

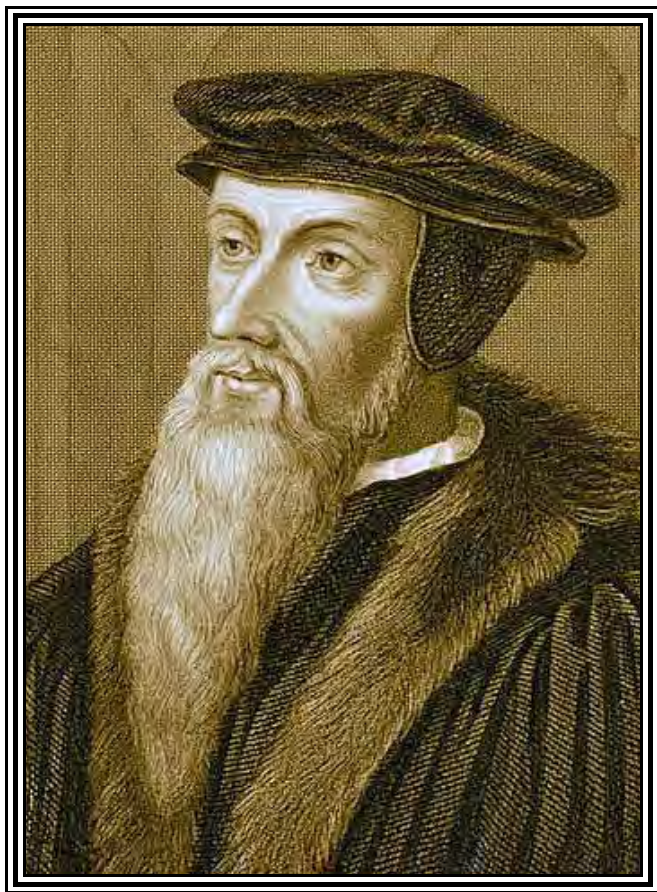
*“Title Page To Hebrews In 19<sup>th</sup> Century Luther Bible”*

# ***NOTES ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS***

## **1. Introduction**

The Epistle to the Hebrews is sadly one of the least familiar books of the New Testament. I say “*sadly*” because Hebrews is a document profound in substance and rich in significance. The book and its inclusion in the New Testament canon remains shrouded in obscurity and controversy. It was the latest of the twenty-seven books to be formally recognized the early church as a part of God’s Word. That may be a contributing factor in Hebrew’s dilemma. However, ultimately, every book of the Bible is self-authenticating in that it speaks with the inherent authority and power of God. In that regard, there is certainly no problem in regard to this Epistle. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran commentator Edmund J. Wolf correctly notes:

*“Its own contents evidence its inspiration. Nowhere are the main doctrines of the faith more purely and majestically set forth, nowhere in Holy Scripture*



**“John Calvin”**

*urged with greater authority and cogency, nowhere, in short, are those marks which distinguish the first rank of primitive church writings from the second and post-Apostolic more unequivocally and continuously present.” (Wolf, p. 238)*

Franz Delitsch, foremost German Lutheran commentator of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, expressed his admiration for the content of Hebrews in these most eloquent words:

*“There is nothing comparable to the Epistle to the Hebrews among the other epistles of the New Testament, resembling in this uniqueness of position, as well as in tone and spirit the great prophetic exhortation of Isaiah 40-46, which in a similar manner, stands along among the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. The tone of thought in both of these portions of Scripture has the same transcendental character, each has a*

*threefold division of its contents; the same majestic march and flow of language characterizes each, the same Easter morning breath from another world, and the same tranquilizing veil suspended before the eyes of the vexed inquirer, now half revealing now half concealing the origin and authorship of either composition. No other book of the New Testament is distinguished by such brilliant eloquence and euphonious rhythm as our epistle; and this rhetorical form is not superinduced upon the subject, but is its true expression, as setting forth the special glories of the new covenant and of a new and Christ transfigured world. Old and New Testaments are set the once against the other, the moonlight of the Old Testament paling once and again before the sunrise of the New, and the heavenly prospect thus illumined. The language is characterized throughout by conscious repose, dignified solemnity, and majestic quietude.” (Delitsch, I, p. 3)*

The reasons for the neglect of Hebrews may, however, be more subtle, than questions of isagogics. They may, indeed, have more to do with the spirit of the times than with the ancient epistle itself. Contemporary conservative scholar Phillip Edgecomb Hughes - a refugee from the Episcopal Church - contends that Hebrew's problems with much of the modern church are actually that fact that its admonitions hit too close to home and its profound substance is too much of a burden for those who have chosen to settle for “Christianity lite” made up of trivial superficialities rather than solid Biblical Truth.

*“If there is widespread unfamiliarity with the Epistle to the Hebrews and its teaching, it is because so many adherents of the church have settled for an undemanding and superficial association with the Christian faith. Yet, it was to arouse just such persons from the lethargic state of compromise and complacency into which they had sunk, and incite them to persevere wholeheartedly in the Christian conflict, that this letter was originally written. It is a tonic for the spiritually debilitated. The study of this Epistle leads us beneath the surface of things to the profound depths of our evangelical faith, and enriches and establishes our understanding of the grace of God manifested on our behalf in the incarnation, self-offering and exaltation of Him who is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. ‘There is indeed, no book in Holy Scripture,’ says Calvin in the Forward to his Commentary on Hebrews, ‘which speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ, so splendidly extols the power and worth of that unique sacrifice which He offered by His death, deals more adequately with the use and also the abrogation of the ceremonies, and, in short, explains more fully that Christ is the end of the Law.’...All are agreed on the intrinsic nobility of its doctrine. The writer’s mastery of Greek is unmatched elsewhere in the New Testament, and his powerfully argued development of theological themes indicates the exceptional quality of his intellect. His language, in Westcott’s judgement, is ‘both in vocabulary and style purer and more vigorous than that of any other book of the New Testament;’ and Moffett writes admiringly - ‘He has a sense of literary nicety, which enters into his earnest religious argument without rendering it artificial or over elaborate. He has an art of words which is more than an unconscious style of rhythm. He has the style of a trained speaker; it is style, yet style at the command of a devout genius.’” (Hughes, p. 2)*

The theological theme of the Epistle is the supremacy of Jesus Christ and the perfect manner in which Christ and Christianity are the fulfillment of the promises and practices of God’s covenant with Israel. William L. Lane, in a major new commentary on Hebrews, calls the Epistle, *“a sermon in actual lie...a sermon reduced to writing.”* (Lane, Vol. 1, p. 1) Dr. Lane explains the need for another extensive commentary (2 volumes) on the Epistle in this way:

*“Hebrews is a call for ultimate certainty and ultimate commitment. James Olthuis has described Hebrews as a “certitudinal Book”; it concerns itself with the issue of certainty by confronting ultimate questions about life and death with ultimate realities. Its presentation of the way in which God responds to the human family as One who speaks, creates, covenants, pledges, calls, and commits Himself is intended to breathe new life into men and women who suffer a failure of nerve because they live in an insecure, anxiety-provoking society. Hebrews participates in the character of Scripture as a gift. It is a gift the church sorely needs.”* (Lane, p. xii)



The power of the Epistle to the Hebrews is derived from the fact that it is an intensely Christological document. The centrality and supremacy of Christ is its constant emphasis with profound implications for the nature and purpose of God's covenant with the nation of Israel.

*“The comprehensive theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews is the absolute supremacy of Christ - a supremacy which allows no challenge either from human or angelic beings...The unchallengeable supremacy of Christ is established by the demonstrations through the logic of Scripture to the great leaders and instructors of God's people in the past, namely, the prophets and patriarchs in general, and Moses and Aaron in particular, and also to spiritual angelic creatures. The superiority of Christ, moreover, is identical to the superiority of the new covenant, of which He is both the fulfillment and the Mediator, to the old covenant, which was conveyed by the agency of angels, and administered by the prophets, priests, and rulers of former times, and which, by its very nature was imperfect and temporary. In Christ, the new order, which is perfect and eternal, and by which, therefore, the old is done away, has been inaugurated.” (Hughes, p. 21)*



***“The Martyrdom of Origen” - 16<sup>th</sup> Century Woodcut***



## 2. Authorship

The early church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 260-349) offered the the best assessment of the debate over the authorship of Hebrews in his paraphrase of the opinion of the words of the brilliant scholar Origen of Alexandria (AD 184-253), contained in a no longer extant book of sermons based upon the book. Origen expressed his personal support for the traditional attribution of content of the letter to the Apostle Paul, suggested that the unique style of the letter was the result of the fact that Paul's thought's had subsequently been written down by a close associate of Paul, and acknowledged that only God knew for certain whom He had inspired to compose this epistle:

*“But as for myself, if I were to state my own opinion, I should say that the thoughts are the apostle's, but that the style and composition are those of one who has called to mind the apostle's teachings, and, as it were, made short notes of what his master said. If any church, therefore, holds this epistle as Paul's, let it be commended for this also. For not without reason have the men of old times handed it down as Paul's. But who wrote the epistle in truth, only God knows.”* (Heen/Krey, p. xvii)

The acceptance of Pauline authorship - either directly or through the work of a close associate reporting the apostle's thoughts - was general in the eastern church from the beginning. Hebrews played a particularly important role in the struggle of eastern against the Arian heretics who denied the deity of Christ. The same was not true however in the west, where serious and widespread doubts remained. Reservations among western theologians were, to a large extent, the result of the use of Hebrews by the Montanist heretics who denied that one who committed mortal sin after baptism could be restored to the faith. It was not until Jerome (AD 347-420) included the letter in his Vulgate and St. Augustine of Hippo in North Africa (AD 354-430) accepted and commended the letter, that general acceptance followed in the western church. The earliest Greek collection of Paul's epistles, written around AD 200, includes Hebrews, actually listing it second after Romans to signal its importance in the view of the eastern church. The debate was



*“The Council Of Carthage”*

ultimately resolved by the Council of Carthage in AD 397 which officially listed Hebrews among the letters of St. Paul.

*“The earliest known use of Hebrews was in the western empire where it was quoted and alluded to by 1 Clement, written from Rome about the end of the first century. There are echoes of Hebrews in Polycarp (AD 69-155) and it is quoted by Irenaeus (AD 180), Tertullian (AD 155-220) and Gaius of Rome (AD 200). None of these letters cites Hebrews as canonical or attributes it to Paul...The only suggestion from these sources as to authorship comes from Tertullian who attributes it to Barnabas...In the East, however, the situation was different. At the end of the second century, Pantaeus (AD 180), the founder of the great catechetical school in Alexandria, Egypt, claimed Hebrews was both Pauline and canonical...Pantaeus, however, recognized the lack of normal Pauline introduction as an impediment in need of explanation: Paul had not affixed his name because he was only apostle to the gentiles, while the Lord was the apostle to the Jews. Pantaeus’ successor, Clement of Alexandria (AD 200), continued to affirm the tradition of Pauline authorship and canonical status, although he expanded the explanation against possible objections. He attributed the omission of Paul’s name to Paul’s desire not to offend the Jews to whom he had addressed this epistle. Moreover, he said that Paul wrote in Hebrew and that Luke translated Hebrews into Greek.” (Cockerill, p.4)*

*“Thus, it was only from the late fourth century that an ecumenical consensus begins to develop that the epistle to the Hebrews derived from Paul and was of canonical stature. Once established, this ecumenical consensus regarding the apostolic origin and authority of the epistle lasted through the medieval period.” (Heen/Krey, p. xvii)*

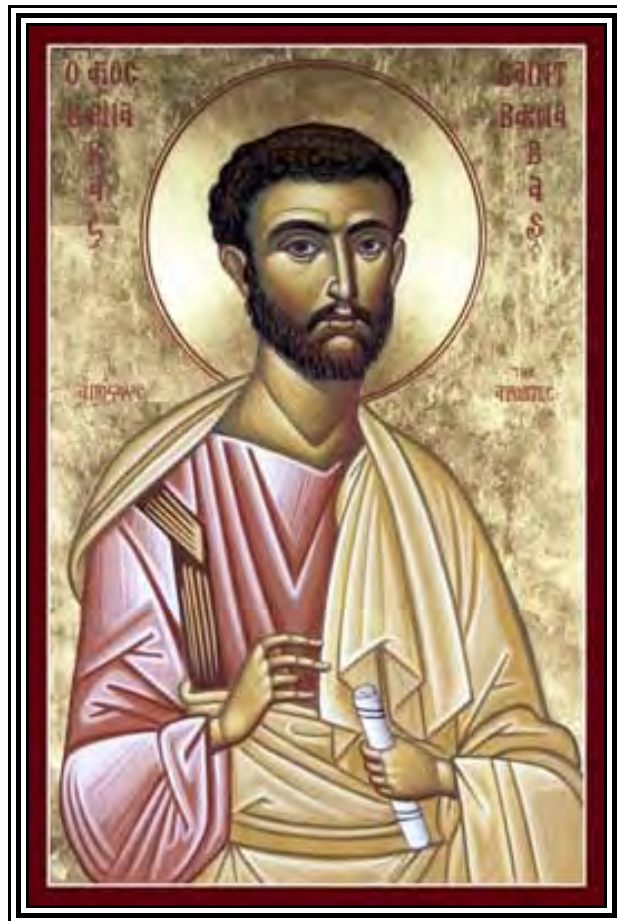
17<sup>th</sup> Century Puritan commentator John Owen, wrote a massive seven volume commentary on the epistle. While he acknowledged that the issue could never be absolutely resolved, the stern old Calvinist affirmed his support for the traditional assertion of Pauline authorship in this characteristically unequivocal manner:

*“St. Paul it is by whom we affirm this epistle to be written...It may not be then that now, after so long a season, the truth of our assertion should be so manifestly evinced as to give absolute satisfaction unto all (which is a vain thing for any man to aim at in a subject where any man suppose that they have a liberty of thinking what they please); yet, I doubt not that it will appear not only highly probable, but so full of evidence in comparison with any other opinion that is or hath been promoted in competition with it, as that some kind of blameable pertinaciousness may be made to appear in its refusal. Now the*

*whole of what I shall offer in proof of it may be reduced unto these six heads: 1. The manifest failure of all them that shall assign it unto any other penman; 2. The insufficiency of the arguments insisted on to disprove our assertion; 3. Testimony given unto it in other Scriptures; 4. Considerations taken from the writing itself; compared with other acknowledged writings of the same author; 5. The general suffrage of antiquity or other ecclesiastical tradition; 6. Reasons taken from other sundry circumstances relating to the epistle itself. Now as all of these are not of the same nature, nor of equal force, so some of them will be found very cogent, and all of them together very cogent to free our assertion from just question or exception.” (Owen, I, p. 67)*

That consensus in support of Pauline authorship remained intact until the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the renewal of Greek scholarship which accompanied the Reformation. Erasmus of Rotterdam, the foremost humanist scholar of the day, challenged Pauline authorship - although not the place of the letter in the canon - because of the uniquely different style of the Greek text. Both Luther and Calvin shared these reservations about Pauline authorship, but neither challenged the place of Hebrews in the canon of the New Testament.

The major contenders among the associates of St. Paul who have been put forward as the



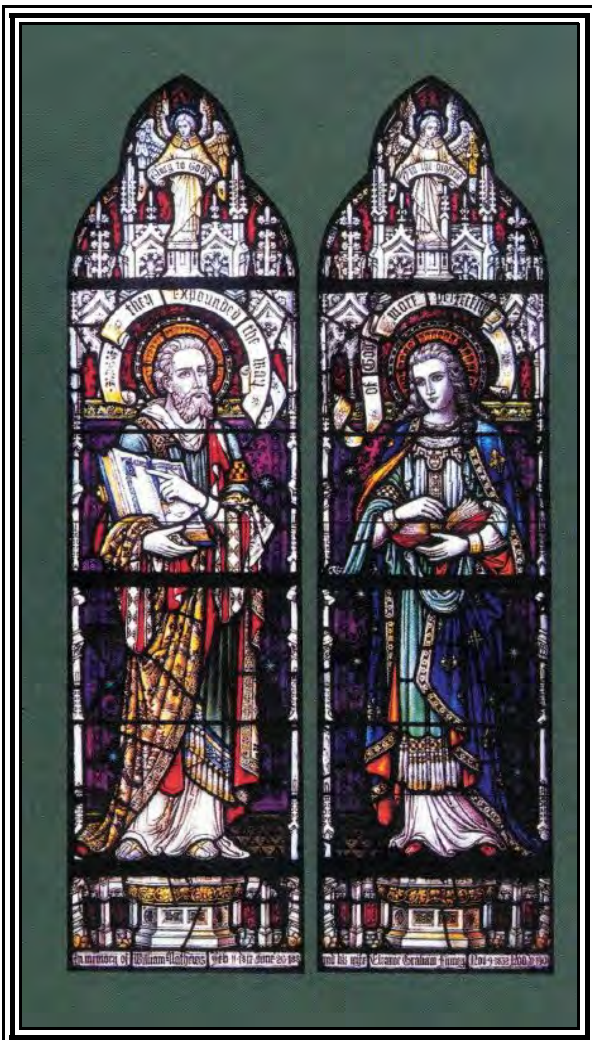
*Icon of Saint Barnabas*

writer of Hebrews are Barnabas, Silas, Luke, and Apollos. All are mentioned in the New Testament and linked to the ministry of Paul. Barnabas was a native of the island of Cyprus. He is described as ***“a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.”*** (Acts 11:24) He was sent by the Jerusalem church to Antioch in Syria to encourage outreach among the Gentiles and his mission there met with great success (Acts 11:20-24). He went to Tarsus to bring back Saul (Paul) to assist in his work in the rapidly growing church: ***“And when he had found him he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught many people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”*** (Acts 11:25-26) With the church thriving in Antioch an offering was collected among the Gentiles to aide the beleaguered Christians in Jerusalem. Barnabas and Saul were delegated to deliver that offering to the mother church (Acts 11:30). When they return to Antioch they brought with



them young John Mark (Acts 12:25). Acts 13 lists the leaders of the congregation in Antioch as follows: ***“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manean, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.”*** (Acts 13:1) The order of the listing demonstrates the prominence which Barnabas enjoyed in the church at this point. On the basis of a vision from the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul are sent out on a mission journey to expand the outreach among the Gentiles. John Mark accompanied them. They traveled around the eastern Mediterranean. (Acts 13-14) They met with great success while arousing significant opposition from the Jews. John Mark left them in Perga in Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem. During this journey the role between Barnabas and Paul shifted and Paul became the chief spokesman for the mission (Acts 14:12). When the time came for Paul’s next journey he and Barnabas disagreed over whether to allow John Mark to accompany. At that point the two men each went their separate ways. (Acts 15:35-41) Paul refers to Barnabas among those who are apostles in 1 Corinthians 9:6. The Apostle discusses his relationship with Barnabas one more time in reference to the great Council of Jerusalem which formally opened the door to the Gentile mission and agreed that

it was not required for Gentile Christians to observe the laws of the old covenant. He indicates that he and Barnabas carried the good news of that decision to the congregation at Antioch (Galatians 2:1-21). It is evident that Barnabas played an important role in the first generation of the Christian Church as a leader of the outreach to the Gentiles, second only to that of Paul himself. He would most certainly have been interested in the subject of Hebrews asserting the supremacy of Christ as the fulfillment of the old covenant.



***“Aquila and Priscilla”***

Apollos is introduced in Acts 18. He was a native of the Egyptian city of Alexandria, the great center of Greek learning in the ancient world. He had converted from Judaism to Christianity and had come to Ephesus, proclaiming the gospel of Christ. Apollos is described as ***“an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures.”*** He was a skilled teacher, ***“fervent in the Spirit,”*** but his knowledge of Christ was incomplete, ***“knowing only the baptism of John:***

***“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at***

*Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in the Spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue; whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; whom, when he was come, helped them much, which had believed through grace. For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publically, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.”*  
(Acts 18:24-28)



*“Icon of Saint Apollos”*

Apollos encountered Paul in Corinth and the Apostle blessed his ministry, laid hands upon him and gave him the gift of the Holy Spirit. *“And it came to pass that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus...And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them and they spake with tongues and prophesied.”* (Acts 19:1-6) The importance of the ministry of Apollos in Corinth is further indicated by the fact that St. Paul notes in 1 Corinthians that one of the personality factions which had developed within the church were followers of Apollos (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4). The Apostle further noted that he had urged Apollos to return to Corinth to deal with their problems, but that Apollos did not wish to do so at that time: *“As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren, but his will was not at all to come unto you at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.”* (1 Corinthians 16:12) Paul’s final reference to Apollos comes in the greetings at the conclusion of his letter to Titus where he commends the ministry of Apollos to their support: *“Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently that nothing be wanting unto them.”* (Titus 3:13)

Once again, it is evident that Apollos would have been well qualified as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He was a highly educated Hellenistic Jew, raised in the sophisticated city of Alexandria. He was a skilled teacher with an encyclopedic knowledge of the Old Testament. The hallmark of his ministry was a fervent desire to demonstrate to his fellow Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah on the basis of prophetic scripture. Lutheran commentator R.C.H. Lenski notes and enthusiastically supports Luther’s conclusion that Apollos was, in fact, the author of Hebrews with this summary of the evidence:



*“It is Luther who suggests Apollos as the writer of Hebrews: ‘This Apollos was a man of high understanding, the Epistle of the Hebrews is indeed his!’...The evidence that we possess fully warrants the conclusion that Apollos wrote Hebrews to the body of Jewish Christians at Rome after the martyrdom of Paul and before the destruction of Jerusalem, between the years 67 and 70. Let us review the story of Apollos. His first appearance, recorded in Acts 18:24-28, presents him as an Alexandrine scholar, a Jew, a man of the word, who was trained in one of the great universities of Alexandria, this ancient seat of learning, a man ‘powerful in the Scriptures.’ Fully instructed in the gospel of Christ by Priscilla and Aquila, he goes to Corinth, one of Paul’s main congregations, and greatly assists the Corinthian believers by mightily and publically convincing the Jews in Corinth by means of the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. Hebrews shows the fine Greek scholar who is mighty in the Old Testament Scriptures, who supports the work of Paul, just as he did in Corinth, who is mighty to convince Jewish minds that ‘Jesus is the Christ,’ just as he was in Corinth. If we should make an inventory of the writer to the Hebrews and did not have Acts 18:24-28, our inventory would contain exactly the features which Luke records about Apollos.” (Lenski, pp. 22-23)*

Lenski goes on at considerable length to document the consistently close relationship between Apollos and the ministry of St. Paul, thereby strengthening the bond between Apollos and the authority of the apostle.



