applying to ourselves*. Indeed we may take it home with all confidence as applying to each individually; even as here we read, "The Lord is MY Helper, I will not fear." In our reading of Scripture let us form the happy habit of thus applying the words of God to ourselves.

Before leaving the first six verses let us notice the *simplicity* which is here enjoined upon believers; a simplicity all too much lost in these days of civilized artificiality. How striking a testimony would be rendered if we were marked by that brotherly love which expresses itself in hospitality and practical sympathy, by natural love preserved in undefiled honour, and by a holy contentment, the fruit of the realized presence of God, and the very opposite of the mad covetousness and discontent of the world.

The seventh verse bids us remember those who are guides or leaders, having ministered the word of God. To be a leader one needs not only to minister the word but to practise it. When this is the case faith is made evident and the "end" or "issue" of their conduct can be seen, and we can safely be exhorted to imitate their faith. Their faith, be it observed. It is all too easy to start imitating the speech and ways and idiosyncrasies of those we look up to. But if we imitate anything let it be the faith which underlies and inspires all else about them.

In verse 8 also our thoughts are carried back to the things with which we started in Hebrews 1. There we discovered that the words occurring in Psalm 102, "Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail," were not addressed to God in a general way, but specifically to the One whom we know as our Lord Jesus Christ. This thought is amplified in the great statement that He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Of whom could such a statement be made but of One who was and is God?

Now just because the One in whom our faith centres is the same, there must be a certain kind of sameness in all the truth that also centres in Him. He can never be the Centre and Theme of doctrines which are various and strange. There is no place for that unsatisfied restlessness of the human mind that is for ever running after notions, however contradictory they may be. Now the real knowledge of Jesus establishes the heart with grace, and mere variety and novelty cease to attract. The danger immediately threatening the Hebrews was the importation of strange doctrines from their own former religion, as is indicated by the allusion to "meats."

A certain proportion of the meats consumed by the Jews reached them through their sacrifices. Leviticus 7 shows us that not only the priests, but also in some cases those who offered were privileged to eat parts of the things offered: that is, they ate of the altar. How often must unbelieving Jews have flung the taunt at their believing brethren that they now had no altar in which to claim their share! But the fact is, "We have an altar"! And of the Christian's altar the proud orthodox Jew had no right to eat, having shut himself out by his own unbelief.

What is the Christian altar, and where is it to be found? "Come to us," say the Romanists, "and in our high altars, ornamented with crucifix and candles, where mass is daily said, you will find it." And so also, though with slight variations, say Greek and Anglo-Catholics. But what says the Scripture? It says, "We have an altar, . . . for . . . Jesus also, . . . suffered without the gate." Patriarchal and Jewish altars — the only altars made by hands that ever were sanctioned by God — where just types of the death of Christ. We eat of that Altar, inasmuch as every bit of spiritual blessing that we are able to appropriate comes to us from thence. We eat His flesh and drink His blood, according to our Lord's own words in John 6; and in this there is no allusion to the Lord's supper, but rather to a spiritual appropriation of His death. Just as Baptism sets forth in figure our burial with Christ, so the Lord's supper sets forth in figure this spiritual appropriation: that is all.

In the death of Christ, then, we have our Altar; but in His death we have also the antitype of the sin offering. According to Leviticus 4, if the sin in question was of such a nature as to involve the whole congregation, then the blood of the offering had to be carried into the holy place and sprinkled before the veil, and the carcase of the animal had to be burned without the camp. Our Lord Jesus has taken up the whole question of sin in all its gravity. His blood has spoken in the fulness of its virtue in the immediate presence of God, and, true to the type, He died as the rejected One outside the gate of that very city which was the crown and glory of man's religion. We are glad to be identified with the virtue of His blood before God; are we as glad to be identified with Him in His place of rejection without the camp? Except we have come powerfully under the attraction of His love, we are not!

Verse 11 gives us the type. Verse 12 gives us the fulfilment of the type, in Jesus suffering without the gate of Jerusalem. Verse 13 gives us the exhortation based upon it, but using again the language of the type. We are not exhorted to go without the city, for here we have no continuing city as verse 14 reminds us, but to go without the camp. To the believer the world has become a wilderness.

