

Things "We have" as seen in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

G. Davison

Jan-Aug 1969

The Epistle to the Hebrews is the only inspired writing in the New Testament which does not carry with it the name of the vessel whom the Holy Spirit of God uses to pen it. Yet, it seems to be clear to Bible students that the writer was the Apostle Paul. It has been thought that the reason he does not add his name to it was on account of his being more particularly the apostle to the Gentiles. Be that as it may — and we think it may be so — where could a more suitable vessel be found to pen these stupendous truths? Paul, like those to whom he wrote, had known the experience of accepting Jesus to be the Christ. This had the effect of leading them further and further into the full light in which God was now revealed, and consequently further and further out of the semi-darkness of Judaism. We must remember that Judaism was a divine system, having as its objective service to the *only* true God, and was not marked by the gross darkness of the idolatrous Gentiles. That is why we refer to it as semi-darkness. God was not yet fully revealed, hence the veils on the face of Moses and in both the tabernacle and the temple.

Prior to their having believed the gospel, these Hebrew Christians had been connected with a divine system which was earthly, material, and though unknown to them at that time, temporal; but by the obedience of faith they had been brought by the work of the Holy Spirit into another divine system which was heavenly, spiritual, and in a large measure, eternal. Who then was more able to write to them on this subject than the apostle Paul, who as the erstwhile Saul of Tarsus was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee" until he was apprehended by that great light from heaven and the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ which called him into instant subjection? It was thus he was brought out of Judaism into Christianity, from the shadow to the substance, although he had yet much to learn concerning this great fact. Nothing less than a vision of this magnitude would have caused this proud Pharisee to bow and own Jesus as his Lord. We believe he was the vessel used by the Holy Spirit to pen these truths as one who had a sympathetic understanding of the conditions of those to whom he wrote.

One other outstanding feature of this epistle worthy of note is the great stress laid upon the effects of faith. As we have noted, these Hebrews had been connected with a material system of things which was in action before their *eyes*, while now they were living in relation to God in an order of things which was *unseen* to natural eyes, yet very real to their souls by the Holy Spirit. Whatever they appeared to have lost on the earthly side, heavenly and spiritual things were now their portion. In that great account of faith in Hebrews 11, three outstanding effects of faith are set before them. It enables one to believe the *incredible* as witnessed by Noah (v. 7); to effect the *impossible* as witnessed by Abraham (v. 12); to see the *invisible* as witnessed by Moses (v. 27).

It is apparent that this epistle was written to encourage them to go on in the pathway of faith. Whatever they appeared to have lost through leaving the system where Christ had been refused, the apostle is used by the Spirit to remind them of seven advantages they had gained by accepting Jesus as the Christ and as their Lord. Hence seven times in this epistle we meet with the expression "we have," and it is these seven heavenly blessings we have in mind to call attention to. We do not suggest that these seven heavenly advantages were true for those Hebrew Christians only; in the mercy of God they are true of every saint of God today.

There are many heavenly assets referred to in this Epistle but it is those carrying the term "we

have" which we desire to bring to the notice of the saints. The first is as follows: -

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4: 14-16.

There is an interesting thought brought to light in this reference to the Great High Priest which is worthy of note. A *high* priest is a relative term, involving others of lesser degree, yet in this Epistle the saints are never referred to as priests. The reason would appear to be that their attention should be concentrated on the One who represents them in the presence of God, rather than an explanation of their privileges as priests. Peter is the vessel used by the Spirit to bring before the saints the truth of their being priests, yet he on the other hand never refers to our Lord as being High Priest. Here in Hebrews attention is directed to the One who is now in the presence of God on their account, thus demonstrating the greatness of the new, heavenly, spiritual sphere into which they had been brought. The term High Priest doubtless stands in contrast to Aaron, whom they knew as the appointed high priest in the typical system, but Aaron was never termed "*great*". The reason for this is crystal clear in the very passage we are considering. They were reminded that their "*Great High Priest*" is "Jesus the Son of God."

The apostle was led by the Spirit to bring this great fact to their notice in view of their need of encouragement to "hold fast" their profession — a word better rendered "confession." The word "profession" refers more to their lips than to their lives, important as that is. They had publicly *confessed* their faith in the fact that Jesus was the Christ. This had cut them off from any benefits before obtained in the service connected with the temple, but in rich compensation they were brought into greater benefits as in the heavenly and spiritual sphere into which faith in the Lord Jesus had brought them.