*Icon of Saint Silas*

Silas is another of Paul’s associates who has historically been suggested as the author of Hebrews. Silas was a leading member of the congregation in Jerusalem who was associated with the ministries of both Paul and Peter. Silas, like Paul, was a Roman citizen, and commended by the Jerusalem Council among those ***“men that have hazarded their lives for the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (Acts 15:26-27) Silas is a Greek name and Paul often refers to him by the Latin equivalent of that name, Silvanus. Thus, 1 Thessalonians, for example, begins with this salutation: ***“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, to the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.”*** (1





*“Paul And Barnabas In Lystra” by Peeter Paul Rubens*

Thessalonians 1:1-2) In the paragraphs which follow, Paul appears to refer to Silas as one of the apostles: ***“Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you nor of others, when we might have been burdensome as the apostles of Christ.”*** (1 Thessalonians 2:6) The Book of Acts reports that Silas accompanied Paul throughout his second missionary journey. (Cf. Acts 15:22,40; 16:19; 17:4; 2 Corinthians 1:19) Silas later delivered an epistle for the Apostle Peter: ***“By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting and testifying unto you that this is the true grace of God, wherein ye stand.”*** (1 Peter 5:12) Silas was clearly a member of Paul’s inner circle, and thus in a position to have recorded or paraphrased the Apostles thoughts in Hebrews.

The final candidate as the man among the associates of St. Paul who has been suggested as the author of Hebrews is Luke, the author of the third Gospel and the Book of Acts. Luke was a Gentile convert to Christianity who came from Antioch in Syria. Paul informs us that Luke was a medical doctor, identifying him in Colossians 4:14 as ***“Luke the beloved physician.”*** That would have meant that Luke was a highly educated man. That superior training is clearly indicated in his sophisticated literary style and skill in the Greek language, which most scholars agree was his native tongue. He also demonstrates a level of familiarity with the Hebrew scriptures which would have been most remarkable for a Gentile. In the prologue to his Gospel Luke indicates that he was not an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus:

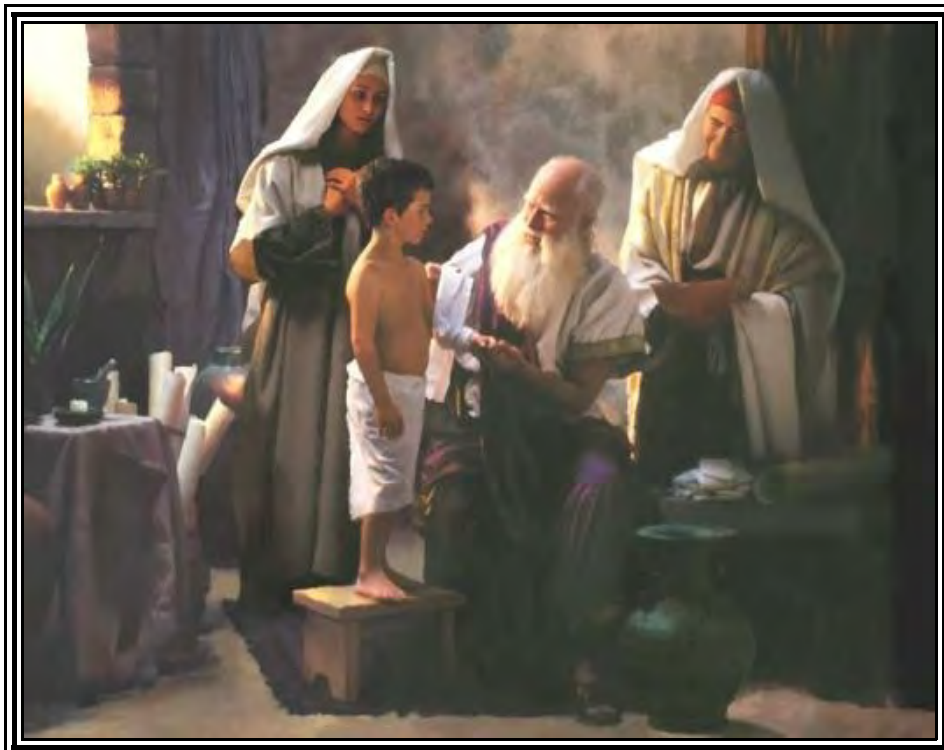
***“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them***

*unto us which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou has been instructed.” (Luke 1:1-4)*

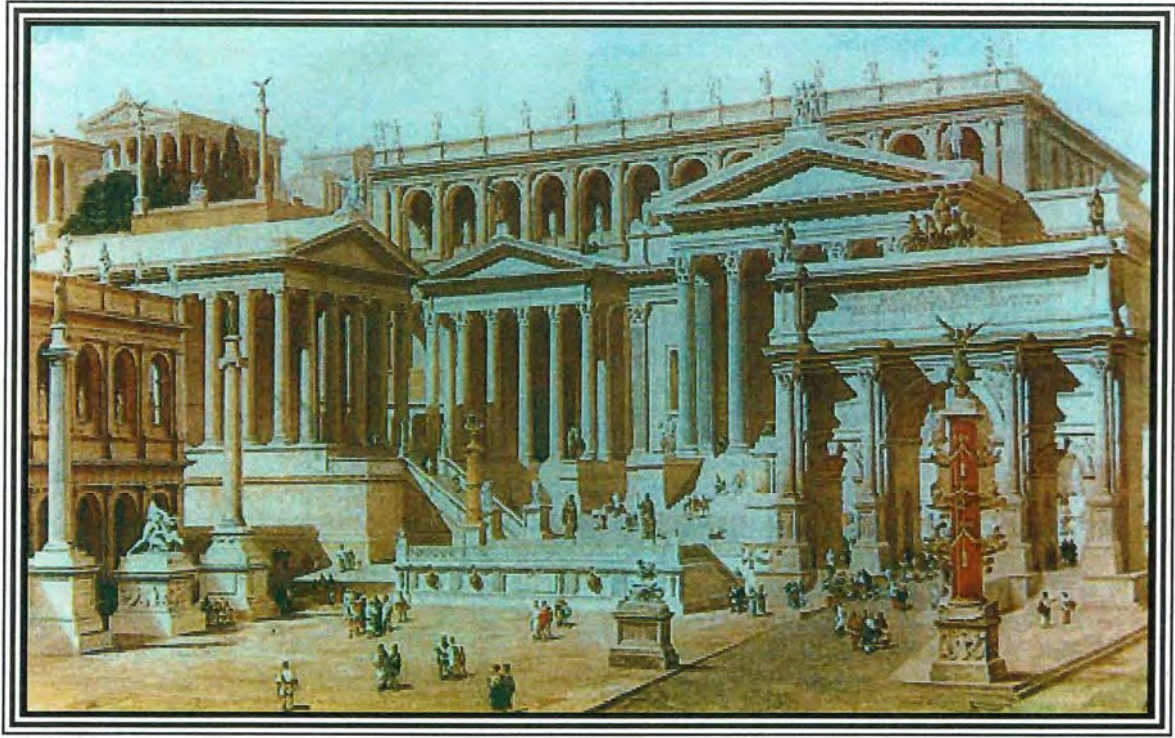
The Gospel of Luke and Acts are evidently designed to be a two volume work described in classical Greek style and historical and theological account of the life of Christ and the origin of the Christian church. This masterpiece constitutes more than one fourth of the total content of the New Testament.

Paul refers to Luke three times in his epistles. The afore mentioned reference to the beloved physician in Colossians is one of those references. In Philemon 24 Luke is included in the group of *“fellow workers”* who send greetings at the end of the letter. Writing from prison in Rome near the end of his life, Paul notes that only faithful Luke remains by his side (2 Timothy 4:11) The use of the plural pronoun *“we”* throughout much of the Book of Acts indicates that Luke accompanied Paul on a great many of his travels across the ancient world. This close association, combined with Luke’s background and classical education has recommended him to scholars as a candidate for the authorship of Hebrews.

As indicated at the outset, the absence of information within the letter itself or corroboration from the earliest historical sources, the question of authorship cannot be decisively resolved. No doubt, the debate will go on, nonetheless.



*“Luke The Beloved Physician”*



*"The Forum In Rome - The Heart Of The Empire"*

### **3. Historical Setting**

The classic view holds that Hebrews was addressed to early Christian congregations in the city of Rome. This view retains significant, although not unanimous, support among contemporary Bible scholars. This view also receives significant support within the Epistle itself in the form of the author's closing comment: ***"Those from Italy send you their greetings."*** (13:24) Commentator William Lane summarized the argument in favor of a Roman audience for the epistle as follows in his 1991 commentary:

*"Proposals for the social location of the community have ranged from Jerusalem in the east to Spain in the West. The critical judgment reflected in this commentary is that the intended audience is to located in or near Rome. The ambiguity of the formulation -'Those from Italy greet you' is well known, the fact remains, nevertheless, that in the sole parallel...provided by the New Testament (Acts 18:2) the phrase clearly means from Italy. The expression is used in reference to Aquila and Priscilla who were currently in Corinth. They had sailed from Italy when Claudius had issued a decree expelling Jews from Rome. In Acts 18:2, Italy specifically denotes Rome. This may be the most natural way of reading Hebrews 13:24 as well. In the closing lines of Hebrews, the writer conveys to the house church in or near Rome the greetings of Italian Christians who are currently away from their homeland. The following evidence may be cited in support of this critical judgement: 1. The allusions to the generosity of the audience in supporting other Christians in Hebrew 6:10-11 and 10:33-34 agree with the history of Christianity in Rome*



as known from other sources; 2. The description of the early suffering endured by the audience in 10:32-34 is congruent with the experience of those who were subject to the Claudian edict of expulsion in A.D. 49; 3. The designation of the leadership of the community in 13: 7, 17, and 24 as 'hegoumenoi' ('leaders') is found outside the NT in early Christian sources associated with Rome; 4. Hebrews was first known and used in Rome. Clement of Rome, in his pastoral letter to Corinth, provides indisputable evidence of the circulation of Hebrews among the churches of Rome. Not only are there striking parallels to the form and statement of Hebrews throughout I Clement, but Clement is literally dependant upon Hebrews in I Clement 36:1-6. " (Lane, p. lviii)

In the midst of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. the population of Rome was nearing 1,000,000 people. As was to be expected, the capital of a world empire included an international population with significant contingents of ethnic and national groups from Spain to Persia. It is believed that the Jewish population within the city was between 40,000 and 50,000. There were at least seven active synagogues in Rome and by the second century that number had doubled to nearly fourteen. These Jews who had come to Rome as immigrants of prisoners of war, maintained close connections with Palestine and Jerusalem as evidenced by correspondence uncovered in archaeological excavation of a number of synagogues. The origins of the Christian community in Rome are obscure and particularly controversial, given the Roman Catholic insistence that the Apostle Peter was the founding bishop of the

Church in Rome and that thereby his papal successors are by divine right the absolute monarchs of world Christianity. There does not appear to have been a formally organized

church in Rome in the mid 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. which included all the Christians of the city, but rather a number of small individual house churches scattered around the city. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul significantly does not refer to the "church" in Rome.



"Icon Of St. Paid"

"He does mention a "church" ('ecclesia') that meets in the home of Prisca and Aquila (16:5). The apostle simply calls his readers 'God's beloved in Rome' and 'saints' (1:7). In this regard it is better to think of a number of cells or house churches in the city. Estimates of how many house churches existed range from three to eight. " (Hultgren, p. 8)

Other helpful comments from St. Paul in Romans - which was written in the mid "50's" - include his assertion of a long held desire to

visit the Christians in Rome:

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*"I do not want you to be unaware brothers that I planned many times to come to you (hut have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among many other Gentiles. I am obligated both to the Greeks and to the non-Greeks, both to the wise and to the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the Gospel also to you who are in Rome."* (Romans 1:13-14)

This casual remark not only indicates the significant presence of Christians in Rome at an early date, but also specifically affirms the mixed Jew/Gentile nature of that congregation. This fact is of particular significance in terms of the subject matter of Hebrews. The early presence of Christians in Rome reinforced by Paul's further observation to the Romans that by the mid "50's" *"your faith is being reported all over the world."* (Romans 1:8) The suggestion that the capital city of the empire was one of the first cities with a significant Christian presence is further reinforced by Luke's observation that the crowd in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost included *"visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes."* (Acts 2:10) Once again, the fact that the Romans at Pentecost were both Jews and Gentiles who had converted to Judaism is of special relevance to Hebrews. The fact that these Gentile Jews were willing to travel halfway across the world for a religious festival is indicative of the profound seriousness with which they viewed their new faith. The message of Hebrews would certainly have been most interesting to such people.

*"Whatever we are to make of that reference in Acts, it is apparent that when Luke wrote his account late in the JS<sup>1</sup> Century, he thought that the earliest Christian community in Rome could be traced back to a founding by converts (former Jews and proselytes) and that they had a connection with Jerusalem."* (Hultgren, p. 9)

This perspective - of a mixed Roman Christian community made up of both Jews and Gentiles in which the relationship between the old and new covenants was the source of contention - is reinforced by the 4<sup>th</sup> Century Roman Church Father Ambrosiaster, who



*"Procession In Rome"  
by Alma-Tadema*





*"Medieval Map of Rome c. A.D. 100"*

- composed the first Latin commentary on the epistles of St. Paul. In his introduction to the Epistle of Romans, Ambrosiaster observed: *"The Romans had embraced the faith of Christ, albeit according to the Jewish rite, although they had seen no signs or mighty works, nor any of the apostles."* (Lane, p. lix) This observation, although hotly contested in Roman Catholic tradition, would be completely consistent with the approach and content of Hebrews.

It is further evident that Hebrews is addressed to Christians in a great urban center and, more specifically to a particular group or faction of Christians within a larger group of believers. The recipients of the letter are distinguished from their leaders in the concluding exhortations:

***"Obey your leaders, submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you...Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you greetings."***  
(13:17,24)

- William Lane notes: *"The assumption that they are located in an urban setting is supported by the insistence that 'here we have no abiding city' as well as by the range and focus of the parenthetic concerns expressed in 13:1-6 over things which are appropriate to an urban setting."* •• (Lane, p. liii)



## HEBREWS CHAPTER 1

*(1) In the past God spoke to our forefathers at many times and in various ways, (2) but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, Whom He appointed Heir of all things and through Whom He made the universe. (3) The Son is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His power/ul Word. After He had provided purification for all sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (4) So He became as much superior to the angels as the Name He has inherited is superior to theirs. (5) For to which angels did God ever say, "You are My Son; today I have become Your Father." Or again, "I will be His Father and He will be My Son"? (6) And again, when God brings His Firstborn into the world, He says, "Let all God's angels worship Him." (7) In speaking of the angels He says, "He makes the angels His winds, His servants flames of fire." (8) But about the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of Your kingdom. (9) You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness, therefore God, Your God, has set You above Your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy." (10) He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. (11) They will perish, but You remain. They will all wear out like a garment. (12) You will roll them up like a robe. Like a garment they will be changed. But You remain the same, and Your years will never end." (13) To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at My right hand and I will make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet"? (14) Are not all angels ministering spirits set to serve those who will inherit salvation?*



*"The Divine Trinity" by Vasnetsov*

## Verses 1-2

□ *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, Whom He appointed Heir of all things and through Whom He made the universe."*

*"In the past God spoke to our forefathers ..."* - Hebrews opens with a grand summary statement of the basic theme of the entire letter affirming the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second Member of the divine Trinity, over all things heavenly and throughout the entire creation. Franz Delitsch offers this typically thorough restatement of Hebrew's theme statement:



Franz Delitsch

*"God has made a final revelation of Himself in the Son as the Fulfiller of the work of atonement; Who, being from eternity above all things by virtue of the essential dignity of His divine person, is now exalted above all in the nature which He assumed in time. The Epistle begins, like the First Epistle of St. John, with a grandly solemn, but more rhythmically rounded period, in which we find all the main thoughts of the whole treatise, and are prepared for their subsequent development. The super-prophetical, super-angelical, super-levitical dignity of Christ is here briefly indicated, and at the same time regarded from that unearthly, transcendental point of view which is maintained throughout the Epistle."* (Delitsch, I, p. 39)

The opening words of Verse 1- *"In the past"* - indicate from the very beginning of the letter that the decisive moment, the single crucial turning point in

the entire history has occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything which preceded the incarnation of Jesus was prelude, anticipating the fulfillment of the promise of the messianic Descendant of the Woman who had been promised amid the ruins of Eden. (cf. Genesis 3:16) The contrast will be re-stated in Verse 2 as the author describes *"these last days"* in which the decisive revelation from God has now been spoken through His own Son. This terminology is used throughout the New Testament to define the incarnation of Christ and the crucial turning point of human history. This is the same language through which Peter explained the meaning of Pentecost to the bewildered crowd in Jerusalem, quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel: *"No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your young men will see visions, and your old*

□



*men will dream dreams."* (Acts 2:17) Paul had used the same terminology in his warning to Timothy of the false teaching which he would have to confront: *"The Spirit clearly says that in the later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons."* (2 Timothy 4:1) John issued a similar warning in his first epistle: *"Dear children this is the last hour, and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour."* (1 John 2:18) The author presumes a comfortable familiarity on the part of his audience with the state of affairs which had prevailed between God and His chosen people prior to the coming of Jesus Christ. He neither describes nor details those circumstances. Rather he simply makes the broad assertion - *"God spoke to our forefathers at many times and in various ways."* The fact of the matter is that God communicated with mankind, and with the chosen people in particular, in a broad variety of different way during the former days. On a number of occasions, He took on physical form to interact with men through the figure which the Old Testament typically describe as *"the Angel of the Lord."* It was this unique figure Who led Israel through the wilderness to the Promised Land. God asserted the Angel of the Lord's special identity in Exodus 23:20-21;

*"See I am sending an Angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to Him and listen to what He says; do not rebel against Him, He will not forgive your rebellion since My Name is in Him. My Angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land."*

The Angel of the Lord appears at the crucial moments of Israel's history to establish and maintain the covenant. It was the Angel of the Lord, for example who appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:6) and who parted the waters of the Red Sea to deliver the



*"The Destruction of Pharaoh At The Red Sea" by Bridgeman"*



Israelites from the chariots of Pharaoh (Exodus 14:19-20). The Angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate Christ, God's most intimate form of self-disclosure even before His incarnation. God inspired many of His prophets to write His Word and others to preach and proclaim His Word. He revealed Himself in magnificent dreams and visions throughout the former days. All of these *"various ways"* have now been surpassed and fulfilled in the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The singularity of God's self-disclosure of Himself in the person of *"His Son"* is affirmed in stark contrast to the multiplicity and the diversity of the past. The very intimacy of the title - *"His Son"* - the specific implications of which will be articulated in the verses which follow, suggests that the revelation of God in Christ must be *"sui generis"*, that is, one of a kind, in a category of its own. All that can be known about God can be known only through Jesus Christ.

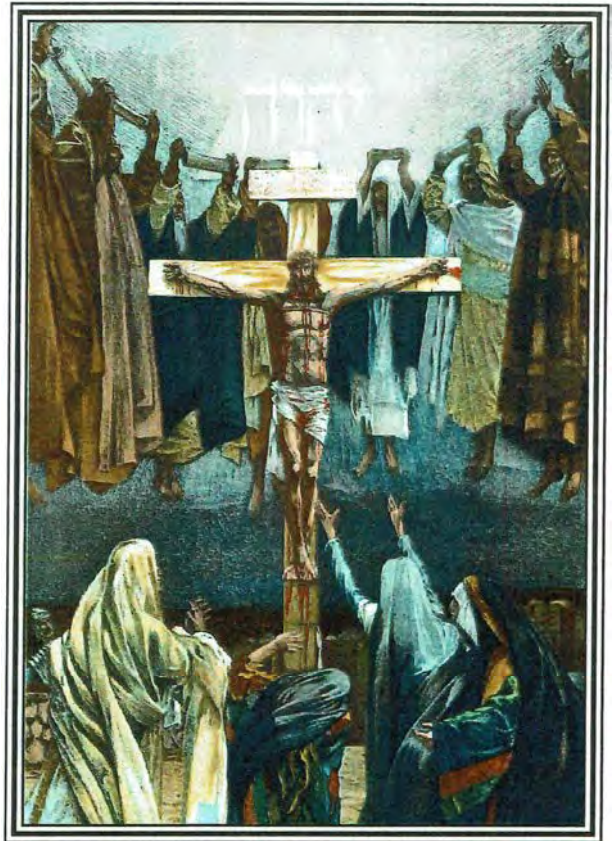
*"The whole manifestation of the nature of God unto us, and the manifestations of grace are immediately by and through the person of the Son. He represents Him unto us, and through Him is everything that is communicated unto us from the fulness of the Deity conveyed."* (Owen, III, p. 97)

The Old Testament revelation was fragmentary and occasional, lacking fulness and finality. Everything about that revelation had to be characterized by a sense of preparation and anticipation for the defining event of God's self-disclosure in the plan of salvation had not yet occurred. It was still in the future. The role of all of the prophets and indeed of Israel's --- calling as the chosen people itself was to make ready for that one grand event which had not yet occurred. Only God Himself, in the person of His own Son, could and would accomplish that event. Delitsch emphasized the importance of the contrast between the role of the prophets and that of the Son with these well-chosen words:



*"Father Into Thy Hands" by Tintoretto*

*"On this fragmentary and multiform speaking of God to the fathers follows now His speaking to us "by His Son. The one revelation is contrasted with the many, the instrumentality of the prophets with that of the Son. "Son" is here, as in vs. 28 so applied to the Mediator of the New Testament as almost to be regarded as a proper name, and therefore used without the article...This absolute use of 'uios' like a proper name is just what we should expect in the Letter to the Hebrews as one of the last of the Pauline writings. Moreover, the great fundamental difference between the two revelations is clearly indicated in the simple antithesis of 'through the prophets' and 'through the Son, - ' the term prophet making a relation purely accidental and official in its character, 'Son' one that is essential and necessary, being grounded in the nature of the person by whom it is occupied. The author now proceeds by means of relative clauses to develop the main characteristics of the supreme exaltation by which the Son as Mediator, of this final revelation, excels the prophets." (Delitsch, I, 42)*



***"Christ the Messiah Upon the Cross  
Surrounded By the Prophets Who Had  
Foretold His Coming And His Death"  
by James Jacques Tissot***

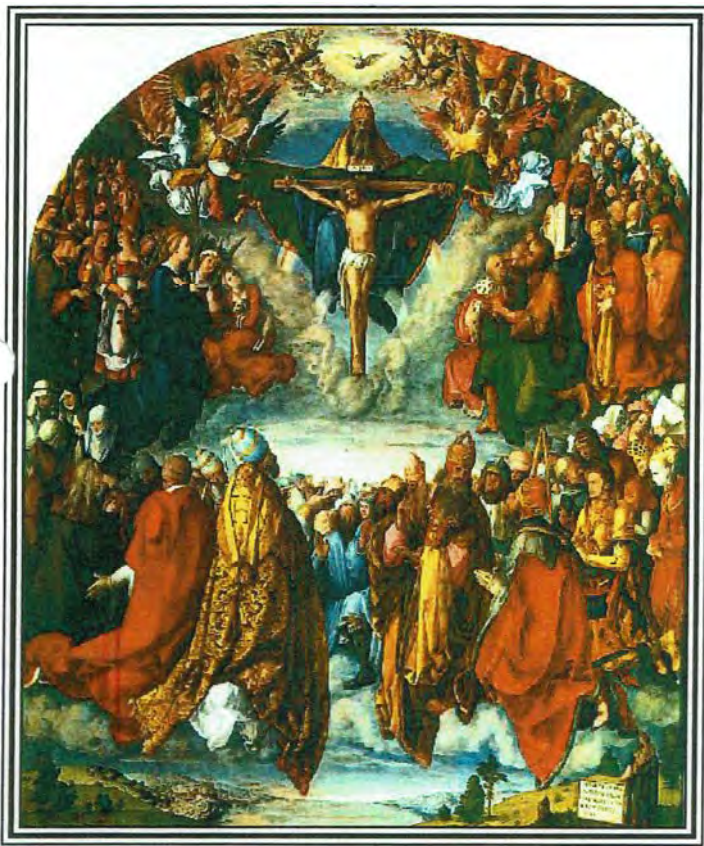
Having noted that crucial distinction, however, we must at the same time, acknowledge the utter inadequacy of describing the inter-relationships of the Members of the divine Trinity with words that were coined to identify relationships between human beings. These mere human terms cannot begin to convey the intricacy and the immensity of God. And yet, the task of Scripture is to convey the Truth of God to human beings, and thus our words, trapped within the puny restrictions of our comprehension, must be used. For we pathetic creatures are incapable of going beyond such words, in adequate through they may be. Our words can be nothing more than the expression of our thoughts. If we cannot comprehend it, we cannot express it. Thus, we must ever approach Scripture with a painfully realistic - humbling - sense of our own limitations. In that humble realism, we must always strive to allow the Bible to interpret itself, defining for us - to the extent that such definition is possible - in this instance, for example, what God's Word means when it describes Him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must remain constantly aware that God is condescending to lower Himself to our level and that hence there will always be a great deal in His revelation of Himself which exceeds our understanding. It could not be otherwise. Our response to that fact dare not be dogmatic extrapolations which expand what Scripture reveals, or congenial redefinition designed to render what I cannot understand more accessible to my own reason. In this instance, the use of the Father/Son relationship is



clearly designed to express the fundamental unity of the nature of the Father and the Son. They are one, and yet they are distinct and separate persons with the Trinity. That far we must go, but we dare go no further. To do so, as the contentious history of the Church amply illustrates is only to invite controversy, division, and apostasy.