Moreover, had the exhortation been, "Go forth . . . without the city," the words might have had a merely political significance to these early Hebrews. As a matter of fact, when a few years later Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, the Christians had almost to a man fled the city; but that was not the point here. The *camp* was Israel viewed religiously, Israel grouped around the Tabernacle according to the divine order. The call to these Hebrews was to go outside the religious system of Judaism, and thus to take up the reproach of Christ. Only one thing could induce them to obey this call, and that the love of Him. "Let us go forth therefore UNTO HIM."

If we attentively read the Acts we become aware that the mass of believing Jews by no means

broke their links with Judaism. They thought now to proceed with Christ AND Judaism. With many indeed it was a case of Judaism and Christ; for the outstanding feature with them was, "they are all zealous of *the law*," rather than zealous for Christ. When this epistle was penned the hour had struck for a decisive move. It could no longer be Christ and Judaism. It had to be Christ OR Judaism. If they wanted CHRIST, then outside the camp to HIM they must go.

A few years passed and in the fall of Jerusalem the very heart of Judaism disappeared. Temple, altars, sacrifices, priests, all were swept away. The camp strictly speaking had gone. Are we to suppose that therefore this exhortation had lost all its force? By no means, for the Jews carried on some resemblance of their religion by means of Synagogues and Rabbis, and have done so to this day. They still have a camp of a sort, though not the camp as originally instituted of God. When a Jew is converted today, this exhortation without a question calls him out of his Judaism unto the rejected Christ as effectively as ever.

And what of that sad travesty of primitive Christianity which today is called Christendom? It has almost entirely organized itself after the pattern of the Jewish camp. It boasts its priests, its worldly sanctuaries and often its sacrifices. It rests upon a worldly basis and frequently encourages alliance with the world. Has this exhortation no voice to us in connection with this? Is it likely that God would begin by calling His people out of a religious system that He had originated Himself, and then end by expecting them to remain within religious systems which He never instituted, but which were created through long ages of unfaithfulness and decay? What a reviving we should see if every Christian really heard the cry, "Unto HIM without the camp," *and obeyed it!*

Doubtless there are a thousand reasons against our obeying it. Here is one, "We should be isolating ourselves. It would be a dull and miserable business." Would it? Why then does verse 15 go on to speak of praise and thanksgiving? Those who have gone forth to Christ without the camp are filled with praise and thanksgiving! They offer it by Him, for He is their High Priest, and they are exhorted to offer it continually. The Jewish camp had the silver trumpets and the high sounding cymbals without a doubt. But what were they worth? Christendom's camp has, without a question, magnificent organs and orchestras and lovely choirs. But what about, "the fruit of lips, confessing His name"? That is another matter, and that is the thing that counts!

Here is another objection, "We should be sacrificing all our opportunities of doing good." Should we? Why then does verse 16 speak of our doing good? The fact is that unlimited opportunities for doing real GOOD lie before those who are obedient, and instead of sacrificing their opportunities, they offer real sacrifice in doing good.

Again it may be said, "If you go outside the camp it will be all disorder and confusion." What then about verse 17? These Hebrews, though coming outside the camp, would have leaders or guides, raised up of God, who would watch over them for their souls good. To such it would be a pleasure to submit. This does not look like disorder but rather the reverse.

Yet once more, it may be said, "But we need the outward framework of organization that the camp supplies. Without hurdles the sheep will always be straying." But look at verses 20 and 21. Long before this, as recorded in John 10, the Lord Jesus had spoken of Himself as the Shepherd who had entered the Jewish fold in order that He might call His own sheep by name and *lead them out*. Now he is presented to us as the great Shepherd of the sheep, raised again from the dead by the God of peace. In going forth unto Him they were but leaving the fold finally and for ever, in order to come altogether under His authority and His shepherd care. They were coming to Him by whom they could be made perfect in every good work to do the will of God.

All this stands as true for us today as for the Hebrew believers of the first century. If we have gone forth to Him, who is our risen Shepherd, we have come to a place where Psalm 23 applies, with a fulness of meaning that David himself could never have known. Instead of knowing want we shall be like sheep who lie down in green pastures, because abundantly satisfied.

On this note the Epistle ends. The writer speaks of it as "a word of exhortation," and such indeed it is. It is also "a letter . . . in few words." Though only two epistles exceed it in length yet it is indeed "in a few words" if we consider the magnitude and scope of its contents. If we have really taken in these "few words" we shall have received some knowledge of things which are so great that all eternity will not exhaust them.