Their "Great High Priest," who was now in the presence of God in heaven, had once walked this earth in perfect subject Manhood, and had experienced all the cares and trials of the pathway apart from sin. Hence His ability to sympathize with them in the pathway of faith into which they had now been brought. Scorn, ridicule and all they were subject to from the nation had been borne by Jesus when He, in this world, had suffered the same things as witnessing to the truth and standing for the rights of God. Who could have a better understanding of their needs than the One who had suffered the same things Himself? The word translated here as "infirmities" is elsewhere translated as "sickness" and "weakness." Whatever the translation it appears to convey the thought of one needing help from another. It is the same word used of our Lord — "crucified through weakness," and although sickness was never recorded of Him yet having suffered the bodily anguish of the cross, how fully He would know what His saints would stand in need of when sickness was allowed to come upon them. "In all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

In view of this wonderful provision the saints are encouraged to draw near to the throne of grace, seeking help in any time of need. What an encouragement for us that, as the fruit of what Christ has done, the throne of God is now to the saints a "throne of grace." Mercy would be the power to lift us above the trial, and grace the encouragement to go on in the path of faith. What the Spirit would have them note was that this help came "in time of need." Mercy and grace were needed by them, as also by us, as in wilderness conditions so far as this world is concerned.

Three things are attributed to the "Great High Priest" in these early chapters of this great Epistle.

In Hebrews 2: 18 "He is able to *succour*". In the section under our consideration He is "able to *sympathise*", (New Trans.). Then "He is able also to *save*," Hebrews 7: 25. Salvation has in view all the obstacles of this sinful world which would oppose the believer's progress as walking subject to the will of God. Thus these Hebrew Christians were encouraged to go on in the pathway of faith, assured that the One whom they had trusted had every resource in His hands to support them right to the end of the pathway.

May we also in our day avail ourselves of these resources, and so keep steadily moving on in the service of our God.

Following our brief meditation suggested by the term "we have" in Hebrews 4: 14-16, we turn now to Hebrews 6: 17-20. This is a most encouraging passage for all who have turned in faith to our Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." Hebrews 6: 17-20.

Amongst many interesting details in this remarkable passage there are four outstanding features to which we would call attention, two in relation to God and two as an answer to these in the saints. How astounding it is that our God not only declares His purpose to us, but graciously confirms it with an oath. The word "counsel" is really purpose. Who would know better than God of the need to strengthen the hearts of those who had turned from Judaism and had accepted Jesus as their Lord! In consequence they were suffering persecution and were pressed on every hand to abandon their faith and turn back again to Judaism? So the apostle was led to tell them that God not only had a purpose which was unchangeable, but had bound Himself with an oath to carry out that purpose which had their eternal blessing in view.

These two certainties were made known to them in order to confirm them in their souls. It was to give them "strong consolation" and "an anchor of the soul." The statement "fled for refuge" would probably carry their minds back either to Numbers 35 or Joshua 20 where Israel was given instructions to provide cities to which a manslayer could flee for refuge; an interesting study in line with this chapter in Hebrews. The apostle is not only used of the Spirit to assure them of this place of refuge, but also to assure them that in this place of refuge they were brought into a privilege far beyond Judaism, for it led them "inside the veil." How well we know that an anchor has safety in view. This is clearly seen in the only other place where anchors are mentioned — Acts 27. There they needed four because of the elements; but here one only is necessary where Jesus is — inside the veil.

The veils of old, whether on the face of Moses or in the tabernacle system, were to teach the people that God in holiness could not have His people in His presence so long as the outstanding question of sin and sins had not been settled. This question was raised once every year between God and His people on the great day of atonement, but the question could not be fully settled, as we read in this epistle, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should *take away* sins," Hebrews 10: 4. The word "atonement" indicates "to cover," not to *take away*. We do not doubt that both propitiation and substitution were there in type, but were never really effected for the glory of God and for the blessing of the people. *Now, as the result of the work of Christ*, both have been effected and reconciliation between God and man is the blessed result. All three are seen in another scripture —

"For Christ also has once suffered for sins' — propitiation - "the just for the unjust" — substitution - "that He might bring us to God" — reconciliation, 1 Peter 3: 18.

Another important point is in the fact of our Lord being referred to as "forerunner." This involves that they henceforth *belong to heaven*, seeing that their forerunner is there, "within the veil." The apostle had already assured them that they were called with a "heavenly calling" chapter 3: 1, and the One to whom this calling attached them was established in an order of priesthood greater than that of Aaron. Melchisedec was both King and Priest of the Most High God — the title by which God will be known in the world-to-come. Yet, ere the world-to-come with its display of glory was in evidence, they were linked with the One who had an unsuccessional, unending priesthood, One fully able to succour them in the pathway of faith as Melchisedec had succoured Abraham in his pilgrim pathway as he moved on to the realization of the promise of God. Thus they were encouraged and assured of the greater blessings they already possessed as having embraced Jesus as Lord, while awaiting His return to bring them into complete salvation as stated in Hebrews 9: 28.

Let us also be encouraged as enjoying the present favour of these precious possessions in Christ.

In pursuance of our subject regarding spiritual gains as outlined in this Epistle, our next reference is found in Hebrews 8.