***"Whom He appointed Heir of all things, and through Whom He made the universe."*** - Hebrews begins its argument with a completely unambiguous assertion of the identity of Jesus Christ as God Himself.

*"All the glorious perfections of the nature of God do belong unto and dwell in the Person of the Son. Were it not so, He could not gloriously represent unto us the Person of the Father; nor by the contemplation of Him could we be led to acquaintance with the Person of the Father."* (Owen, III, p. 97)



***"The Adoration Of The Holy Trinity"***  
***by Albrecht Dürer***

All that will follow is founded upon the unshakable conviction that Jesus Christ is true God. Thus from the very outset the divinity of Christ is set forth as the foundation. Many commentators believe that these words, and those which follow, are actually portions of the earliest liturgies of Christendom, drawn from the Psalms.

*"At this point, the writer may have introduced an early liturgical tradition...Within a frame established by the allusion to the Royal Son of Psalm 2, and to the Royal Priest of Psalm 110, the Son's role in creation, redemption, and revelation is recited in creedal fashion."*

(Land, I, p.12) If this is the case, what can be seen here is congregations which were still significantly Jewish using the Messianic texts of the Old Testament in their worship to identify Jesus Christ as the Son of God and proclaim Him as such in their adoration and praise. At the same

time, such usage of the Old Testament would acknowledge its completion and fulfillment in Christ. The phrase, ***"Whom He appointed Heir of all things"*** with its combination of sonship and inheritance, is a direct allusion to the messianic profile of Psalm 2: ***"He said to Me, 'You are My Son. Today I have become Your Father. Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your inheritance, the ends of the earth Your possession.'"*** (Psalm 2:7-8) Paul used the identical concept in Romans to describe our salvation as a participation in the

inheritance which Christ our Savior has received from God His Father:

*"For you did not receive a Spirit which makes you a slave again to fear, but you received a Spirit of sonship, and by Him we cry 'Abba' 'Father.'" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if, indeed, we share in His suffering that we may also share in His glory."*  
(Romans 8:15-17; cf. Galatians 4:4-7)



*"The Exalted Christ" by Surikov*

The typical sense of the inheritance, of being *"appointed heir"* in the New Testament is not so much the transmission of property from one generation to the next but the intimacy of family bonds in which those who share the same blood share thereby in all things together. It involves the conveyance of God's promises and blessings from forefathers to descendants. This concept conforms perfectly to the point of Hebrew's preface, identifying Christ- God's Son and Heir - as the perfect fulfillment of all the promises which God had made to His people. *"Christ has received from God a possession which was only promised and looked forward to by the people of the Old Testament times."* (Ellingworth, p. 95)

At the same time, the all inclusive language of both phrases in this sentence - *"of all things"* - *"the universe"* - serves as a not too subtle reminder to the self-focused descendants of Abraham that God's plan of salvation was never restricted to their particular nation. God is the Lord of all, the Creator of everything and the grace which is the essence of His Being



cannot be bound by the puny human perspectives of national or ethnic divisions. This contentious truth becomes a key component in a Biblical understanding of the divine covenant with Israel, not merely as an end in itself - to save one favored nation which all others are heedlessly damned - but as the means to an end - so that the promise of the Savior/Messiah may be carefully preserved and at the proper time preached and proclaimed throughout all the world.



*Icon of Christ As Creator*

To further solidify his declaration of Christ's divinity, the inspired author also directly links Jesus to creation, which might rightly be identified as the most divine of all God's works. In Biblical monotheism there can be only one God because God is by definition the only independent existence. God does not have a source. He is the source of everything else which exists. He is "JHWH" - "I AM" God is not a part of, but rather apart from time and space reality. That is why He is God and that is why there can be only one God. To cite the fact that Jesus Christ, God's Son is the One ***"through Whom He made the universe"*** is a blunt forthright assertion that Jesus Christ is God. This declaration is not unique to Hebrews and wherever it occurs it is in the context of declaring Christ's deity. ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things***

***were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made...He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him."*** (John 1:1-4,10)

St. Paul reminded the Corinthians of Christ the Creator in virtually identical words: ***"Yet for us there is but one God, the Father from Whom all things came and for Whom we live; and there is but one Lord Jesus Christ through Whom all things came, and through Whom we live."*** (1 Corinthians 8:6) The Apostle's assertion of the deity of Christ the Creator is even more emphatic in Colossians 1:

***"He is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible or***

*invisible, whether thrones, or powers or rulers or authorities. All things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."*

The inclusive language of the text stresses Christ's role as the agent of creation not only for the earth, but for the entirety of the universe - all of space and time reality. As God, the only independent existence, the sole uncreated One, Christ is the divine agent through Whom all that has been created came into being in the beginning. The citation of Christ's role in creation here is no idle coincidence, if such a thing were possible in the inspired Word of God. The Church's historic recognition of the importance of this concept - namely that the entire universe, everything other than God Himself - has its sole origin in the one divine Being is reflected in the language of the Nicene Creed which specifically asserts the fact that God

is the Creator *"of all things visible and invisible."* If this were not the case then there could possibly have been more than one God. But since the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the one and only Uncreate, the existence of other gods is impossible.



*"Christ The Creator" by Robert Barrett*

There is indeed wondrous purpose in this reference to the identity of Christ as the divine agent of creation in the opening phrases of the Epistle. In his magnificent seven volume exposition of Hebrews, 17<sup>th</sup> Century Puritan theologian John Owen described the magnificent symmetry of this initial reference to Christ as the Creator of both the original creation which had been ruined by sin and of the new restored creation. This balance becomes all the more compelling as we recognize that the Creator of both creations brought about this miracle by condescending to become a part of that which He had created through His own incarnation:

*"The holy and blessed Trinity could have so ordered the work of creation so as that it should not have so immediately, eminently, and signally have been the work of the Son, of the eternal Word; but there was a further design upon the world to be accomplished by Him, and therefore, the work was signally to be His - that is, as to immediate operation, though as to authority and order it peculiarly belonged to the Father, and to the Spirit as to disposition and*





*"Christ Exalted" by Rubens*

*ornament. All things at first were made by Him, that when they were lost, ruined, scattered they might again in the appointed season be gathered together into one head in Him by whom they had first been created... For this end then God made all things by Him, that when He came to change and to renew all things, He might have good and right title so to do, seeing that He undertook to deal with or about no more than what He Himself had originally made." (Owen, III, p. 79)*

This reality, in turn, prepared the way for the tragic irony that although the creation's Redeemer was the same divine Son through whom it had come into being in the beginning, that now fallen creation failed - or refused - to recognize and acknowledge Him. The Evangelist, Saint John places particular emphasis on this tragic irony in the prologue to his Gospel: ***"He was in the world, and the***

***world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own and His own received Him not."*** (John 1:10-11)

### ***Chapter 1: Verses 3-4***

***Who, being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down by the right hand of the Majesty on high. Being made so much better than angels, as He hath by an inheritance obtained a more excellent Name than they.***

***"Who, being the brightness of His glory..."*** -The emphasis of the text's assertion of the deity of Christ now shifts its focus from the identity of Jesus as the divine Son of God in relation to the creation and His participation in its origin and its redemption to the ineffable wonders of heaven itself and his participation therein as the second Person of the Holy Trinity. In this manner the author completes his unequivocal identification of Jesus as true God. The identity of Christ as the divine Son of God uniquely qualified Him to accomplish the task of atonement in a way that none other could have done. It had to be God Himself in the Person of His own Son who would rescue the creation which He Himself had brought into being. The fact of Christ's identity as ***"being the brightness of His (God the Father's) glory and the express image of His (God the Father's) person"*** has always been and will always be. These phrases simply *"tell us what in Himself He was who did this work, that*

is, they describe the eternal, unchangeable, and absolute background of the whole of His historical action, set it forth in the light of its true significance.” (Delitsch, I, p. 47) None other could have performed these works and the truth that God’s only Son did perform them is of infinitely profound significance for our understanding of our God and the divine nature. Delitsch is completely correct in his categorical statement that without this clear understanding of *“the eternal and divine relationship in which our Reconciler stands to God... the atoning work of Christ could be neither appreciated nor understood.”* (Delitsch, I, p.48) The wondrous phrase ***“the brightness of His glory”*** refers to the sparkling light which shines directly forth from a source of light. The Apocryphal *“Wisdom of Solomon”* - written around 200 B.C. and very prominent in the piety of Judaism at the time Hebrews was written - uses virtually the same language to describe the personified wisdom of God:

*“For she is the breath of the power of God and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore, nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of His goodness.”* (Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26)

Commentator Paul Ellingsworth contends that this allusion to the familiar Apocryphal text is a deliberate and effective effort to make the concept of a Son of God more congenial to a Hebrew audience by demonstrating a respected precedent for such thinking from a respected part of their own background. He offers this paraphrase: *“What was said long ago about wisdom, her relationship to God and her role in creation, is true of the Son; it is the Son alone who effects purification of sins; he is the One whom God, in the words of Psalm 110:1, has exalted to sit at His right hand.”* (Ellingsworth, p. 97) The use of *“light”/“glory”* as an image of the nature of God is common throughout both testaments.



*“Christ the Light Of the World” by Arnold Friberg*





*“Christ the Light of the World”*

*“I the Lord have called thee in righteousness; and will hold thine hand and will keep thee and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles. To open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners out from prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord. That is My Name; and My glory will I not give to another; neither My praise to graven images.” (Isaiah 42:6-8; cf. 48:11)*

*“In whom the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them...For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:4,15)*

*“In Him was life and that life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The same came for a witness to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but he was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (John 1:5-9)*

This mind boggling glimpse into the interaction of the members of the Trinity called for the creedal affirmation of Christ as *“light of light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made.”*

*“The Son is the irradiation, the effulgence of that divine glory...All the early fathers understood the word in the same way...and its consequences rightly drawn: (1) that the Son must be consubstantial with the Father, inasmuch as what emanates from light must have itself the nature of light; and, (2) that the divine generation of the Son must be at once a free and necessary process within the Godhead...The relation between God the Son and God the Father is similar to that between sunlight and the sun...The unfolding by God of His own glory is the forth shining of the Son who thereby obtains an existence which, though derived, is yet self-subsistent and divine...This light is the*

*supersensuous light and fire of His own nature, thrown out for the purpose of self-manifestation and in the Son all the power of divine light are collected and appear as in a glorious shining forth in the eternal firmament of the divine nature.” Delitsch, I, p. 49)*

**“And the express image of His person”** - The second phrase makes the same point, emphasizing that the same divine nature is shared by the Father and the Son, but in, perhaps, an even more forceful way. **“The express image”** translates a Greek noun which refers either to the stamp which impresses an image upon a coin or the image which is impressed by that stamp upon the coin. In either case, the emphasis of the word is the precise correspondence that which made the image and the image that was made. Without it, the coin could not be recognized as genuine. That same emphasis is intended here, namely that God the Father and the Son are of precisely the same divine nature. The Son is the exact representation of the Father. To assert that the Son is the **“express image of His person”** is to simply to express *“the essential unity and exact resemblance between the Father and His Son.”* (Ellingsworth, p. 99) At the same time, this inherently inadequate language also serves in an amazing way to imply and express the distinctions between the various Members of the divine Trinity:

*“He (the Son) is in His Person distinct from the Father, another not the Father; and yet the same in nature, and this in all glorious properties and excellencies. This oneness in nature and distinction in person may well be shadowed out by these expressions - ‘He is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person’...That He is one distinct from God the Father, related unto Him, and Partaker of His glory is clearly asserted in these words; and more is not intended in them.”* (Owen, III, p. 91,92)



*“The Holy Trinity” by Vassili Surikov*



Gareth Cockerill says it well in assessing the meaning of the phrases:

*“Thus the Son is the perfect imprint of the very being of God. These two complementary expressions ‘the radiance of God’s glory’ and ‘the exact imprint of God’s very being’ preserve the distinctiveness of the Son while affirming that the finality of His revelation is based on His identity with the God He reveals.”* (Cockerill, p. 94)

**“And upholding all things by the word of His power...”** - The universal Heir and Agent of creation is also the One who sustains the universe, the entirety of time and space reality. The language of the text is completely inclusive - **“all things.”** The Greek verb **“upholding”** typically refers to carrying or bearing a burden toward a particular destination. Through the use of this word the text assigns to God the Son responsibility for the fulfillment of God’s ultimate purpose for His creation:

*“The Son through Whom God created the world and its ages does more than sustain them. He also ‘bears’ or ‘directs’ those ages to their God intended goal...The immediate context suggests that the Son accomplishes God’s ultimate purposes by His making purification for sins and by His subsequent session. The broader context would add His second coming.”* (Cockerill, p. 95)

Such cosmic engagement and responsibility can obviously only be ascribed to God Himself. In this way, once again, the author reasserts the fundamental reality of the deity of Christ



**“Christ The Almighty Lord”**



***“The High Priest Sprinkling The Atonement Blood”***

which is the basic theme of this prologue.

*“The description of the Son in His pre-existence is followed logically by a clause descriptive of His relationship to the creation. The news clause ascribes to the Son the providential government of all created existence which is a function of God Himself. As the pre-creational Wisdom of God, the Son not only embodies God’s glory but also reveals this to the universe as He sustains all things and bears them to their appointed end by His omnipotent Word. The ascription of cosmic dimensions to the work of the Son was prompted by the total estimate which the writer had formed of His transcendent dignity. One who revealed God as fully and ultimately as did the Son must share in the divine government of the world.” (Lane, I, p. 14)*

It is most fitting that the means by which the omnipotent Christ upholds and sustains the creation is the same means by which He brought that creation into being in the beginning - ***“by the Word of His power.”*** That Word is nothing more or less than the expression of the divine omnipotence which inherently belongs to Him as the second member of the Holy Trinity.

***“When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down by the right hand of the Majesty.”*** - Once again, the crucial task of the Son in time is the work of salvation for sinful mankind. This great work was accomplished by the incarnation and the cross. In the context of this Epistle and its audience it is most appropriate that the work of atonement is described in the language of the priestly cult and the sacrificial worship of Tabernacle/Temple. The Greek term which occurs in this phrase technically refers to the ritual removal of defilement by the sacrifice of blood. Thus, for example, Exodus 29, provides these instructions for the



purification of the altar of sacrifice: ***“Seven days thou shalt make atonement for the altar and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy; whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy. Now this is that which thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year day by day continually.”*** (Exodus 29:37-38) The incense altar was to be purified annually in a similar fashion: ***“And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonements; once a year shall he make atonement on it throughout your generations; it is most holy unto the Lord.”*** (Exodus 30:10) A special cleansing with blood was required to prepare the altar for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement:

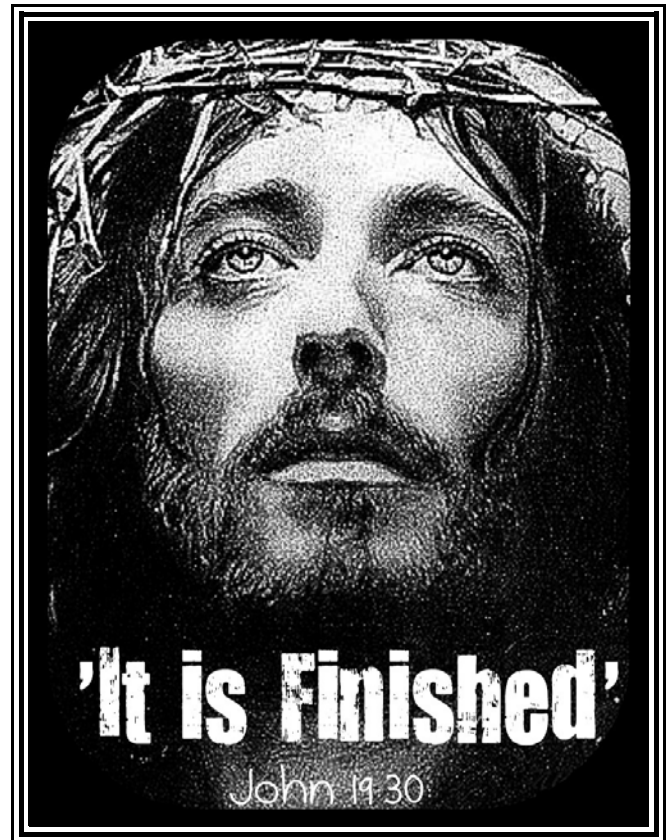
***“And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the Lord and he shall make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of a bullock, and of the blood of a goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleanness of the Children of Israel.”*** (Leviticus 16:18-19)



***“The Day Of Atonement In The Temple”***

The blood of the sacrifice was clearly defined as the agent of cleansing and purification: ***“For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.”*** (Leviticus 17:30) The simple point of the cultic rituals was the defilement of sin created a barrier between the sinful congregation and the holy God. That barrier had to be removed before it would be possible for the people to approach God. Sin’s corruption was removed, that is, covered over, in the blood of the innocent sacrifice which was slaughtered on behalf of the guilty. The use of these Old

Testament Levitical categories here to characterize the work of Christ is intended to indicate that all of these sacrificial rituals were intended to point toward the ultimate atonement in the sacrifice of the Messiah and had now been fulfilled and completed in Jesus Christ. Already in this instance the text is unequivocally clear that the action of the Messiah in this regard is categorically different than those of the Levitical priests in that it was performed once for all - ***“when He had by Himself purged our sins”*** - in stark contrast to purifications of the priests which had to be annually repeated down across the generations. The tense of the verb in Greek is called *“aorist.”* The aorist tense describes an action which took place at one time in the past and was perfectly completed at that time. In a similar fashion, the language makes clear the most radical difference between the cultic sacrifices and the atonement sacrifice of the Messiah. He did not use a sacrificial animal.



He offered Himself as the only effective sacrifice for the sins of the people. The language of the text leaves no room for ambiguity - ***“when He had by Himself purged our sins.”*** These points will be specifically asserted in the chapters to follow as the core of this argument is driven home.

***“Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;”*** - The sequence of events leading up to the session of Christ at the right hand of God’s heavenly throne is familiar to us from centuries of creedal repetition. The sequence is important here so that we clearly understand that the session of Christ at God’s right hand is the result of the perfect fulfillment of the work of salvation. Lutheran theologian John Schaller correctly summarized the doctrine of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions in these succinct words:

*“The promise of God is Psalm 110:1ff. that the Messiah should sit at the right hand of Jehovah was fulfilled in Christ, as the New Testament declares abundantly (Matt.26:64; Mk.16:19; Ro.8:34; Eph.1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Rev. 3:21). Assembling all the elements of information contained in these and similar passages, the Lutheran Church declares this sessio to be the supreme event of Christ’s exaltation, by which Christ’s human nature was placed on the throne of divine majesty, honor and glory, to exercise forever infinite power and dominion, as an omnipresent Lord of all. It should be noted at the outset that this phase of the exaltation is not*



*merely a state of existence, but of omnipotent and paramount activity.”*  
(Schaller, p. 110)

The concept of ***“being seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high”*** is, as Dr. Schaller noted, an acknowledgment and indication of Christ’s, the incarnate Logos, divine nature and power. The exaltation and empowerment which this verbal image describes applies directly to Christ’s human nature, since the divine nature had already from eternity possessed these things as the second person of the Holy Trinity. The image of being seated at the right hand is drawn originally from David’s prophecy of the enthronement of the Messiah in Psalm 110. The themes of the Psalm are remarkably similar to those of Hebrews as the enthronement of the Messiah is an affirmation of His victorious divine power and the Messianic King is declared to be a royal High Priest forever ***“after the order of Melchizedek”***:

***“The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion: rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning; Thou hast the dew of Thy youth. The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at Thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, He shall fill the places with the dead bodies; He shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink in the brook of the way; therefore shall He lift up the head.”***



***“The Priest/King Melchizedek Blessing Abraham” by Tissot***

St. Paul makes the same connection in Romans 8 as he asserts the position of Christ at God's right hand as the basis for the Christian's confidence that no power of earth or hell can divide the Christian from his Lord and Savior.

***“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or the sword?...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 8:33-39)

The Apostle uses the connection between the position of Christ at God's right hand with His divine power and glory in the magnificent Christological Hymn of Ephesians Chapter 1:

***“And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. Which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”*** (Ephesians 1:19-23)



***“Christ the Almighty Lord of the Church”***

The specific meaning of the session at the right hand of God became the subject of debate at the time of the reformation in connection with the bitter debates between Lutherans and Calvinists in regard to the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Calvinists argued that since the body of Christ is seated in heaven at God's right hand it could not possibly be present throughout Christendom in the



elements of the sacrament. Franz Pieper, in his classic *Christian Dogmatics*, identified the misunderstanding of Scripture set forth in this position:

*“The sitting of Christ upon the right hand of God designates the unending dominion upon which Christ entered by His ascension. The term ‘right hand of God’ is an anthropomorphism, or a figure of speech by which Scripture speaks of God as having eyes, ears, feet, hands, and the like. As man commonly uses his right hand for most of the things he does, so the attribute by which God does His work, namely, His unlimited power or omnipotence, is figuratively called His right hand...If then, it is said of Christ, according to His human nature, that after His suffering and death He sat down at God’s right hand, this statement describes not ‘a seat of honor’ but ‘a throne of divine power’...a throne of unweakened and unlimited divine power and might as Ephesians 1:20 clearly teaches...In its doctrine of Christ’s session at God’s right hand the Lutheran Church merely sets forth what Scripture says of God’s right hand and of Christ’s sitting at God’s right hand. Of God’s right hand the Lutheran Confessions say: ‘Which is not fixed place in heaven, as the Sacramentarians assert without any ground in Holy Scripture, but nothing else than the almighty power of God which fills heaven and earth.’ Of the session at the right hand of God the Formula of Concord teaches that Christ, after ascending far above all heavens, ‘not only as God but also as man has*

*dominion and rules from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth as the prophets have predicted and the apostles testified (Mark 16:20) that He everywhere wrought with them and confirmed their word with signs following. The same doctrine is taught by Luther and the Lutheran dogmaticians. Hollaz thus writes: ‘The sitting at the right hand of God is the highest degree of glory in which Christ, the God/Man, having been exalted according to His human nature to the throne of divine Majesty, most powerfully and by His immediate presence governs all things which are in the kingdoms of Power, Grace, and Glory, to the glory of His own Name and for the solace and safety of the afflicted Church.’” (Pieper, II, p. 329 f.)*



**“Christ The Exalted Lord”  
Greek Icon**

John Gerhard, one of the foremost theologians of the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, demonstrated the meticulous care with which our fathers examined the Scriptures as the only basis for Lutheran doctrine in his treatment of this topic.

*“(a) **The Right Hand of God.** The sitting at the Right Hand of God must be understood to be of like nature with the right hand of God. Now the Right Hand of God is not a bodily, circumscribed, limited, definite place, but it is the infinite power of God and His most efficacious majesty in heaven and earth; it is that most efficacious dominion by which God preserves and governs all things. For thus the Right Hand of God is described in Holy Scripture, that it has been magnified in power, and breaks to pieces its enemies (**‘Thy Right Hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; Thy Right Hand, O Lord hath dashed in pieces the enemy.’** Exodus 15:6; **‘Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation; and Thy Right Hand hath holden me up, and Thy gentleness hath made me great.’***

*Psalm 18:35; **‘For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but Thy right hand and Thy arm and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favor unto them.’** Psalm 44:3; **‘Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; and Thy glory above all the earth; that Thy beloved may be delivered; save with Thy Right Hand and answer me.’** Psalm 108:5-6; **‘Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after Thee; Thy Right Hand upholdeth me.’** Psalm 63:7-8, etc. From these and similar passages of Scripture, such a representation of God’s Right Hand is inferred, as that it is the infinite power of God everywhere, in heaven and earth, most efficaciously and most powerfully governing, controlling, and administering all things. Hence, it is also called the right hand of power, **‘And Jesus saith unto him, ‘Thou hast said. Nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the Right Hand of Power and coming in the clouds of heaven.’** Matthew 26:64; **‘Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit at the Right Hand of the Power of God.’** Luke 22:69; and the Right Hand of Majesty; **“Who, being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by***





*Himself purged our sins, He sat down by the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Hebrews 1:3; the Throne of Majesty; ‘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.’ Hebrews 8:1; the Right Hand of the Throne of God; “Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.’ Hebrews 12:2; the Throne of His Glory; ‘When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.’ Matthew 25:31. Therefore, the sitting at God’s Right Hand is to be understood in such a manner as that through it, participation in divine power, majesty, and dominion in heaven and earth are understood. (b) **Sitting At God’s Right Hand.** This is most correctly and simply explained according to that manner and sense in which Scripture itself explains the sitting at God’s Right Hand. Now Scripture itself explains the sitting at God’s Right Hand as the most efficacious and powerful dominion of heaven and earth. The minor premise is proved by a comparison of the passages. The apostle, in 1 Corinthians 15:25, citing Psalm 110:1, infers - ‘**He must reign until He hath put all His enemies under His feet.**’ What sitting at the Right Hand of God is to David is therefore the same as the reigning and having all things under Him is to the apostle. Thus, Mark 16:19; ‘**The Lord Jesus was received up into heaven, and sat at the Right Hand of God.**’ With this passage we compare the expression of the apostle in Ephesians 4:10 “**He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things.**’ Therefore, to sit at the Right Hand of God, and to fill all things, i.e. with the presence of majesty, are convertible terms. And because the power and presence of majesty exercise themselves in a special way through works of grace, in the collection, preservation, and protection of the Church, therefore, according to Mark 16:20, the consequence is, the ‘**apostles preached everywhere, the Lord working with them.**’ And according to Paul, Ephesians 4:11, ‘**He gave some apostles,**’ etc. and Ephesians 4:8 precedes, ‘**He gave gifts to men.**’ Peter, likewise, Acts 2:33, states that the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Ghost was a fruit and consequence of this sitting at the Right Hand of God: ‘**Being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see.**’ The emphatic description of the sitting at the Right Hand of God given by Paul, Ephesians 1:20 sq. and by Peter, 1 Peter 3:22 are especially to be noted. Take notice that in the latter words, ‘**He gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church**’ this presence and power to the Church is not limited or restricted, but by these are described the effect and fruit of the dominion over all things conferred upon Christ. For as God preserves the whole world because of the Church, so also the divine power and majesty are*

imparted to Christ, according to His human nature, in order that He may be King and Protector of the Church. Finally, this also must be noticed, that when Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven to judgement, He will nevertheless sit upon the seat of His majesty and the Right Hand of God' power. **"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."** Matthew 24:30; **'When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His Glory.'** Matthew 25:31; **'Jesus saith unto him, 'Thou hast saith. Nevertheless, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.'** Matthew 26:64. Therefore, the Right Hand of God is not any finite or circumscribed place in heaven; otherwise, Christ coming in the clouds to judgement would no longer sit at



**"Christ Seated At the Right Hand of God"**  
**19<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Engraving**

the Right Hand of God. Likewise, all men are to be brought before His judgement seat, and to see Christ as their Judge; **'And I will pour out upon the House of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications; and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.'** Zechariah 12:10; **'And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.'** Matthew 24:30; **'Behold, He cometh with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.'** Revelation 1:7. But if Christ, with His glorified body, personally united with the Logos and taken up to the Right Hand of God, were so confined to a determinate place in heaven that He could not be present and be seen except in the one place, how could all men, innumerable in multitude, see Him in that one place at one and the same time? If the seat of majesty upon which Christ will sit when He comes to judgement has been removed so many miles from earth, how will all men, at



*one and the same view, be able to see Him?” (Schmid, p. 403, ff.)*

***“Of the Majesty on High”*** is an identification of God which serves to emphasize His unique glory and in that way stress the exaltation of the Son who has been granted the power and dominion of being seated at His right hand. The concept of ***“Majesty”*** expresses the greatness of God using the imagery of magnitude. *“The choice of ‘majesty’ as a circumlocution for God here sharpens the impression of the Son’s incomparable glory. Concurrently it affirms the eternal majesty of God.”* (Lane, I, p. 16) The addition of the qualifying phrase ***“on high”*** further serves to elevate the Son beyond the realm of all things created to the dwelling place of God beyond the categories of time and space. The phrase occurs often in the Old Testament. Psalm 93's song of praise to God is a classic example of the concept, using the same terminology which appears here in Hebrews.

***“The Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith He hath girded Himself; the world also is established that it cannot be moved. Thy throne is established of old. Thou art from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters; yea, than the might waves of the sea. Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, forever.”***



***“Christ At The Right Hand of God the Father”  
11<sup>th</sup> Century German Altar Painting***



*“Ranks of Angels Worshipping Christ In Heaven”*

*“Being made so much better than the angels as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”* - This segment of the prologue concludes with the assertion that the enthronement of the Son and the names and titles involved in that exaltation - *“as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than their”* - (cf. Vs. 5 - *“Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things”*) also unequivocally establishes His superiority over the angels. The name which He has been given is Christ’s identification as *“His Son”* in Verse 5. This is particularly significant given the prominent role which angels played in the piety of Judaism at this point in history. Franz Delitsch points out the profound significance of this sentence in the formulation of the overall assertion of the unique superiority of Jesus:

*“What the Son was in Himself before all time, and what He was and always has been to the world as such, His true personal being and personal manifestation, which had been, for a time, clouded and concealed in His self-humiliation; all this is now contrasted with that which, after the accomplishment of His atoning work, He has become, being seated at the right hand of God, and exalted above the angels, with one of whom (Michael the ‘Metatron’ - the Mediator) Jewish theology was certainly not indisposed to identify Him.”* (Delitsch, I, P. 59)

This same connection between the enthronement of Jesus and His superiority to the angels appears in the other exaltation hymns of the Pauline epistles.

*“Wherefore God hath also highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of*

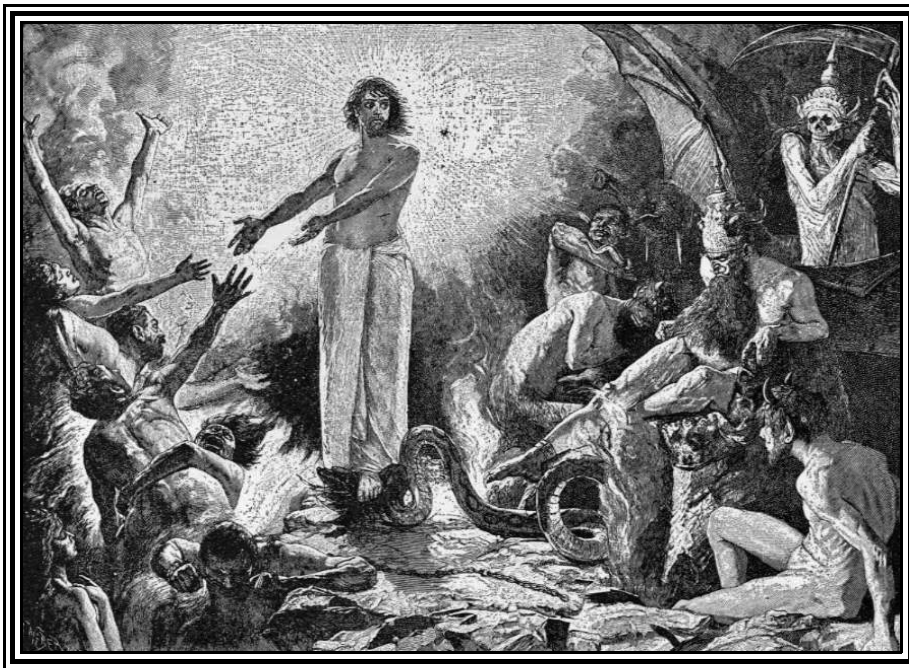


*things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2:9-11)

*“And what is the exceeding greatness of His power usward, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under His feet and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church.”* (Ephesians 1:19-22)

Peter makes the same point in his description of the exaltation of Christ and its implications for the faithful in Christ:

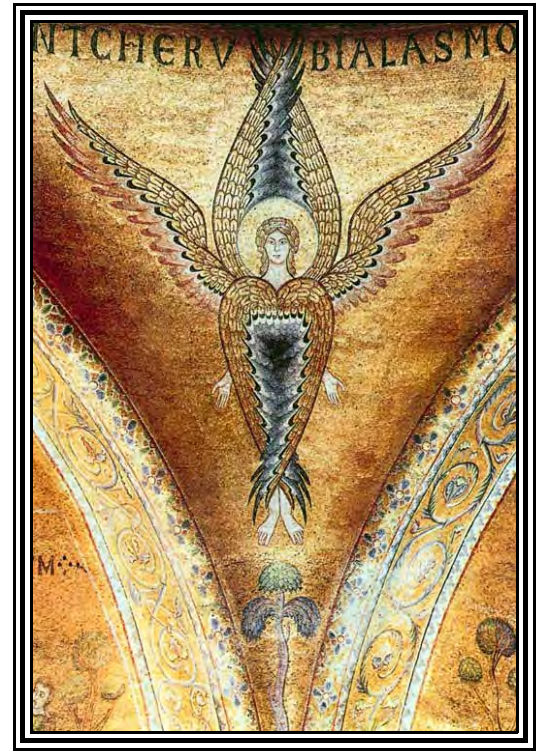
*“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quicken in the Spirit, by which He also went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient when once the longsuffering God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.”* (1 Peter 18-22)



*“Christ’s Descent Into Hell” - Sasha Schneider*

## **Chapter 1:5-14**

*For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee? And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son? And again, when He bringeth the first-begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him? And of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God, even Thy God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows. And Thou Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thine hands; they shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they shall all wax old as doth a garment. And as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail. But to which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*



*"A Seraph" - Greek Mural*

*"For unto which of the angels said He..."* - This is the first of three paragraphs which establish the superiority of Christ over different groups. As previously noted, angels played a prominent role in the piety of Judaism and accordingly to establish a substantive distinction between Christ and the various angels identified by the Jews would have been an important priority. Delitsch mentions the archangel Metatron as a primary figure within this realm. A brief description of this shadowy spirit in Judaism clearly indicates the threat he could have posed to the primacy of Christ as the Son of God.

*"Metatron is one of the most important angels in the Western tradition...In the Talmud and Targum, Metatron is the link between God and humanity. Among the various missions and deeds attributed to Metatron is the staying of Abraham's hand at the point of sacrificing Isaac...Metatron is thought to reside in the seventh heaven and is the tallest angel in heaven. The Zohar computes his size as equal to the breadth of the whole world...Metatron is generally recognized as the heavenly scribe who records everything in the ethereal archives...Metatron seems to be made up of two Greek words for 'after' and 'throne' taken together as one who serves behind the throne or one who occupies the throne next to the throne of glory...In the Hebrew Merkabah*

*Book of Enoch the transformation of the patriarch Enoch, the son of Jared, the great grandfather of Noah into the angel Metatron is described - 'This Enoch whose flesh was turned to flame, his veins to fire, his eyelashes to flashes of lightning, and whom God placed on a throne next to the throne of glory, received after this heavenly transformation the name Metatron.'*" (Lewis, p. 274)



***"The Archangel Metatron" by Jay French***

The comparison demonstrating the inherent superiority of Christ over the angels as the Son of God is put forward and documented with a series of rhetorical questions and seven citations from the Old Testament. The first of those questions - ***"For unto which of the angels said He at any time..."*** is linked to the preceding Verse 4 and the basic statement of the argument with the conjunction ***"For."*** The deliberate use of the word ***"angels"*** in both verses also stresses the connection and therefore the flow of the argument's logic. The obvious response called for by the question is negative. There has never been any angel who has been addressed or identified by God in the manner. The same rhetorical question will be repeated in Verse 13 to indicate the conclusion of this segment of the presentation.

The opening inquiry refers back to ***"the more excellent name"*** of Verse 4. The two Old Testament quotations cited are from Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. Hebrews identifies both of these texts as messianic and that was indeed the way in which they had traditionally been understood with Judaism. Both passages utilize the name ***"Son"*** and are thus perfectly suited to support the point which the author is making in this section. ***"Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten thee."*** (Psalm 2:7) is spoken as God assures His people of the victory of the Messiah over all the powers of this world - ***"The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed."***



Their furious opposition was doomed to failure because the Promised One is God Himself - ***“Yet I have set My King upon My holy hill of Zion.”*** Paul had cited the same text in Acts 13:33 in reference to Jesus and His triumphant resurrection from the grave: ***“God hath fulfilled the same unto us, their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again, as it is also written in the second psalm - ‘Thou art My Son. This day have I begotten Thee.’”*** The second reference - ***“And again, I shall be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.”*** - comes from 2 Samuel 7:14. God, through His prophet Nathan is promising King David that although he will not be allowed to build God’s temple in Jerusalem, one of his descendants long after him will establish and everlasting kingdom and raise up an everlasting house of God:



***“Christ the King” - Greek Icon***

***“And when thy days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father and he shall be My Son.”*** (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

This was the first time in the Old Testament that the Messiah was identified as a descendant of King David. When the Archangel Gabriel came to Mary to inform her that she would be the mother of the Savior, he made specific reference to the fulfillment of this promise both in terms of the Messiah being the Son of God and the King who would receive the throne of David: ***“He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David.”*** (Luke 2:32) The combination of these two well-known texts provides compelling support for the unique status of Jesus as the Son of God who is inherently superior to any of the angels of heaven.

***“By joining Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 the writer of the Hebrews provides strong biblical support for the assertion that the position of the angels is subordinate to the status of the Son. He alone enjoys the unique relationship with the Father that finds expression in the designation ‘My Son.’”*** (Lane, p. 25)

***“And again, when He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, He saith...”*** - The next quotation is introduced with these intriguing words. The consensus is that the reference in this phrase ***“when He bringeth His first-begotten into the world”*** is a reference to the



*“Christ The Almighty Judge Before Whom Every Knee Shall Bow”*

second coming of Christ on the Day of Judgement. This sense of the text would be more clearly reflected in the English translation if the word **“again”** were to be applied to the main verb of the sentence thus reading - *“And, when He again brings the first-begotten into the world...”*. This return will mark Christ’s second entrance into time and space:

*“Once before Yahweh has brought the First-begotten into the earth that is inhabited by men. That was in the time of the incarnation and in the redemptive mission of the incarnate Son, when He wrought the cleansing of the world from its sins. Then, too, God’s angels worshiped Him (over Bethlehem’s fields, at the end of the forty days of the temptation, etc.) although this worship is not mentioned here. He who was brought in once shall be brought in again, which must occur at the end of the world when He shall execute the final judgement. Then all the angels of God shall accompany Him, and they shall worship Him, and not only in His deity, but equally as the Son of Man in his humanity, in which the heavenly host worshiped Him already in His incarnation.”* (Lenski, p. 48)

The title **“First-Begotten”** - unlike its more common, exclusive counterpart **“Only-Begotten”** - suggests that there will be others to follow. The **“begotten”** directs our attention particularly to the incarnation and the humanity of Jesus. It is a priority not only of chronology, first in time, but of dignity and glory. The interpretation that the coming again of which the text speaks is Judgement Day addresses this concern and conforms perfectly to Paul’s observation in Romans 8 that by His death and resurrection Christ has become the prototype **“the firstborn among many brethren”** of all believers who will be raised from their graves by God to receive the glorious salvation which has been won for them by Christ on the Last Day.



***“For whom He did foreknow, He did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, them whom He did predestinate He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified.”*** (Romans 8:29-30)

The same title occurs in a similar sense in Colossians 1:18 - ***“And He is the Head of His body the Church; who is the Beginning, the Firstborn from the Dead; that in all things He might have preeminence.”*** And again in Revelation 1:5-6 -

***“And from Jesus Christ who is the Faithful Witness and the First-Begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him who loves us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”***

Delitsch affirms the beautiful appropriateness of this designation of Christ as ***“the first-begotten into the world”*** as a continuation of the theme of Christ as the Adam of the new creation who, unlike Adam his counterpart, will bring life and glory to mankind:

*“How genuinely Pauline is the expression chosen to describe His second coming! The returning Savior is here called the first-begotten, and He is so called chiefly because He is regarded as the firstborn among many brethren, and therefore in the sense of Romans 8:29. The title, ‘the firstborn among many brethren’ belongs to Him as the risen One, One who has been born of God into the new life and glorification - the first new man who has experienced a birth out of the womb of the grave, and the founder of a new humanity, enjoying a primacy of both time and rank above His fellows. This new primacy corresponds to the original dignity enjoyed from eternity, and within the developments of time it impresses on Him above all creatures, the divine seal. The Only Begotten becomes, in His glorified humanity as the Son with many brethren, the firstborn among them...The risen Christ has gone back into a state of supra-mundane being with*



***“Christ the King and Lord of the Church”  
by Rudolf Schafer***



*God, out of which He will one day come forth. The Father will then acknowledge Him, and make by His almighty word, not only men, but angels, bow down before Him.” (Delitsch, I, pp. 67-68)*

The clearest reference to a specific divine command from God for the angels to worship His Son comes from the closing words of Moses valedictory sermon to the Children of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:43 (based on the text of the Greek Septuagint) in which the aged prophet celebrates the ultimate vindication of God which will take place on the Day of Judgement:

***“Rejoice ye heavens with Him, and let all the angels of God worship Him; rejoice ye Gentiles with His people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in Him; for He will avenge the blood of His sons, and He will render vengeance and recompense justice to His enemies, and will reward them that hate Him; and the Lord shall purge the land of His people.”***

Within Judaism this text was properly understood as a Messianic reference even though the verses speak of Jahweh in that the subject matter was the final judgement. The agent through whom Jahweh would manifest Himself at the final judgement was the Messiah



***“Glory, Praise, and Honor Be To You, O Christ the King and the Redeemer***

hence the text actually refers to Him. The author of Hebrews follows this customary understanding in His application of the phrase ***“and let all the angels of God worship Him”*** to the Messianic Son of God. *“Wherever the Old Testament speaks of a final and decisive manifestation of Jehovah in the power and glory of the final judgement and salvation; wherever it speaks of a revelation of Jehovah which shall be the antitype and fulfillment of that typical one in the Mosaic time, of a self-presentation of Jehovah as manifested King over His own kingdom, there, Jehovah = Jesus Christ; for Christ is Jehovah manifested in the flesh - Jehovah Himself entering into fellowship with humankind, and taking part in our historical developments - Jehovah rising as the Sun of Righteousness, and shining on His own people. This is irrefragably true; it constitutes the innermost bond between the two testaments. All writers of the New Testament are fully conscious of it.” (Delitsch, I, p. 72)*

A similar wording is found in Psalm 97:7 where the context also deals with the coming of the judgement. In this instance the Hebrew phrase calls



*“Christ the King of Angels” by Van Eyck*

upon the “*elohim*” - a word usually translated as “*gods*” but which refers to spiritual beings in general and can be used in reference to angels.