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum; We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man. (Hebrews 8: 1, 2)

Turning to this chapter we need to note that there is now a change in the teaching so far as the truth of the priesthood of our Lord is concerned. Hebrews 1 - 7 present to us what is often called the wilderness side of the priesthood of our Lord as seen in a former reference to Hebrews 2, 4 and 7. This section beginning in Hebrews 8, and reaching on to Hebrews 10: 22, now presents our Lord as the sanctuary priest. As the wilderness priest He has a ministry manward, but as the sanctuary priest He has a ministry Godward. This we hope to shew as we proceed. Aaron was a type of this dual ministry as a reference to him will shew.

On the day of the consecration of Aaron and his sons we read that he was clothed in garments of glory and beauty, (Exodus 28). In these garments he bore the names of the children of Israel on both his shoulders and his breast. Six of their names were engraved on an onyx on one shoulder, and six on an onyx on his other shoulder according to their *birth*. On the breastplate their names were engraved on different stones, and this time according to their *tribes*. This in type suggested both the strength and the affections of the priest who represented them in the presence of God. While it does not appear that Aaron ever went into the presence of God in his official garments of glory and beauty, the type is there set forth. In answer to this we have pointed out previously that our Lord comes before us as the One who ministers succour, sympathy and salvation to us in times of need. We ever stand in need of this support while in wilderness conditions where we seek daily grace to move for the pleasure of God in the midst of a hostile world.

There is also another interesting feature connected with Aaron as a type of our Lord which we are apt to forget. Aaron did not have a set of *garments* only; he had a family of *sons*. In the garments we have typically set forth the truth of *representation*, but in his sons the truth of *association*. It is this line of truth which now begins in this section to which we are calling attention. These Hebrew Christians in their original order could never have known the privilege of association with the high priest of Judaism unless they had been born into the priestly family of Levi, but now they were to learn that they had the privilege of association with our Lord Jesus Christ in His greater priesthood which was both heavenly

and spiritual. This comes before us in our next reference to the subject we have in hand.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water, Hebrews 10: 19-22.

In this passage the thought of access into the presence of God comes clearly before us. What a wonderful place of privilege we are in as the fruit of what Christ has done and our acceptance of Him as our Saviour! In this great chapter where approach to God is the main theme, reference is made to the body of our Lord (verse 10); to His blood (v. 19); and to His flesh (v. 20). They all have a voice for us to encourage us to draw near to God. In the offering of the "body" of our Lord our sinful state has been dealt with. In the shedding of His "blood" our sins have been purged away; yet the One who gave His body and shed His precious blood abides a Man eternally at the right hand of God in heaven. "His flesh" refers to His Manhood, and is brought in here as replacing the veil of the tabernacle, for it is ever the tabernacle referred to as a type in this Epistle, never the temple. In His work upon the cross as an offering to God He has satisfied the claims of God and met our need as sinners. The result is, God can have us in His presence without infringing His righteousness and His holiness, and we being cleansed can approach into the presence of God with all fear removed from our hearts. Having been judicially cleansed by His blood and morally cleansed by His word, now in company with the Great High Priest (New Trans.) we can with Him draw near to God. We do well to heed the exhortation "Let us draw near." As in the tabernacle of old approach into the presence of God was through the veil, now it can only be through our Lord Jesus Christ. In His mediatorship He presents God to man, and in answer to this revelation presents man to God. Hence it is through Him — the veil — we have access to God as the true worshippers to worship God in spirit and in truth, and to us, God is known as Father.

Our final reference to what "we have" is found in Hebrews 13.

We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. (Hebrews 13: 10-14).

If these Hebrew Christians were to enjoy in full the blessing into which they had been brought, it involved taking a place outside of recognized Judaism where Christ had been rejected. It has often been stated that if they had the privilege of approaching God inside the veil as taught in chapter 10, it involved a place of reproach outside the camp as taught in Hebrews 13. Yet the exhortation here was not quite to go "without the camp" but to "go forth therefore unto HIM." For a Jew to leave Judaism purely to be outside of it would constitute apostasy, but to go out to Him who had been rejected by the camp was their Divine authority to follow Him. It meant leaving what was earthly, material and typical, for association with the Lord in what was heavenly, spiritual and in a large measure eternal, of which the first order was but a type. The first order which had its centre in the city of Jerusalem was about to pass away in any event (no doubt referred to in "no continuing city") but the new order into which they had now been brought is referred to as "heavenly Jerusalem," Hebrews 12: 22.

So we close these brief notes on a vast subject with a reminder of these two exhortations which we in our day still need to keep in mind. "Let us draw near," and "Let us go forth therefore unto HIM." Only as both are practically true of us are we able to enjoy the fullness of this wonderful blessing

which has been secured for us by the work of our Lord Jesus Christ when He died for us upon the cross.