***“Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and judgement are the habitation of His throne. A fire goeth before Him and burneth up His enemies round about...Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols; worship Him, all ye gods.”*** (Psalm 92:1-2,7)

***“And of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits and his ministers flames of fire.”*** - Having identified the Son and contrasted Him with the angels to demonstrate His inherent superiority, the writer now makes the same point in reverse, by identifying the angels and contrasting them with the Son. Nonetheless the clear focus remains on the central character, the Son of God. In the Greek text the two lines which describe the nature of the angels are followed by thirteen lines which address the nature and status of the Son. This structure makes the intent of the author very clear. The Book of Hebrews, unlike some of Paul’s epistles (cf. Ephesians 1:20-21; Colossians 1:16) and St. John’s Revelation (cf. Revelation 8:1-13; 10:1-11; 12:7-17) makes no reference to different ranks or categories of angels. The Apocryphal writings of both Judaism and Christianity were intrigued, some would say obsessed, with this topic, particularly the numerous books attributed to the Patriarch Enoch. Judaic piety during the inter-testamental period went so far as to identify particular angels with the various forces of nature and contend that such angels literally took the form of those dimensions of the physical world. Thus, for example, the creation account in the apocryphal Book of Jubilees, composed during the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. , described the role of



the angels in nature with these colorful words:

*“For on the first day He created the heavens which are above, and the earth and the waters, and all the spirits which minister before Him: the angels of the presence, and the angels of sanctification, and the angels of the spirit of fire, and the angels of the spirit of the winds, and the angels of the spirit of the clouds and darkness and snow and hail and frost, and the angels of resoundings and thunder and lightning, and the angels of the spirit of cold and heat and winter and springtime and harvest and summer, and all the spirits of His creatures which are in heaven and on earth.” (Jubilees 2:2)*

Such fantasies draw perilously close to pantheism. R.C.H. Lenski correctly observed: *“But such fictions do not illumine the Truth.”* (Lenski, p. 53)

All such distinctions, whether fanciful or real, are beside the point for Hebrews. His only interest is in establishing the categorical difference between all angels and the Son of God. The quotation in this instance is from Psalm 104. Once again, as in the previous instance, the writer quotes from the Greek Septuagint text:

***“Bless the Lord O my soul; O Lord my God Thou art very great! Thou hast clothed Thyself with praise and honor; Who dost robe Thyself with light as with a garment; spreading out the heavens as a curtain. Who covers His chambers with waters, Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind, Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flaming fire.” (Psalm 104:1-4)***



***“One of the Fiery Serpahs Which Surround God’s Throne”***

The Hebrew text of the first phrase literally reads - *“He makes His messengers winds.”* The KJV mistakes the sense of the Hebrew noun *“ruach”* here in its rendering the term as *“spirits.”* The word can be understood in that way at times, but not in this context, in



comparison with the ***“flaming fire”*** of the following phrase. However, the point of comparison in Hebrews’ use of this text is not the imagery of roaring wind or flaming fire. For the Psalmist, the physical images merely convey the speed and effectiveness with which God’s angels carry out the tasks which God has assigned to them. *“The psalmist says that God makes His angel messengers as fleet as winds and His angel officials destructive as the consuming flame of fire.”* (Lenski, p. 53) Rather, Hebrews quotes this text because of its designation of the angels as God’s ***“messengers”*** and ***“ministers.”*** That is to say, angels are not equal to God. They are His servants. That places them in an entirely different category than God’s own Son which the following verses will affirm in detail.

***“But unto the Son He saith, ‘Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteous and hated iniquity; therefore Thy God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.’”*** -

The first quotation used to establish the unique identity and stature of the Son in comparison to the angels is an extended segment of Psalm 45:6-7. As in the preceding citations Hebrews does not hesitate to apply an Old Testament text which was originally addressed to God specifically to the Son of God - ***“But unto the Son He saith.”*** As we pointed out previously in a quotation from Franz Delitsch (p. 48) this was the consistent practice of both Rabbinic Judaism and the earliest teachers of Christendom, including the apostles themselves.

*“On the same principle, all Psalms in which the world subduing kingdom of Jehovah is celebrated are strictly Messianic, and are regarded as such by our author (the writer of Hebrews). The final glory of the theocracy is in God’s plan of redemption none other than a Christocracy; the kingdom of Jehovah and the kingdom of Christ are one.”* (Delitsch, I, p. 72)

In this passage that distinction between God the Father and God the Son is even more strongly indicated by the final phrase in Verse 7 - ***“Therefore Thy God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.”***

The substantive difference between the Son and angels is first indicated in Psalm 45 by its assertion of the eternity of the Son and His Kingdom - ***“Thy throne, O God, is forever and***



***“The Archangel St. Michael Slaying The Dragon of the Apocalypse”***

*ever*” - in contrast to the angels which are a part of the created order with a specific origin at the time of God’s creation. *“Here, however, he underscores the angels’ finite nature. They are created, temporal, malleable beings whom God makes and changes.”* (Cockerill, p. 108)

*“The writer intends to contrast the Son, whose throne endures forever, with the angels whose existence is ephemeral.”* (bound to relatively brief time)...*The writer’s primary interest in the quotation is not the predication of deity but of the eternal nature of the dominion exercised by the Son. The implication that the Son shares the quality of deity only intensifies the reference to His eternal rule and sharpens the contrast between the unchangeable Son and the mutable angels.”* (Lane, p. 29)



*“Kaiser Wilhelm II Holding the Royal Scepter of the German Empire”*

The throne of the monarch is the seat of his office - the concrete indication that he holds the position of the King. In the English language the term which describes the removal of a King from his position is to be *“dethroned.”* Hence, to indicate that *“Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever”* is to assert that the Kingdom of the divine Son is eternal and unlimited by the constraints of time.

*“A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy Kingdom.”* - Reference to the royal scepter, as the most visible emblem of the sovereign power of the King, that is his ability to carry out or implement his reign reinforces the same point. The word is derived from a Greek verb which means to lean or rely upon. Thus the staff became the ceremonial representation of the power which supports or upholds the throne of the king. The defining characteristic of the reign of this eternal King is *“righteousness.”* The original term in the Hebrew text means *“straightness”* or *“uprightness.”* It does not, it cannot, deviate

from the absolute standard of that which is good and right and true. Earthly kings invariably abuse their power by pride, partiality, or prejudice. They thereby debase themselves and the high office which has been entrusted to them. The old adage is precisely correct in its assertion - *“Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”* Sinful human beings are incapable of such righteousness. But the divine Son, to whom this eternal kingdom has been entrusted is in a different category altogether. Perfect righteousness is His nature as the Son of God and that perfect righteousness will characterize every dimension of His



*“The Angelic Hosts Worshiping Christ The Lamb”*

reign.

*“The scepter of the Son’s Kingdom is the scepter of uprightness par excellence. The rule of the divine Son, now seated at God’s right hand is righteous or upright in a way no other has ever been, for it is the exercise of God’s own sovereign righteous rule so desired by the OT prophets.”*  
(Cockerill, p. 110)

In a world thoroughly cursed by the unrighteousness and corruption of sin this righteous reign was the promise and the dream of God’s prophetic spokesmen. Jeremiah foretold this Messianic Kingdom:

***“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise up unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is His Name, whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”*** (Jeremiah 23:5-6)

King David yearned for such a kingdom of righteous, and hoped that it might be accomplished through his son Solomon. But that was not to be. Only the Messiah, the divine King, could establish true righteousness among all men forever.

***“Give to the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness to the king’s son. He shall judge Thy people with righteousness and Thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people. He shall save the***



*children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and the moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”* (Psalm 72:1-8)

**“Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity.”** - These are the hallmarks of the Kingdom of the Messianic King because this is the character of the Son of God who serves as that King. The two phrases **“loved righteousness”** and **“hated iniquity”** are the necessary counterparts of one another. Anyone who truly loves righteousness will necessarily hate iniquity. A genuine love for righteousness must be accompanied by an equally genuine hatred for anything and everything which denies or defies God’s righteousness. Easygoing indifference to evil is widely viewed as a virtue in contemporary society. In fact, such tolerance is generally perceived as the foremost of virtues. The Bible proclaims this perspective to be a deadly delusion of the devil. The apathetic acquiescence to evil which reigns supreme among us is not a sign of love, it is the ultimate contradiction of love. As this text reminds us, love and hatred are the necessary counterparts of one another. Both that true love and burning hatred are present in the reign of the Messianic King.



***“The Anointing of David As King of Israel by Samuel”***

**“Therefore God, even Thy God, hast anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.”** - The original historical context of Psalm 45, here being quoted, was the celebration of a royal wedding. Every king of David’s line was a potential Messiah, given the prophecy that the Promised One would be David’s descendant. Sadly, however, the



*“King Solomon And The Queen Of Sheba”*

royal descendants of David proved consistently unqualified for that role.

*“The Psalm is messianic in that it embodies the inspired psalmist’s desire to see the idea of the theocratic kingdom, and so the promise of the coming Messiah fulfilled and realized in the then present king, a desire which was not fulfilled, the whole line of kings from David down to Zedekiah, falling miserably short of that ideal and of that promise...And so the original reference of this 45<sup>th</sup> Psalm to the person of a king who failed to realize it, after that failure, laid aside and forgotten, but the Psalm itself remained standing as a prophecy which still awaited its fulfillment.” (Delitsch, I, p. 77)*

The hope for the Messianic King and the Kingdom of perfect righteousness remained as the various monarchs of David’s line rose and fell, the faithful remnant of the people waited.

*“Throughout the Old Testament we find similar messianic hopes and longings attaching themselves to such kings as David and Solomon, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, etc., etc. - hopes and desires which, failing all in their primary objects are finally concentrated in the person of the second David, and become Yea and Amen in Jesus Christ.” (Delitsch, I, p. 78)*

Psalm 45 was thus adapted in the liturgies of the Temple, and became a messianic hymn of the marriage of Israel to Jahweh. This is fully consistent with the imagery of the New Testament which depicts the Church, the people of God - not only from Israel but from all nations, as the Bride of Christ. Its use here in Hebrews reflects that heritage. The reference





*Greek Icon of the Archangels Worshipping the Son of God In Heaven*

to anointing is obviously also linked to the position of the King. It was the ceremonial outpouring of the blessings of God upon the man whom He had chosen to reign over His people. That ceremony went through the same gradual transformation which has just been described of redirection from failed earthly monarchs to the ultimate Descendant of David, the Messiah - the Anointed One. The anointing in this instance is unique in that it is performed by God Himself ***“Therefore, Thy God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee”*** with ***“the oil of gladness.”*** The KJV translation of the former phrase, while grammatically possible, misses the sense of the text. The point of this segment of Hebrews is to assert the deity of the Son. This phrase is what grammarians call a *“vocative,”* that is a comment directly addressed to the royal Son. It should be translated - *“O God, Your God has anointed You with the oil of*

*gladness.”* God the Son is identified as true God in the opening words *“O God”* but then distinguished from God the Father, to whom the next words apply - *“Your God.”* ***“The oil of gladness”*** signifies the gladness, delight and bliss which are the response, in heaven and on earth, to the successful establishment of the royal Son’s kingdom of perfect righteousness by His accomplishment of the plan of salvation for mankind. The final words in the phrase - ***“above Thy fellows”*** has also elicited significant discussion. Some contend that the ***“fellows”*** - given the superiority of the Son over the angels as the theme of this segment - are the angels. That view, however, would seem to conflict with the dismissal of the angels in the previous sentence messengers and ministers. The majority view, which appears to make better sense, is that ***“Thy fellows”*** are the saints, those humans who have come to faith and are thereby Christ’s ***“joint heirs”*** (Romans 8:17) who will join Him upon His royal throne as He reigns in heavenly glory: ***“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne.”*** (Revelation 3:21) This makes more sense given the fact the Christ did not take on the nature of the angels but through His incarnation He did take on human nature to accomplish the plan of salvation. Nonetheless, He remains the foremost among all of humanity by virtue of His divine nature and is ***“above”*** every other man who has ever lived.

***“And Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they all shall***



*wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same and Thy years shall not fail.”* - The next text, Psalm 102:25-27, is introduced with the simple conjunction **“and.”** The lack of further explanation or qualification indicates that the author believes the link between the two Psalms to be completely obvious. *“After affirming that the Son was God, it was appropriate to ascribe Psalm 102: 25-27 to Him. This Psalm fits so seamlessly with Psalm 45:6-7 that the author uses a mere ‘and’ to connect the two.”* (Cockerill, p. 111) Once again, those who fail to acknowledge the messianic nature of the Psalms complain that this text applies to God and has no reference to the Son of God as such. The author of Hebrews, they would contend, has either misunderstood the Psalm, or is deliberately misusing it in support of his argument. Such complaints in reference to a biblical author who is writing by plenary verbal inspiration are inherently inadmissible. The problem cannot be with the author of Hebrews or the Holy Spirit who inspires him, but with the critics who obviously do not understand the sense of the verses from Psalm 102 here cited.

Up to this point, the Old Testament texts cited have documented the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God who has been appointed as the divine Heir of all things. The emphasis now shifts to define the relationship of Christ to creation, thereby identifying Him as the one God who is not a part of creation but who stands apart from creation as its source, sustainer, and ultimately its judge. This understanding of the nature of God was the core component of Hebrew monotheism and is thus essential to the Epistle’s contention that Jesus Christ is true God. *“This Scripture confirms and amplifies the Prologue’s description of the Son as Creator, Sustainer, and universal Heir.”* (Cockerill, p. 112). The citation begins in Verse 10 with Verse 25 of Psalm 102 - **“And Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth; the heavens are the works of Thine hands.”** The terminology of the psalmist is clearly dependent upon that of Genesis 1, the original account of creation. The phrase **“in the beginning”** is the opening phrase of the Book of Genesis and the Hebrew Tanak. Every religious Jew would instantly have recognized these words and their implications. When time and space reality began, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was not only present, but the divine agent through whom the work of creation was accomplished. **“The heavens”** and **“the earth”** also reflect the language of



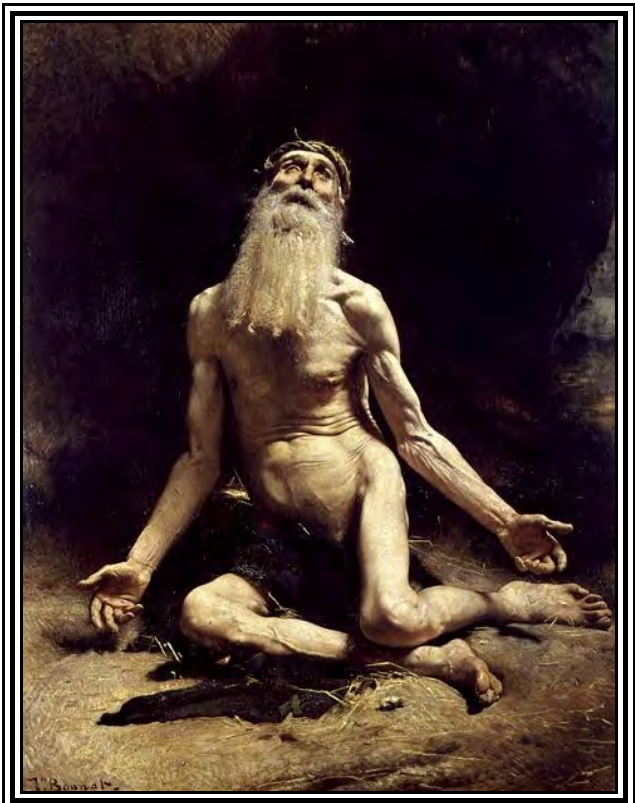
*Creation by William Blake*

Genesis. This is the Old Testament idiom for the entire universe and everything that exists within it. To affirm the Christ ***“laid the foundation of the earth”*** expresses the stability and solidity of that which was made. In Proverbs 8, divine Wisdom, Solomon’s metaphor for the Son of God, uses similar language to describe His activity in creation:

***“When He prepared the heavens, I was there; when He set a compass upon the face of the depth: When He established the clouds above; when He strengthened the foundations of the deep; When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was with Him as One brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth, as My delights were with the sons of men; Now, therefore, hearken unto Me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep My ways.”*** (Proverbs 8:27-32)

The prophet Isaiah had warned the Children of Israel not to forget the nature and the power of God as the One who had laid the foundations of the earth and who would bring down calamitous judgement upon them if they were unfaithful to Him: ***“And forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if He were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?”*** (Isaiah 51:13) When the patriarch Job dared to question the justice of God and complain about the manner in which he had been mistreated by Him, God quickly corrected Job’s presumptuous misunderstanding:

***“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who laid the measure thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the cornerstone thereof; when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? And who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, And brake up for it My decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be***



***“The Lament of Job”***



*stayed.”* (Job 38:4-11)

This terminology in Verse 25 of Psalm 102 sets the stage for the unimaginable magnitude of the contrast which will follow in Verse 27 of the Psalm when the Son of God is said to have *“folded them up like a garment.”*



*“They will perish, but You remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You roll them up like a robe. Like a garment they will be changed. But You remain the same, and Your years will never end.”* - The citation of Psalm 102 continues to contrast the eternity and immutability of the Son of God with the temporary nature of the creation which He has fashioned. The psalmist uses the apt analogy of a piece of clothing which wears out and is ultimately folded up and cast aside. Once again, the contrast between the temporary nature of creation - *“they will perish” “they will be changed”* - in contrast to the eternity of the Son of God - *“but You remain” “You remain the same and Your years will never end”* - cuts to the core of Biblical monotheism’s understanding of the nature of God. The one God exists outside of time and space, unlike the gods of polytheism and pantheism which are simply the personification and deification of natural forces. The one God is not subject to time. He is without beginning and without end. God, and in this instance specifically the Son of God, are not merely permanent, that is, without end. Instead, more fundamentally, Time is a category which does not apply to God. He is independent of time, without beginning, without end and not subject to time’s passage in any way. His transcendence of these categories of creation is the nature of His deity. Accordingly there can be only one God from who everything that is originates. Everything else has a starting point and a point of origin which are God Himself. The text here makes that emphasis clear by introducing this section with the assertion of the Son as the agent of creation - *“In the beginning, O*

***Lord, You laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. Revelation 13:8 makes the same point when it declares: “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the book belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”***

The imagery of the physical universe and all the things of this world wearing out like a ragtag garment which has seen prolonged use and is discarded when it has served its purpose in contrast to the permanence of God also appears in the prophecy of Isaiah.

***“Lift up your eyes to the heavens. Look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. Hear Me, you who know what is right, you people who have My Law in your hearts; do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults. For the other will eat them up like a garment, the worm will devour them like wool. But My righteousness will last forever, My salvation through all generations.”*** (Isaiah 51:6-8)

The language makes the point that the time/space universe was designed to be temporary and “serves to stress the frequency and casualness with which the created order is altered.” (Lanne, p. 31). “It will be no more difficult for the Son to remove this creation than for a human being to fold up a coat or a blanket.” (Cockerill, p. 114)

***“To which of the angels did God ever say, ‘Sit on My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet?’ - Verse 13 echoes the beginning of this segment of***



***“The Enthronement of Christ At the Right Hand of God” by DeGrebber***

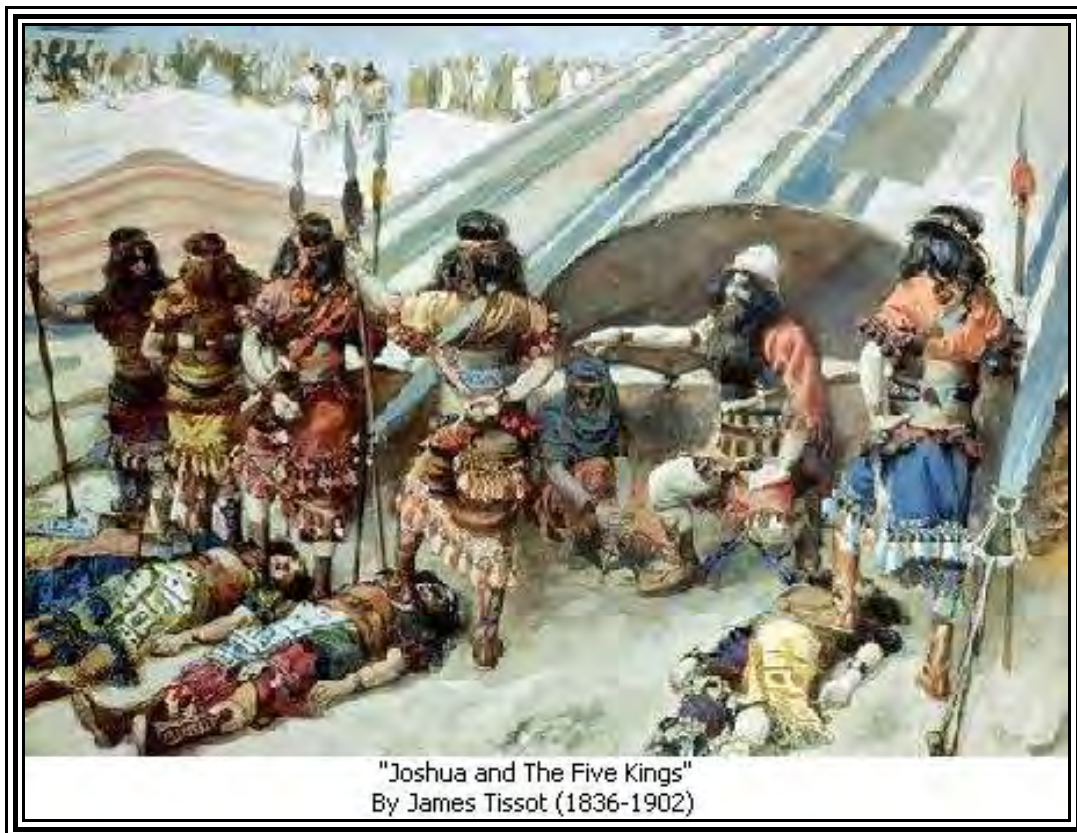


quotations in Verse and forms the conclusion of the list of Old Testament citations. Many of the commentators refer to the two verses with their identical rhetorical questions as “bookends” which serve to bracket the segment. The question - ***“To which of the angels did God ever say”*** - is intensified in this instance with the inclusion of the word “ever” which in the Greek text is the last word in the sentence for particular emphasis. The quotation in this instance is from Psalm 110:1 - ***“The Lord says to my Lord; ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’”*** Thus, Psalm 110, the Old Testament text quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other, both opens (1:2-3) and closes (1:13) the paragraph. These texts (Psalm 110:1 & Psalm 110:4) from the magnificent coronation Psalm recur throughout the Epistle to document and certify the heavenly exaltation of Christ, the Son of God (cf. Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 1:3,13; 10:12,13; 12:2: and Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:11,17,21). The intensity of this usage is unparalleled for any Old Testament text anywhere else in the New Testament. It’s reoccurrence here clarifies the previous reference in Verse 3 which had implied that Jesus seated Himself at the right hand of God - ***“When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty of God on High.”*** The citation from Psalm 110 makes it clear that the session of Christ at the right hand of the Father took place specifically at God’s instigation and invitation - ***“The Lord says to my Lord, Sit at My right hand.”***



***“Chrst the King Upon His Heavenly Throne With The Crowns Of Earth At His Feet” - Hubert Van Eyck***

The almighty power of the exalted King of Kings at God’s right hand will be such that no one, not the powers of earth or Hell, neither sin, death nor the devil shall be able to stand against Him. He shall be victorious over them all. This is vividly indicated by the phrase - ***“Until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.”*** The practice of having his enemies brought before the victorious monarch, forcing them to their knees, and then placing his foot upon their outstretched necks was common throughout the middle east to humiliate one’s defeated foes and demonstrate the totality of the victor’s triumph. Wall reliefs in the tombs of the pharaoh’s are replete with examples of such scenes. A Bible precedent for this powerfully symbolic practice can be seen in the aftermath of Joshua’s smashing defeat of the alliance of five Canaanite kings who had formed a confederation to attempt to halt the Israelite invasion of the land of Canaan. The Kings has concealed



themselves in a cave after the battle in a vain attempt to escape their fate:

*Then said Joshua, Open the mouth of the cave and bring out those five kings to me out of the cave. And they did so and brought forth those five kings out of the cave; the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. And it came to pass, when they brought those kings unto Joshua that Joshua called for all the men of Israel and said unto the captains of all the men of war which went with him; Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings. And they came near and put their feet upon the necks of them. And Joshua said unto them: Fear not, neither be dismayed, be strong and of good courage for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom ye fight. And afterward Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees; and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening.” (Joshua 10:22-26)*

The reference here is future - *“until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool”* - referring to the ultimate defeat - but not destruction - of evil on the final Day of Judgement.

*“Are not all His angels ministering spirits, sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”*

This concluding sentence of Chapter 1 serves as the transition from this chapter’s assertion of the equality of the Son with God and His supremacy over all of creation specifically including the angels. Chapter 2 will deal with the Son’s relationship with the people of

God. Thus this positive statement about the subsidiary role of angels in God's dealings with His people prepares the way for what is to come. The identification of God's people as ***"those who will inherit salvation"*** - an allusion to Judgement Day - links up with the promise to the Son that God will ***"make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet"*** - also an allusion to Judgement Day. Once again the question - ***"Are not all His angels ministering spirits"*** is rhetorical, expecting and requiring a positive response. Yes, of course they are. *"The interrogatory form implies that no reader of this epistle will think of dissenting. ... Yes, that is what they are. No more than that is possible for them. They fit into the incarnate Son's royal rule of grace. None of them could ever act as king himself."* (Lenski, p. 61) The author does not indulge in distinguishing between ranks or different kinds of angels. Such speculation was - and is - rife during this period. A number of New Testament texts also allude to such distinctions without offering any definitions for them (cf. Ephesians 1:21; 1 Peter 3:22) Instead the inclusive language here - ***"all His angels"*** embraces however many ranks and kinds there may be. The Greek adjective ***"ministering"*** is *"leiturgika"* from which the English noun *"liturgy"* is derived. In secular Greek the term typically referred to public service in connection with government. However, in Biblical Greek the sense of the word shifted to the realm of religion and the service rendered in conjunction with the worship of God - thus the English usage. The service of the Levitical priests in the Temple is typically described with this same word. The other Greek word used in reference to the non-liturgical service of the angels is *"diakonia"* upon which the English word *"deacon"* is based. Thus, for example, the angels are said to have served Jesus after his forty days in the wilderness (Mark 1:13) and His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:53). Neither word is strictly distinguished from the other leaving room for significant overlap, which is, no doubt the case here. The fact that they serve further distinguishes them from the Son as their Master.

*"It is the angel's delight to do this service for Christ's saints. To act as Christ's officiating ministrants in saving us poor mortals is the height of their joy. It is also the limit of their activity. They cannot make us heirs of salvation; only the Heir Himself can do this, who alone has the inheritance to share with us as 'joint heirs' Romans 8:17)." (Lenski, p. 62)*

***"Those who will inherit salvation"*** is, as previously noted, language characteristically eschatological, used in reference to Judgement Day and the end times. The inheritance of salvation suggests the bequest of a gift from God which will become the recipient's permanent possession. ***"Salvation"*** is the deliverance from sin, death and the power of the devil which has been accomplished by the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. More positively stated, it is the eternal life with Christ in heaven which is God's gracious gift to those who have been justified by grace through faith in Him.

This magnificent Chapter is the most profound demonstration in all of Holy Writ of the indissoluble connection between the Old and New Testaments.



## Hebrews Chapter 2

*(1) We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we do not drift away. (2) For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, (3) how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. (4) God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will. (5) It is not to*



*“Christ Enthroned As The King Of Heaven”  
- Russian Orthodox Icon*

*angels that He has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking, (6) but there is a place where someone has testified: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him? (7) You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor (8) and put everything under his feet.” In putting everything under him God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. (9) But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (10) In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting the God for Whom and through Whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. (11) Both the One Who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. (12) He says; “I will declare Your Name to My brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing Your praises.” (13) And again; “I will put My trust in Him.” And again He says; “Here am I, and the children God has given Me.” (14) Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity, so that by His death He might destroy*

*him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - (15) and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (16) For surely it is not angels He helps, but Abraham’s descendants. (17) For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people. (18) Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.*

#### **Verses 1-4**

***We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.***

***“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard...”*** - Based upon the confusion already indicated by his need to address the incomparable greatness of the Son of God in Chapter 1, the author now proceeds to a stern word of warning as to the necessity of relying upon the Word of God, beginning in the Old Testament writings of the prophets, and now culminating in the ultimate Word of God which has been revealed in the incarnate Son of God, rather than the opinions and inclinations of individuals or society. The technique is a typical rabbinic form of argument, from the lesser to the greater (Latin - *“ad minori ad maius”*). *“Verses 2-3 reinforce the urgency of ‘attending the the things heard’ by compring the preparatory and thus lesser OT revelation with God’s final disclosure in the Son; if it was important to heed the former, how much more the latter.”* (Cockerill, p. 117) To soften the blow, so to speak, the apostle includes himself among the subjects of the admonition - ***“We must pay more careful attention.”*** The linking term in this sentence is ***“therefore”*** which signals that what follows is based upon that which came before. The connection is not to a particular segment of Chapter 1 but to the entire argument presented there. The drifting away to which he refers is departure from or uncertainty about the truths of the faith, with specific reference to the identity of the Son of God. The indication here is that drift was caused by inattention to the Word of God. The nautical imagery of drifting as upon the sea suggests a navigator who is not paying appropriate and necessary attention to staying on course and thus brings his vessel into danger of being lost and not reaching safe harbor as he drifts aimlessly and without direction. The goal, or safe harbor, here is Christ, holding firm to their confession of Christ and living in obedient faithfulness with eyes fixed upon Jesus (12:1-3) St. Paul used the same image in Ephesians 4:14 when he described false doctrine as contrary winds and waves which prevent growth in the truth of Christ: ***“Then we will no longer be***



***“The Angel of the Presence Shielding Moses From the Majesty of God As the Ten Commandments Are Inscribed***





*Stain Glass Window of the Arch Angel Uriel*

*infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”* That which *“we have heard”* is the apostolic preaching of the cross and the message of salvation by grace thru faith in Jesus Christ as will be explicitly defined in the verses which follow. The following verse will specify that what *“we have heard”* comes directly from Christ to His chosen apostles and through them to the congregations which they will establish throughout the world at Christ’s command. *“The pastor’s first description of the gospel underscores its divine origin and the urgency of obedience.”* (Cockerill, p. 117)

*“For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment...”* The verbal nature of the message in both instances is indicated by

*“to what we have heard”* in Verse 1 and *“spoken by angels”* here. The two phrase fit together and reflect each other. The reference here to *“the message spoken by angels”* is specifically in regard to the presentation of the Law on Mount Sinai. The role of angels in the Sinai theophany is well documented. Moses described the appearance of the Lord upon Mount Sinai surrounded by countless hosts of angels in Deuteronomy 33:2 - *“The Lord came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir; He shown forth from Paran. He came with myriads of holy ones, from the south, from His mountain slopes.”* Saint Stephan rebuked the mob of Jews which were about to murder him in Jerusalem as having rejected the Law which Moses had received through angels: *“Moses was in the assembly in the desert with the angel, who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, and he received the living words to pass on to us...you who have received the Law that was put into effect through angels, but have not obeyed it.”* (Acts 8:38.53) Paul made the same observation in his demonstration of the superiority of the Gospel over the Law in his epistle to the Galatians: *“What then was the purpose of the Law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred has come. The Law was put into effect through angels by a mediator.”* (Galatians 3:19) The popular Jewish apocryphal Book of Jubilees, written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C. goes into considerably more detail as the role of the angels in the revelation at Mount Sinai, particularly that of the Angel of the Presence (typically identified as the Arch-Angel Uriel) who becomes the intermediary



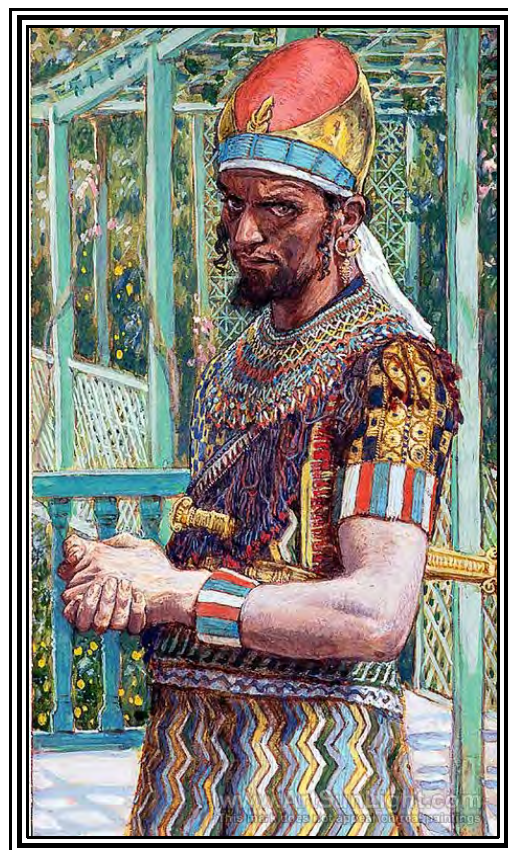
through whom God addresses all of His comments to Moses, many of which pertain to the subject of angels.

*“And God said to the Angel of the Presence, ‘Write for Moses from the first creation until My sanctuary is built in their midst forever and ever. And the Lord will appear in the sight of all, and everyone will know that I am the God of Israel and the Father of the children of Jacob and King upon Mount Zion forever and ever. And Zion and Jerusalem will be holy. And the Angel of the Presence, who went before the camp of Israel took the tablets of the division of year from the time of the creation of the Law and Testimony....And the Angel of the Presence spoke to Moses by the word of the Lord, saying: ‘Write the whole account of creation that in six days the Lord God completed all His work and all that He created. And He observed a Sabbath the seventh day and He sanctified it for all ages. And He set it as a sign for all His works. For on the first day He created the heavens, which are above, and the earth and the waters and all the spirits which minister before Him: the angels of the presence, and the angels of sanctification, and the angels of the spirit of fire, and the angels of the spirit of the winds, and the angels of the spirit of the clouds and darkness and snow and hail and frost, and the angels of resoundings and thunder and lightning, and the angels of the spirits of cold and heat and winter and springtime, and harvest and summer, and all the spirits of His creatures which are in heaven and on earth.’” (Jubilees 1:27-29, 2:1-2)*

“*Antiquities of the Jews*” makes the same point as Josephus reports a speech to his soldiers in which King Herod denounced the barbarism of his Arabian adversaries, proven by their willingness to murder the ambassadors which he had sent to them:

*“And for ourselves, we have learned from God the most excellent of our doctrines, and the most holy part of our Law, by angels, or ambassadors; for this name brings God to the knowledge of mankind and is sufficient to reconcile enemies to one another. What wickedness, then, can be greater than the slaughter of ambassadors?” (Josephus, “Antiquities” XV, V,3)*

In contrast to the Law at Sinai in which the angels participated, the Gospel of the New Testament was conveyed by the incarnation of the Son of God, who



*King Herod the Great - Tissot*

became a man to personally convey and accomplish *“this salvation which was first announced by the Lord.”* The Law at Sinai *“was binding, and every violation and disobedience received it just punishment.”* The Law revealed at Sinai - *“was binding”* - that is it had the authority to command obedience because it came from God. It could not be ignored or disobeyed without the threat of punishment from on high. Sadly, Israel did disobey that Law, often and consistently. Nonetheless the validity of the Law and its origin in God was demonstrated by the fact that *“every violation and disobedience received its just punishment.”* Beginning with the apostasy of the Golden Calf while still at the mountain and continuing down to the ultimate destruction of the Israelite nation by the Assyrians and the Babylonians and the subsequent dispersions throughout the pagan world which contemporary Jews still endured at the time of the Epistle *“every violation and disobedience”* met with *“its just punishment”* from the righteous God whose Law had been violated. This continuous pattern of disobedience and punishment validated the Law and irrefutably demonstrated that it had come from God. Those punishments were never arbitrary or cruel, for such would have violated the nature of God. His punishments were always *“just”* - perfectly consistent with the disobedience which had occurred.



*“The Babylonian Destruction of Jerusalem And the Beginning of the Exile”*

*“How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?”* - The argument now immediately proceeds from the lesser - the Law on Sinai - to the greater - the Gospel of salvation in Christ. If the angel mediated Sinai Law was binding, and if violation of that Law was consistently met with just punishment from God how much greater the risk of



punishment for drifting away from the wondrous Gospel of salvation **“such a great salvation”** - which has been directly revealed by God in the incarnation of His Son?

*“The experience of Israel in this regard provided a sobering model for those who were prone to become apathetic and unresponsive to God’s revelation in the Son. Already under the old covenant carelessness toward the revealed will of God incurred appropriate punishment. No less can be anticipated by the people of God now that He has declared His ultimate word through the Son...The greater degree of privilege enjoyed by the new people of God simply means that they are faced with greater responsibility and greater peril.”*  
(Lane, I, p. 38)

The rhetorical question **“How shall we escape?”** makes the point much more dramatically that a simple state about the impossibility of escape could have made it. *“How shall we escape, you, my readers, and I - tell me if you can for I do not see how we possibly can, note the mastery of the question and also the doubling of the the question.”* (Lenski, p. 66) The verb **“ignore”** means to despise God’s revelation in Christ and treat that revelation as though it were insignificant or unimportant. Jesus had used the same word in the parable of the Wedding Feast in regard to those who **“paid no attention”** to his invitation and went on with their lives. (Matthew 22:5) It does not refer to outright rejection or disobedience but is a milder term which simply indicates disregard or disdain for something or someone. The **“escape”** is from the same kind of **“just punishment”** which had been imposed upon the Israelites in the past. The implication of the lesser to the greater argument here is not only that evading the punishment would be impossible but that the punishment itself would be infinitely more severe. *“He wants His hearers to feel that, if possible, the judgement of those faithless to the Son is even more certain than the absolutely certain judgement of those disobedient under the OT revelation.”* (Cockerill, p. 121)



**“The Roman Destruction of Jerusalem”**





*“The Sermon On The Mount” - Henrik Olrik*

***“This salvation which was first announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.”*** - The angel mediated word of the old covenant had been validated by the inevitable judgement which fell upon those who disobeyed. The ***“great salvation”*** of the new covenant is validated in a much different way (1) by being originally spoken by the Son of God Himself Who had become a human being in order to convey and accomplish that salvation; (2) by the attestation and proclamation of faithful eyewitnesses; and, (3) by the confirmation of God the Holy Spirit in signs and wonders. The verb ***“was first announced”*** means to originate or have it beginning. This amazing reality is the literal fulfillment of the promise which God had spoken through Moses:

***“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put My words in His mouth and He will tell them everything I command Him. If anyone does not listen to My words that the prophet speaks in My name, I Myself will call him to account.”*** (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

The foundation of the Christian gospel is the reality of God made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ and of His public ministry, during which God’s own Son proclaimed and defined that gospel, and His passion and resurrection by which He fulfilled and authenticated the words which He had proclaimed. Hebrews deliberately identifies Jesus in this phrase as ***“the Lord”*** (Greek - *“tou kuriou”*). This title reemphasizes the sovereign authority and power of Jesus as God’s Son seated at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. ***“The Lord”*** (Hebrew - *“Adonai”* also regularly used as the vocalization of the sacred Name *“Yahweh”*) was also the most frequently used title for God in the Old Testament. Jesus not only ***“first announced”*** the great salvation, He is Himself the message and the God/man

who brought about that which He had proclaimed. This reality sets the **“great salvation”** uniquely apart as the decisive moment in the long history of humanity:

*“The foundation of the Christian economy is traced to the ministry of the Lord. The text contains a profound concept of the Church as rooted in the activity of the Lord. The message of salvation began to be declared through Him.. Basic to the designation of Jesus as Lord, however, is the writer’s conception of the unity of Word and deed in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus’ word is not simply information about salvation...He embodied the Word of God and accomplished it. The Son is the eschatological event of salvation. In this comprehensive sense His ministry, which passed through the successive stages of proclamation, sacrificial death and exaltation, marked the beginning of the message of salvation.”* (Lane, p. 39)

The chain of communication continued from the Lord Himself to be **“confirmed to us by those who heard Him.”** The word of the great salvation goes from Christ to His apostles, who had received the message from Christ Himself who had been eyewitnesses to His earthly ministry, His death, and His resurrection, and who had heard His personal proclamation of the Gospel with their own ears - **“confirmed to us by those who heard Him.”** The emphasis here is upon the direct line of communication and the reliability and clarity which result from that direct communication.

*“Angels participated in the giving of the Law, in the utterance of the New Testament Gospel, the Lord Himself was concerned. God was indeed back of both, but the employment of angels indicates that the Law was far inferior to the New Testament Gospel of Salvation. In fact, the Law came in 430 years after the covenant that was made with Abraham, and that covenant God made directly, in person, without angels.”* (Lenski, p. 65)

It is noteworthy that the writer includes himself among those who heard of the message of salvation from **“those who heard him.”** This would seem to suggest a non-apostolic authorship for the epistle. On the other hand, advocates of the traditional ascription of the epistle to St. Paul assert that this would be a most appropriate wording if the 13<sup>th</sup> apostle, who had not been an eye/ear witness to the three years of Jesus’ ministry, were indeed the author of the letter. Commentator Franz Delitsch observes - *“The phrase is quite in St. Paul’s style.”* (Delitsch, I, p. 98)

**“God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to His will.”** - Finally, the apostolic preaching of those who had heard Him for themselves was decisively confirmed by the miraculous signs and wonders which God graciously provided as divine affirmation of the message of His spokesmen. This language closely parallels the closing segment of the Gospel of Mark:



***“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them, and confirmed His word by the signs that accompanied it.”*** (Mark 16:20) As in the ministry of the Lord Himself, so the ministries of His chosen apostles were characterized by the regular presence of miraculous signs to authenticate the verbal message which was proclaimed. The verb in this sentence emphasizes a co-operation or joint participation, thus the accurate English translation ***“The Lord worked with them.”*** *“The meaning is to bear witness at the same time together with and in this context it means that God joins together with the early preachers to confirm the truth of their witness by performing attendant miracles concomitant with their preaching of the Gospel.”* (Allen, p. 197) The text uses four words to describe the co-operation of God in the apostolic preaching of the gospel, each with its own particular emphasis and application to the subject. The first, ***“signs,”*** indicates a miracle which is designed to convey or confirm a message. The focus here is not on the miracle itself, but on the message which it accompanies. ***“Wonders”*** refer to a supernatural event which transcends all the limits and boundaries of natural cause and effect. Such wonders produce astonishment and awe. The combination of ***“signs”*** and ***“wonders”*** is characteristic in the Old Testament’s descriptions of that which the Lord had done to accomplish the deliverance of His people from bondage in Egypt. ***“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and though I will multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you.”*** (Exodus 7:3-4) Moses used the same terminology to express the wonder of God’s commitment to His people in his parting words to the Children of Israel:

***“Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people ever heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders,***



***“The Destruction of Pharaoh And His Chariots In the Red Sea”***

***by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes?” (Deuteronomy 4:32-34)***

Nonetheless, Moses lamented that the Israelites failed to notice or appreciated the signs and wonders which the Lord had performed on their behalf. Their spiritual blindness prevented them from remaining faithful to the Lord throughout forty years of wandering in the wilderness:

***“Your eyes have seen all that the Lord did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear. During the 40 years that I lead you through the desert your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet. You ate not bread or drank no wine, or other fermented drink; I did this so that you might know that I am the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 29:2-6)***

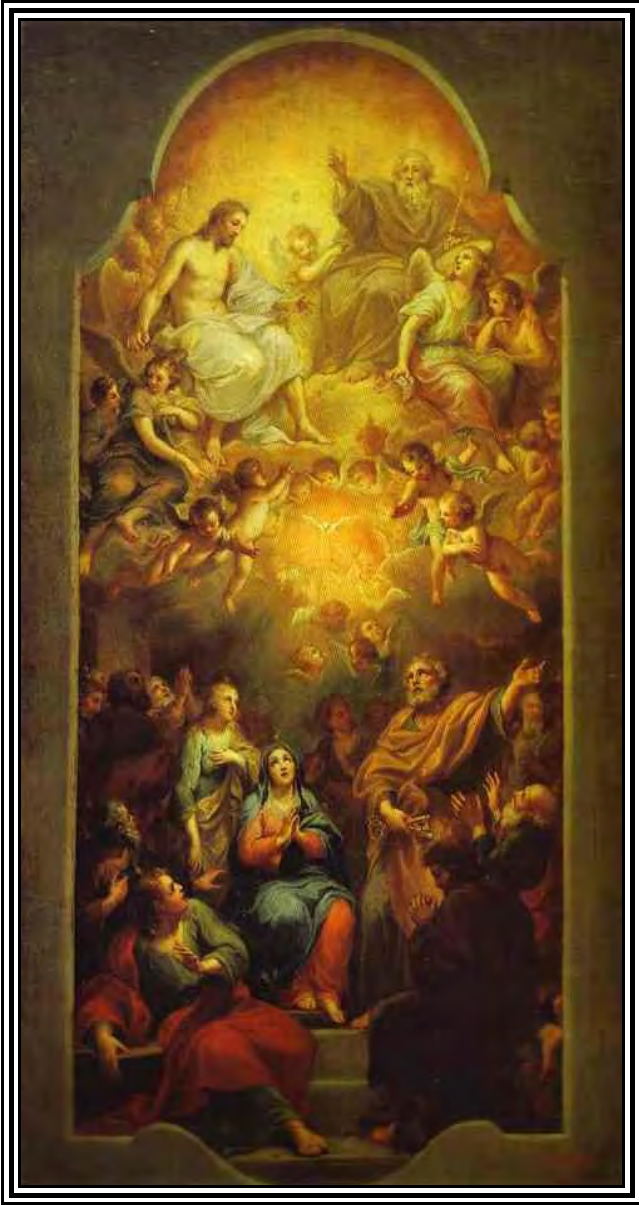


***“The Bondage Of Israel In Egypt”  
17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Bible Engraving***

The third and fourth designations of the supernatural acts by which God validates the preaching of the apostles are ***“various miracles , and gifts of the Holy Spirit.”*** The word ***“miracles”*** focuses on the divine power which accomplishes these feats and the wide variety of the demonstrations through which this power is made known. Healing the sick, raising the dead, controlling the forces of nature, etc. are all included among the miracles which God empowered His apostles to accomplish. ***“Gifts,”*** on the other hand, points to the gracious, unearned character of these blessings. The typical secular use of this term is to that which is received by the beneficiaries of a last will and testament. This text also clearly addresses the disagreement between historic Christianity and contemporary Charismatics who contend that the gifts of the Spirit are to be a permanent hallmark of the church. It is clear in these words that the gifts of the Spirit were to be the hallmark of the apostle’s ministry, certifying their preaching until the completion of the written Word of God which would then permanently become the authoritative basis for the Gospel. This text indicates that the gifts are still present only because some of those ***“who heard Him”*** were still alive and thus suggests that when the last of the apostles died the need for these miraculous gifts would be over and the gifts would cease. This careful reading of the text precludes the Charismatic insistence upon unceasing gifts of the Spirit within the Church.



*“The confirming testimony of God via the miracles, was given to those who heard the Lord, not to the author and his readers... The use of ‘syn’ (with) in the compund that begins Verse 4 indicates that God bore witness with someone ‘to us’. He did not bear witness with and to us at the same time. Those whom God bore witness with, must be ‘those who heard’ the Lord. It was they who were the performers of the gifts, the author and his readers were not performers but observers.” (Allen, p. 198)*



***“Pentecost - The Outpouring Of the Holy Spirit Upon the Apostles” by Mengs***

The sign gifts of the Spirit do not operate independently. They are always linked to the Word and their sole function is to authenticate the content of the Word. To elevate the sign gifts to defining prominence and bestow upon them a permanent significance as marks of the Church is a sad distortion of their purpose as defined in Scripture. Scholars note the same pattern - apostolic ministry authenticated by signs and wonders as the direct link to the presence and preach of Jesus - in the Gospel of St. Luke and his detailed history of the ministry of the apostles in the New Testament Book of the Acts of the Apostles. This is most appropriate in that the evangelist Luke is the only Gospel writer to go on to narrate the history of the apostles:

*“Hebrews 2:3-4 contains a good summary statement of what one finds in the Book of Acts regarding the preaching of the gospel and the presence of signs and wonders. The point was well presented by W.C. van Unnick, who argued that Acts is the confirmation of the Gospel of Luke. He saw the overall purpose of Luke/Acts as presenting God’s plan of salvation through Jesus and how that salvation was brought to those who did not see Jesus incarnate. Van Unnick appealed to Hebrews 2:2-3 as descriptive of what Luke*

*had accomplished in writing his two volume work. The meaning of Hebrews 2:2-3 is that there is a solid bridge between the saving activity of Jesus and those who have had no personal contact with Him. It is the confirmation of this salvation, sanctioned by God through miraculous gifts that the solidity of this bridge can be seen.” (Allen, p. 198)*

## Verses 5-9

*(5) It is not to angels that He has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. (6) But there is a place where someone has testified: ‘What is man that You are mindful of him, the Son of Man that You care for Him? (7) You made Him a little lower than angels; You crowned Him with glory and honor (8) and put everything under His feet.’ In putting everything under Him God left nothing that is not subject to Him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to Him. (9) But we see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than angels, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”*

*“It is not to angels that He has subjected the world to come...”* - The NIV unfortunately omits the Greek conjunction (“gar” - “for” “because” “thus”) which opens this new paragraph in the text and connects it to that which has gone before. The conjunction

indicates that what now follows provides the basis and foundation for what has just been said. The direct communication of salvation thru His own Son, in contrast the mediati0on of the message of the Law to The contrast between God’s Son and the angels is stated with blunt candor by placing the angels with the negative at the beginning of the sentence - **“It is not to angels.”** The subject of the verb **“He has subjected”** is clearly God Himself, given the nature of the action which God alone has the authority to perform. The angels have played an important role in the present world as **“ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation”** (Hebrews 1:14). Deuteronomy 32:8 alludes to an intriguing role for the angels in the governance of the nations of the earth: **“When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He established boundaries for the nations according to the number of the angels of God.”** However, the administration of the New Creation, brought about by the accomplishment of the great salvation by God’s Son will not be entrusted to angels.

*“Although God has entrusted the administration of the terrestrial world to the angels, their prerogatives did not extend to the heavenly world to come...Th heritage of the new people of God, however, lies not in the present world but in the new creation inaugurated by the enthronement of the Son.”* (Lane, I, p. 45)



*“The Ongoing Struggle Between Good And Evil Angels” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving*





*“The Day Of Judgement” - Hans Memling*

The text speaks of the new heaven and earth, already a reality by the work of Christ, which will be fully revealed on the Day of Christ’s second coming in glory and power to judge the living and the dead. This is the new world of which the prophet Isaiah had spoken:

***“Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight, and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take deliver in My people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more...As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make will endure before Me, declares the Lord, So will your name and your descendants endure.”*** (Isaiah 65:17-19; 66:22)

The existence of the believer in the present world is one of eager anticipation awaiting the coming of that which Christ has prepared for us.

***“As you look forward to the Day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”*** (2 Peter 3:12-13)

***“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city,***



*the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them...He who was seated upon the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then He said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"* (Revelation 21:1-3,5)

Paul links the longing of Christians for the new heaven and earth to that of creation itself, which also yearns to be set free from the curse of sin, death, and decay. The exalted Christ will reign as the sovereign and divine ***"Heir of all things"*** (Hebrews 1:2) of this new creation, along with His people in the glory of eternity. We who are His people by grace have become ***"co-heirs with Christ"*** (Romans 8:18) of the new heaven and earth.

*"Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may share in His glory...The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it in hope; that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in pains of childbirth, right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who are the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."* (Romans 8:18-23)

The superiority of Christ the divine Heir over the angels is unmistakable once again. Angels will not reign supreme in the new heaven and earth. Nor could they possibly be capable of such majesty. But the people of God will be granted this greatest of honors as we are seated with Him upon thrones of glory.

*"Although angels seem to be so far above us, we have already been told that they are only officiating servants who have been commissioned to service for our sake (1:14). We are the royal heirs of the world to come and not they. To us, and not to them has God subjected 'the inhabited earth, the one to come for us...Our inheritance*



***"John's Vision of the Heavenly Thrones"***



*“The Thrones of the Saints Surrounding the Throne of Christ” by Fran Angelico*

*is the earth to come where we shall reign with Christ on His throne forever, a boon that is not accorded even to angels.’” (Lenski, p. 72)*

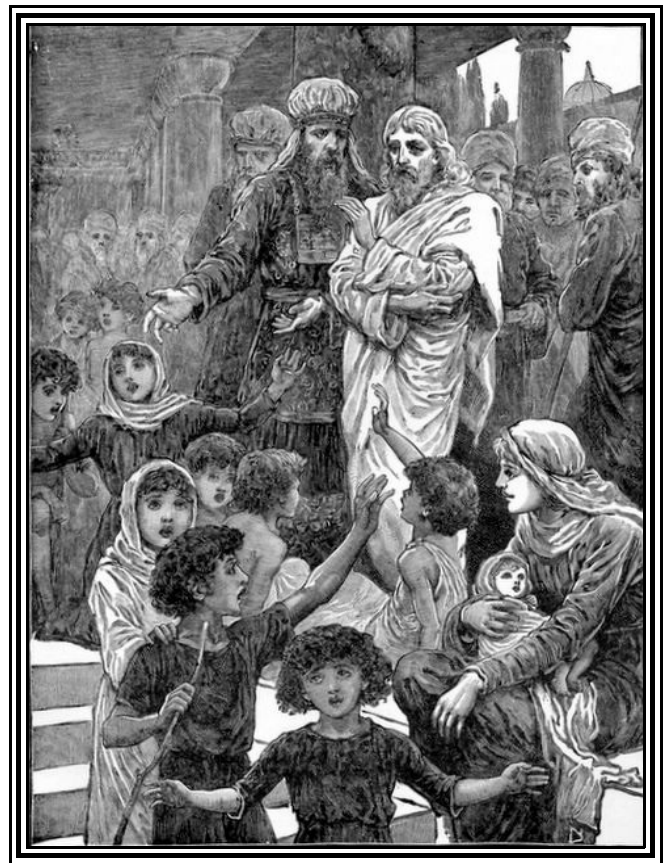
As overwhelming as this may seem, yet it is nonetheless exactly what God’s Word teaches. ***“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me upon My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father upon His throne.”*** (Revelation 3:21) ***“Jesus said to them, ‘At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’”*** (Matthew 19:28) ***“If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”*** (2 Timothy 2:12)

The phrase ***“about which we are speaking”*** serves, once again, to connect that which follows with that which had previously been stated. In this way the chain of Old Testament quotations which now begins is linked to the chain of quotations which had been concluded in Verse 4. The subject of both is the absolute superiority of the Son of God demonstrated by his glory and dominion in heaven and the world heaven and earth to come.

***“But there is a place where someone has testified: ‘What is man that You are mindful of him...’ -*** The verb ***“testified”*** means to affirm in a most solemn manner. Its use here signals the importance of the citation now introduced. The indefinite introduction ***“there is a place where someone”*** is a common rabbinic technique used to suggest that this text should be so familiar to the intended audience that the teacher need not cite a specific reference in order to identify it. At the same time it reflected the universal conviction that since all Scripture was inspired by God it did not matter exactly where this particular segment of God’s Word was drawn. ***“The author assumed that his readers knew and would recognized the quotation. Since he regarded all of the Old Testament as the Word of God, the author did not identify the human author of the quotation unless it suited his purpose to do so.”***

(Allen, p. 203) In fact, the citation is Psalm 8:4-6. It is cited to demonstrate that man is superior to angels in that God has deigned to care for him in a unique fashion and bestowed upon him the rule of the eternal world to come. ***“What is man that you are mindful of him?”*** The Psalm begins with a rhetorical question designed to emphasize the wondrous love of God for mankind. It expresses astonishment that God would display any interest in or concern for such lowly creatures. Humanity does not deserve the grace which God has lavished upon it, nor has it ever done anything which could have earned such attention. The basic thrust of the argument is that despite man’s actual insignificance God has chosen to make him so great by means of the incarnation and subsequent exaltation of His divine Son - ***“the Son of Man.”*** God’s commitment to humanity is expressed in two verbs. The first - ***“You are mindful”*** means to be concerned about or interested in. The second verb in the following phrase ***“that You care for Him”*** was actually a medical term in classical Greek which described a doctor making a house call upon one of his patients. R.C.H. Lenski catches the original sense of the term in his translation of the word as ***“to look in upon him.”*** The writer’s Messianic understanding of the title ***“the Son of Man”*** is clear. Although the commentators quibble as to whether this was the original intent of the psalmist, the ultimate author of the text was the God who inspired both the psalmist and the author of Hebrews. The argument is rendered moot by the fact that Jesus Himself quotes this Psalm in reference to Himself in Matthew 21:16. When crowds of children hailed Him as the Messianic Son of David in Temple, the priests complained of their blasphemy and ordered Him to silence them. The Lord replied with Psalm 8:2 as a prophecy of their acknowledgment of the Messiah - ***“Yes, He replied. Have you never read, ‘From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise.’”*** If Verse 2 is Messianic, the segment of the same Psalm cited here, which begins in Verse 4 of the same Psalm must also be Messianic. St. Paul also quotes from Psalm 8 in 1 Corinthians 15:27 citing the Psalmist’s promise that God will ***“Put everything under His feet”*** as a prophecy of the destruction of the death and the Lord’s resurrection: ***“For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For He has put everything under His feet.”***

***“You made Him a little lower than the angels; You crowned Him with glory and honor and put everything under His feet.”*** - The Psalm continues with a prophecy of the humiliation and the exaltation of Jesus. The incarnation of



***“The Children’s Praise In The Temple”***



the Son of God in the body of a human person would seem would seem to have placed Jesus in a position lower than that of the glorious and powerful angels. From the time of His conception to the moment of His resurrection from the dead Jesus submitted Himself to the limitations of time and space reality in order to live among men as a man. That voluntary act of submission was essential for the plan of salvation to be accomplished. When everything which had to be done had been perfectly accomplished God exalted His Son to the highest position of glory and power once again, thereby revealing His true nature and identity.

*“The Son of God, having condescended to human lowliness, in order to exalt humanity to the height which it is destined to attain, cannot continue in that low estate...The sacred writer would state for what end Jesus, not without mortal suffering - has thus been exalted. That end is this: that He, through divine grace, should be found to have tasted death for the good of all and each of us, and that thus He should have entered into the lowliness of our death subjected humanity, in order to exalt the lowliness to the high estate which the 8<sup>th</sup> Psalm declares to be our ultimate destination, and into which He is already entered Himself. The arrangement of the words is here, as throughout the epistle, beautiful and significant...The suffering of death was the lowest depth*

*of our Lord’s humiliation, from out of which, and because He had descended into it, Jesus is now crowned with glory and honor and so fulfills an ordinance of grace divine, by which He has tasted the bitterness of death in way that should have a meritorious efficacy for the human race in all its members. His being now exalted in a consequence of a previous voluntary subjection to the suffering of death, is a clear manifestation of divine grace, and at the same time, puts a seal upon the meritorious character of that subjection.”*  
(Delitsch, I, p. 113,115)



*“The Exaltation of the Holy Cross” - Elsheimer*

***“In putting everything under Him, God left nothing that is not subject to Him.”***  
The depth of our Lord’s humiliation is the correlate of the lofty height of His exaltation. The scope of the exalted



*“The Exaltation of the Sign of the Son of Man in Heaven”*

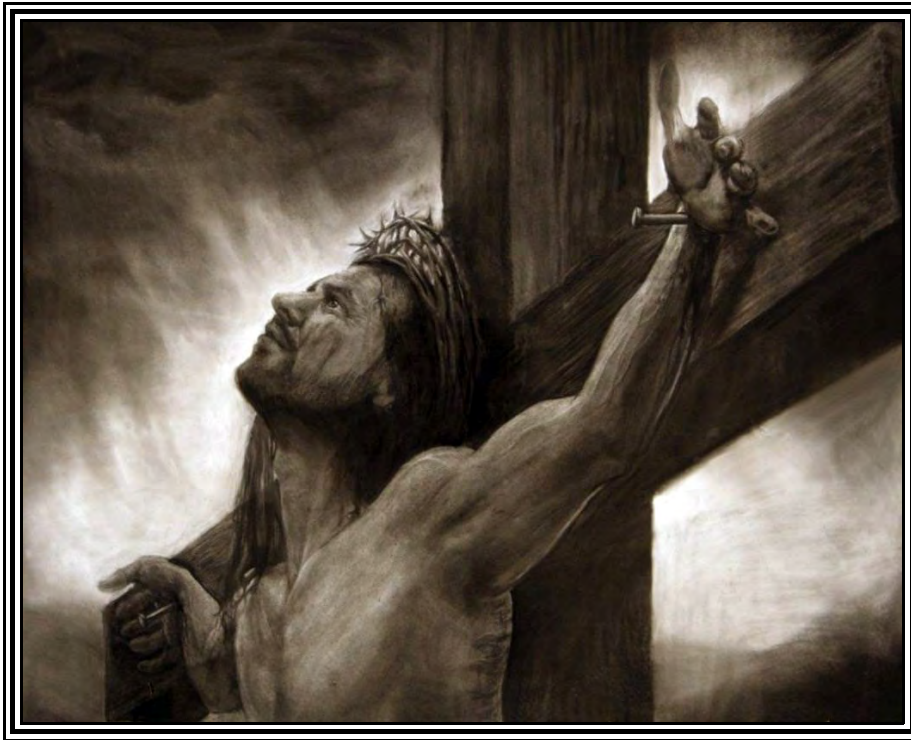
Christ’s sovereign authority is absolutely unlimited. The thrust of the phrase is that in determining to put everything in subjection to the exalted Son of Man God left nothing whatsoever outside of that perfect sovereignty. This total sovereignty is contradicted, of course by the ongoing rebellion and disobedience of sinful mankind. Thus the writer hastens to add - ***“Yet, at present, we do not see everything subject to him.”*** That which is not currently evident will be clearly revealed in the new creation of the world to come. At present sin appears to reign supreme but that appearance is nothing more than an illusion. Thus the verb ***“Yet, at present, we do not see.”*** This is not a matter of fact but perception. The reality has already been revealed in heaven in the exaltation of the Son of Man to the right hand of God.

***“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”*** - The application of the prophecy of the Psalm to Jesus as the Son of Man is now made explicit for the first time. Dr. Lenski aptly described this Verse as: *“A masterly statement, indeed, masterly in covering every point with simple brevity.”* (Lenski, p. 76) In these few words the essence of the Christian Gospel is presented in stunning clarity. Jesus, who by His incarnation humbled Himself to be made ***“a little lower than the angels”*** is now ***“crowned with glory and honor”*** amid the victory celebrations of heaven. The divine Son of God consented to become a human being. ***“He suffered death”*** - not death as a personal punishment like that of every other descendant of Adam, for He had committed no sin. The singularity of Jesus’ death is indicated by the use of definite articles in the Greek text. The phrase literally reads *“the suffering of the death”* for this was a death unlike any other.



*“He underwent a sacrificial, expiatory, substitutionary death which is known as such to the readers. Jesus did not suffer and die in a general way, merely die some kind of death as all sinners suffer more or less and finally die. Of such suffering and death it could not be said ‘because of it’ a person is crowned with glory and honor.’ The soul that sinneth, it shall die. It is sin that produces death. Jesus death was a sweet smelling savor to God, Who therefore crowned Him.” (Lenski, p. 76)*

This unique death was substitutionary in the sense that Jesus died not for Himself but as the substitute, the representative of mankind. This magnificent arrangement was the expression and the application of God’s undeserved love as the means by which sinful humanity could be saved - **“So that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”** The metaphor of tasting death serves to intensify the bitterness of a death which shifted the burden of mortality from the shoulders of all men to those of one man, Who willingly drained that cup to its bitter dregs as He cried out **“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”**



***“Eli! Eli! Lama Sabachtani?”***

The connection between the humiliation and death of Jesus, the Son of Man, and the salvation of mankind is unmistakably explicit in this grand text - **“But we see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death.”** As Jesus has been exalted to heavenly glory and honor so shall we because He has suffered death in our place. Jesus becomes, as it were, the prototype for humanity.

*“The words of the Psalmist look forward to the future, and that future is inextricably bound up with the person and work of Jesus. His condescension*

*to be made for a brief while lower than the angels set in motion a sequence of events in which abasement and humiliation were the necessary prelude to exaltation. His coronation and investiture with priestly glory and splendor provide assurance that the power of sin and death have been nullified and that humanity will yet be led to the full realization of their intended glory. In Jesus the hearers are to find the pledge of their own entrance into the imperial destiny intended by God for them.” (Lane, A, p. 50)*

### **Verses 10-13**

***“In bringing many sons to glory, it is fitting that God, in Whom and through Whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the One who makes men holy, and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says: ‘I will declare Your Name to My brothers. In the presence of the congregation I will sing Your praises.’ And again: ‘I will put My trust in Him.’ And again He says, ‘Here am I and the children God has given Me.’”***



***“It Is Finished” - Anthony Van Dyck***

***“In bringing many sons to glory, it is fitting that God...”*** - The method of God’s plan of salvation was so outrageously unexpected, that the writer feels compelled to comment on the appropriateness on the manner in which God rescued humanity. That the sovereign Lord would Himself become human in the person of His Son and endure the indignity and suffering to which Jesus was subjected exceeds anything the human mind could conceive or imagine. The nature of God is defined in the characteristic manner of classical monotheism as ***“in Whom and through Whom everything exists.”*** The one God is the only independent existence, the sole source of everything else that is. Salvation is here described as ***“bringing many sons to glory”*** - using the exaltation terminology of the preceding verses. The argument of the writer is that accomplishing this goal ***“through suffering”*** was fully consistent with God’s character and purpose, as revealed in Holy Writ - ***“it is fitting.”*** By submitting to suffering and ultimately death the Son of Man satisfied the demands of perfect justice and righteousness, making it possible for a just and righteous God to grant forgiveness and salvation to sinful mankind in a manner which did not contradict His own nature.



The method of salvation is intriguingly described as ***“should make the Author of their salvation perfect through suffering.”*** The title which occurs here - ***“the Author”*** - is used in only three other NT passages, always in reference to Christ in the context of His humiliation and exaltation. Peter bluntly informed the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem: ***“You killed the author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.”*** (Acts 3:15) In Acts 5:31, the same word is translated as *“prince”* as once again Peter referred to the manner in which salvation had been accomplished by God through His Son. ***“God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Savior that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.”*** The final reference comes later in Hebrews: ***“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith, Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** (Hebrews 12:2) The Greek title here translated as ***“Author”*** was used in a broad variety of contexts in secular Greek, all of which refer to someone who leads the way for others to follow. Most colorfully, in a military context, it is used of the Champion who leads the charge which breaks through the line of the enemy, establishing the breach through which his soldiers follow to defeat and destroy their foes. That would seem to be an apt image of that which Christ has done as our Champion in the ancient warfare between God and Satan, good and evil.

***“Should make the Author of their salvation perfect through suffering.”*** - To make perfect in this phrase means to complete or accomplish. Christ was perfectly qualified to accomplish His divine mission as the Champion who would shatter the battle line of the Adversary and triumphantly lead ***“many sons to glory”*** through His own suffering and death in their place. The cross may indeed be ***“a stumbling block to the Jews and an offense to the Gentiles”*** (1 Corinthians 1:23) but it remains nonetheless the method ***“fitting”*** to the nature of God as both righteous and gracious by which Jesus would accomplish salvation. Franz Delitsch summarizes with fitting eloquence:

*“The sacred writer would therewith strike down any Judaic offense taking at the cross. No can have any judgement as to what is God befitting or otherwise in the work of salvation, but God Himself, the End and the Beginning, the Alpha and the Omega of all created things. Yet is the question, Why must the Redeemer be perfected through sufferings? By no means one to which we have no answer...In order to put His creatures of mankind in a communion of glory with His only-begotten Son, God must first put Him in a communion of suffering with all mankind, let Him issue from it with glory and salvation, won as a common good and possession for all. In order to raise humanity from the depths of misery, in which it is so unlike its ultimate destination, to the heights of glory for which it is destined, God must first lead up His only Son to glory through deeps of human suffering, that thus by Him, the Son made perfect through suffering, He might make of us also glorious Sons of God. That is what was God-befitting in the work of salvation.”* (Delitsch, I. P. 120)

***“For He who sanctifies, and those who are sanctified all have one source.”*** - The sentence, like its predecessor, begins with a conjunction - ***“For”*** indicating thereby that these words continue the explanation of that which has already been stated. The verb which here describes that which Christ has accomplished for humanity - ***“He who sanctifies”*** - reflects the characteristic language of the Old Testament. It will occur five more times in the Epistle to describe the work of Christ in forgiving the sins of the world and winning salvation (cf. 9:13; 10:10,14,29; 13:12) To be sanctified means to be made holy both in the essential sense of be purified from sin and the reflected sense of ritual purification in the services of the Tabernacle and subsequently the Temple. Only those who have been cleansed of the defiling guilt of sin can enter into the presence of God. In that sense, its use here anticipates the characterization of Jesus as the ultimate High Priest which will occupy a good deal of the remainder of the Epistle. In Exodus 31:13 the same word is used as the Lord declared that the meticulous observance of the Sabbath as the Day of the Lord would be a



***“It Is Finished”***

constant reminder of the fact that God had sanctified the nation of Israel as His own. ***“Above all, you shall keep My sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know the I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy for you.”*** The fact that Israel had been sanctified by God was to be reflected in their observance of His holy Law: ***“Consecrate yourselves then and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. Keep My statutes and do them. I am the Lord who sanctifies you.”*** (Leviticus 20:8) This refrain, using the same terminology is repeated throughout the assertion of the Law of God in the Torah. The Lord recalled this language to the prophet Ezekiel in asserting the disobedience of His people has the basis for His righteous judgement upon them:

***“I gave them My statutes and made known to them My rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. Moreover, I gave them My sabbaths as a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. But the House of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes, but rejected My rules, by which, if a person does them he shall live, and My sabbaths they greatly***





*“Ezekiel In The Valley of the Dry Bones” 17<sup>th</sup> Century*

*profaned.”* (Ezekiel 20:11-13)

Later, at the Valley of the Dry Bones, God promised Ezekiel that He would restore a new Israel to the sanctity which had been lost by his fallen nation:

***“I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them and I will be their God and they shall be My people. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”*** (Ezekiel 37:26-28)

The identification of Jesus here as ***“He who sanctifies”*** directly connects Him to this characteristic Old Testament designation of the God of the covenant. The fact that Jesus was capable of accomplishing this task at the same time identifies Him as the holy and righteous Son of God.

*“Only One who is Himself fully consecrated to the service of God may exercise*

*the power of making others holy. Although the writer's intention in Verse 11 is to speak of solidarity, the description of Jesus as 'the One who consecrates' and of Christians as those who need consecration sufficiently defines the radical difference between the transcendent Son of God and those who are 'sons.'"* (Lane, p. 58)

The means of this sanctification will subsequently be identified in 13:12 - ***"So Jesus suffered outside the gate, in order to sanctify the people through His own blood."***

***"For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source."*** - The ***"one source"*** from whom both Christ the Sanctifier and those whom He sanctifies come is the subject of significant debate among commentators. In the context of the essential link between Christ and humanity by virtue of His incarnation, the ***"one source"*** could be understood as a reference to the fact that Jesus Christ was true man and had to be such in order to live the perfect human life and die a genuine physical death upon the cross. Some would then identify the ***"one source"*** as Adam from whom all men are descended. Theodoret of Syria, a 5<sup>th</sup> Century bishop and scholar, defended that view.

*"The One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin.' This is a reference to the humanity of the One who sanctifies, for the assumed nature is created. The Creator of Him and of us is one. We are sanctified through Him. Now if the heretics wish to understand this of the divine nature, let them not do so in such a way as to lessen the glory of the only-begotten; for both we and He have one Father; but it is clear that He is Son by nature, we by grace. The fact that it says 'He sanctifies but we are sanctified' teaches us this difference."* (ACCOS, X, p.43)

While this view is certainly plausible, the majority opinion is that the reference here is to God Himself rather than to the Savior and the saved's common humanity. Delitsch explains the traditional view in this way:

*"For God Himself has been designated as the absolute end and cause of the whole development (vs.10)- as the Superior not only of them who need salvation, but of Him also who obtains it - as perfecting the One through sufferings so that He may lead the others on to the glorious goal for which they are destined; and after they, being men, have been distinguished as 'many sons' from the Savior as 'the Son of God' it does seem impossible, after all, that this 'One' of whom vs. 11 speaks and from whom it derives both Him who sanctifies and those who are sanctified can be other than God."* (Delitsch, I, p. 122)

This view would also then be consistent with the subject of the preceding sentence as God

***“for whom and through whom all things exist”*** who brought about the plan of salvation which was consummated by the suffering of Christ.

*“Our brotherhood with Christ rests not solely on the fact of His incarnation, but much more precisely on the redemption which the incarnation enabled Him to accomplish at the cross. In the Gospels, it is after the cross and the resurrection that Jesus referred to His disciples as ‘My brothers’ (Matthew 28:10; John 20:17)”* (Allen, p. 217)

***“That is why He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying: ‘I will tell of Your Name to My brothers; and in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.’”*** - Once again the author turns to the Psalms to document and demonstrate his argument from the familiar texts of the Hebrew scriptures. The point of the citations is to demonstrate the solidarity between the Son of Man and the sons of men whom He came to save. For the sake of the plan of salvation by which ***“the one source”*** - God the Father, had determined to rescue fallen mankind from the curse of sin and death, ***“He,”*** that is Jesus, the divine Son of God, was willing to become a man to implement the will of His Father. To be ***“ashamed”*** refers to the embarrassment of someone who is superior to be associated or identified with someone who is inferior to himself which would ordinarily result in the avoidance of such association or identification. The term is also used in the context of declining to stand with someone who is controversial for fear of the hostility or opposition which could be incurred. Jesus used the term in this sense in His warning to His disciples: ***“For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”*** (Mark 8:38) The parallel text in Matthew 10:32 clearly indicates the meaning of being ashamed of Christ as a refusal to acknowledge and confess Him before men: ***“So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”*** St. Paul described his fearless willingness to proclaim the truth of the Gospel despite whatever opposition it would arouse with this term: ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”*** (Romans 1:16) The word occurs again in Paul’s encouragement to young Timothy to remain faithful to him and the Gospel which he has proclaimed in the face of opposition: ***“Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord nor of me, His prisoner, but share in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling.”*** (2 Timothy 1:8-9) The word is used again in Hebrews in the roll call of the heroes of faith in a manner similar to its use here in reference to God’s willingness to stand by the faithful: ***“But as it is, they desire a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.”*** (Hebrews 11:16)

In his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, St. John Chrysostom (Golden Tongue)





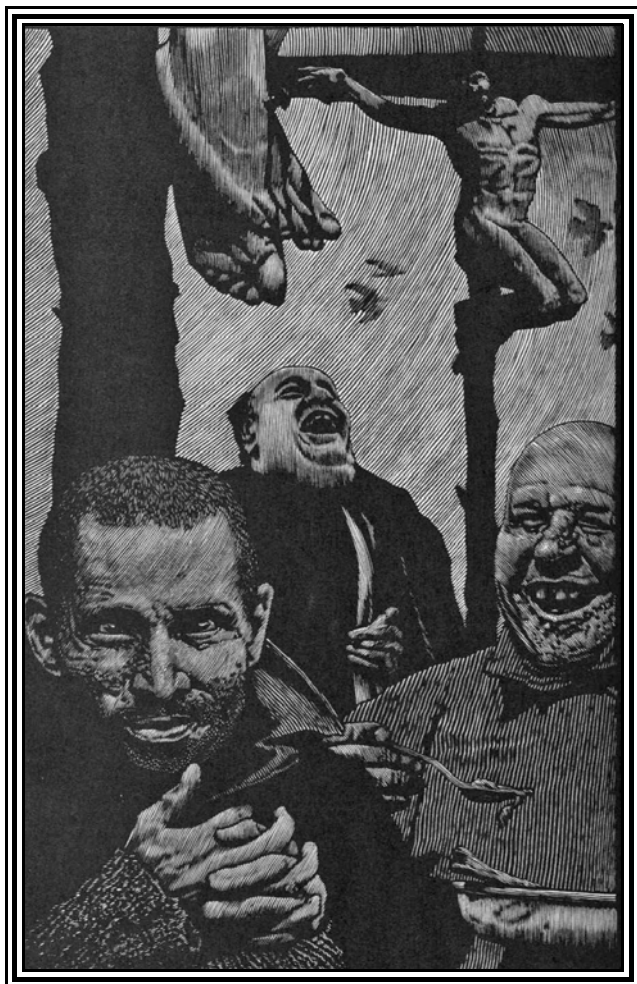
***“John Chysostom Denouncing The Empress As A Heretic”***  
***Jean Laurens***

emphasizes that the use of the ashamed terminology in this phrase also clearly expresses the absolute superiority of Christ who makes men holy over the men whom He has sanctified:

*“‘He is not ashamed to call them brethren.’ Do you see how again he shows the superiority? For by saying ‘He is not ashamed’ he shows that the whole comes not of the nature of the thing, but of the loving affection of Him who was not ashamed of anything, yes, of His great humility. For though we are ‘of one origin’ yet He sanctifies and we are sanctified, and great is the difference. Moreover, He is of the Father as a true Son, that is, of His substance; we, as created, that is, brought out of things that are not, so that the difference is great. Therefore, he says, ‘He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Your Name to My brothers and sisters. For when He clothed Himself with flesh, He clothed Himself also with His siblings, and came in human form.’” (ACCOS, X, p. 43)*

The quotation in this instance comes from Psalm 22:22 - ***“I will tell of Your Name to My brothers; in the midst of the congregation, I will praise You.”*** The Messianic character of this Psalm of David is demonstrated by the fact that our Lord Himself quoted it from the cross: ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*** (Psalm 22:1) The Psalm provides a most dramatic description of the humiliating agony of Christ upon the cross and thus serves most appropriately here to express the degradation and suffering which the Son of God was willing to endure to carry out the plan of salvation which the Lord had determined from eternity. The incarnation of the divine Son is the essence of that plan.

***“But I am a worm, not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people; all who see Me, mock Me; they make mouths at Me; they wag their heads; ‘He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord deliver Him; let Him rescue Him for He delights in Him...For dogs encompass Me, a company of evil-doers encompass Me; they have pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones; they stare and gloat over Me; they divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.”*** (Psalm 22:1-18 *passim*)



***“All Who See Me Mock Me”***

Psalm 22 was particularly appreciated by the orthodox fathers of the early church as the clearest and most detailed prophecy of the passion of Christ in the Old Testament. Cassiodorus, in his 6<sup>th</sup> Century commentary on the Book of Psalms, contended: *“This Psalm alone ought to have been enough to inspire belief in the Passion, that Truth so obviously claimed about Himself.”* (ACCOS, VII, p. 168) While modern commentators bicker and bend, attempting to define the relationship between David, the original author of the psalm and his messianic descendent, the early fathers did not hesitate to conclude that these words were nothing less than a direct - rectilinear - prophecy of Christ and His experiences at Golgatha. This conviction was based upon their firm conviction that the Bible was the Word of God and that the same Holy Spirit inspired every word written by the human authors of both Psalms and Hebrews. Eusibius of Caesarea, bishop of that noteworthy Palestinian city in the early 4<sup>th</sup>

Century expressed the view of his contemporaries with a blunt candor sadly lacking in contemporary scholarship - most of whom deny the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture.

*“The psalm refers to Christ and no one else, for its contents harmonize with none other but Him...But if anyone would apply them to some other person, whether king, prophet, or other godly man among the Jews, let him prove, if he can, how what is written is in harmony with him. For who of those who were ever born of women has attained such heights of virtue and power as to embrace the knowledge of God with unchanging reason, with unruffled soul and with sober mind, and to fasten all his trust on God so as to say - ‘You are*

*He that took me out of my mother's womb; my hope from my mother's breast. I was cast on You from demy mother; from my mother's womb You are my God.' And who that has ever been so cared for by God has ever become 'a reproach of the people' and an 'outcast of the people'? By what bulls and calves can we suppose such a man to have been surrounded? And in what suffering was he 'poured out like water'? How were 'all his bones loosened'? How was he 'brought into the dust of death'? And being brought into the dust of death, how does he say those words still and live and speak? Who are the 'dogs' that surround him who are other than the before mentioned bulls and calves? What gathering of evil people pierced his feet as well as his hands, stripped him of his raiment, divided some of it among themselves and cast lots for the remainder? What was the sword, the dog, the lion?...And how...after being brought into the dust of death can he promise to proclaim his Father's name, not to all, but only to his brothers? Who are the brothers? And what church is it of which this sufferer says, 'In the midst of the church I will hymn you,' adding not the one Jewish nation, but 'all the earth shall understand, and turn to the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Him'? It is for you yourself to test every expression in the psalm and see if it is possible to apply them to any chance character. You will find them applicable only to our Savior, who is most true and most to be trusted, and who applied the words of the psalm to Himself, as the evangelists bear witness." (AACOS, X, p. 168)*



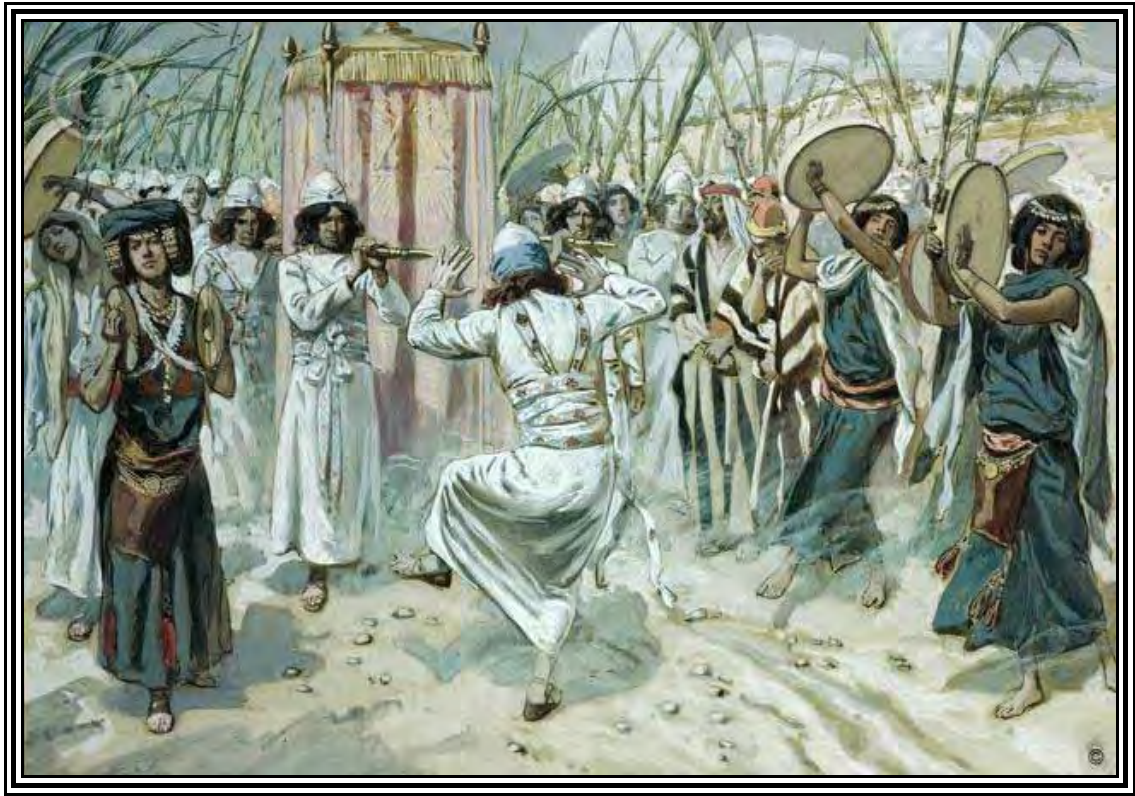
***“My God,. My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?”***



The point of the quotation here is the Messiah's promise to His Father - ***"I will tell of Your Name to My brothers, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise."*** The identification of the divine Son of Man with men by his reference to them as ***"My brothers"*** proves the assertion of Hebrews that ***"He who sanctifies"*** - namely Jesus - ***"is not ashamed to call them brothers."*** The depth of the Messiah's commitment to His human brothers is all the more emphatically demonstrated by the fact that the phrase quoted here comes from Psalm 22 with its wondrous prophecy of the suffering and death of the Savior. *"The writer of Hebrews again lets the Old Testament speak to his Jewish Christian readers with its convincing power...The quotation is the more effective because this is the psalm of the suffering Messiah and is so completely prophetic of the way in which Jesus died."* (Lenski, p. 86) ***"Your Name"*** is the sacred Name of Yahweh, the eternal I AM who has revealed Himself to His people most clearly in the plan of salvation by which He has offered up His only Son, to unite with humanity in order that He might accomplish by His life, death and resurrection the deliverance of mankind from the curse of sin and death. Christ has shown us the way to God and the nature of God by His selfless love by becoming one of us for a time. *"His incarnation made Him our brother, for by suffering as a man, by this alone could He be the complete Author of our salvation, our high-priestly Sanctifier."* (Lenski, p. 86) The noun translated as ***"the congregation"*** is the Greek *"ecclesia"* - the typical New Testament word for the church, the people of God called out of the world and gathered together around Word and Sacrament to worship and praise the Lord. The preceding verses had spoken of Christ's exaltation and His absolute sovereignty over the world to come. His promise here to tell of God's name and to sing His praises anticipates the joyful entrance of the redeemed people of God into the new life which God has prepared for them and Christ has won for them.



***"King David Leading The Choirs With His Harp"***



*“The Joyful Procession Bringing The Ark To Jerusalem” by James Tissot*

*“The connection with Verse 10 also suggests that the occasion when Jesus is not ashamed to call others His brothers is the parousia when God will lead many sons to glory. The declaration anticipates the eschatological entrance of the redeemed community into the world to come.” (Lane, p. 59)*

The scene recalls the joyful festivals in the courts of the Temple when the High Priest and his colleagues would joyfully lead the people in singing and dancing to praise of God and to rejoice in the wonders of His love.

***“And again: ‘I will put my trust in Him.’ And again: ‘Behold, I and the children God has given Me.’”*** - The next two Old Testament quotations come from Isaiah 8:17-18. This segment of Isaiah 8 was frequently cited in the New Testament in reference to Jesus, the Messiah. (i.e - Luke 2:34; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 1:8) The original context is the assurance of the believing remnant in the face of the impending Assyrian invasion of the Kingdom of Judah and the siege of Jerusalem. The speaker contends that despite the overwhelming forces of a mighty warrior empire - which had already destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel - bearing down upon them, God’s people could rest safe and secure, trusting in His promises. The use of this passage in Hebrews would have been particularly effective given the impending Jewish rebellion and the Roman siege of Jerusalem which ended that revolt. The specific point of the text here in Hebrews is the identification of the Messiah of God’s people as ***“the children God has given Me.”*** In submission to the will of God for the salvation of man, Christ who trusted perfectly in the Father’s will, claimed humanity as ***“the***



***children God has given Me.***” Like the previous reference to humanity as brothers, Christ’s willingness to identify humans as children affirms His human nature as the key component in the fulfillment of God’s will for sinful humanity’s salvation. *“The image of the family suggests an intimacy of relationship and a tenderness that broadens the concept of solidarity.”* (Lane, p. 60) Those who regard this condescension on the part of Christ as diminishing Him and reducing Him to a level lower than that of the angels fail to recognize that this voluntary submission only serves to highlight the divine dignity of the Son and the unity of will and purpose which unite the Father and the Son within the Holy Trinity. Bishop Theodoret of Syria clarifies the thought of the text in these well chosen words:

*“How would it be possible to name Him our brother or to call us sons and daughters properly, if it were not for the nature - the same as ours - with which He was clothed? ...And it was especially necessary for Paul to say ‘in the same way’ so that he might refute the reproach of making the incarnation a fantasy. He makes all of these points to teach those who suppose the Son was lower than the angels that He endured suffering for a necessary reason. He explains this more clearly in what follows...The phrase ‘He is not ashamed’ suffices to bring out the difference in sonship. Speaking of masters and slaves, we are accustomed to bring out the humility of masters by saying ‘He is not afraid to eat and drink with his servants, to sit with them, and to personally attend to those who are ill.’ So this is what he is implying here as well, that the One who for our sakes accepted suffering is not ashamed to call those brethren for whom He endured the suffering - and not only ‘brethren,’ He also calls them*



***“The Temptation of Jesus In The Wilderness” - Repin***



*‘children.’ Likewise the Lord said in the Sacred Gospels to the divine apostles, ‘Little children, yet a little while I am with you,’ and again ‘Children, have you any fish?’ He also shows that what is said in lowly fashion is said in reference to the salvation of humankind, even to use language at variance with His own dignity.” (ACCOS, X, p. 44)*

### **Verses 14-18**

***Since, therefore, the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself, likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not the angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.. For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.***

***“Since, therefore, children share in flesh and blood...”*** - The author now explains the necessity

of the incarnation of Christ for the accomplishment of the plan of salvation. It was absolutely necessary for the Messiah to enter into this intimate relationship with His human brothers and children to do the things which had to be done to remove the curse of sin and death and restore mankind to the harmony with God for which they had been created in the beginning. The text is inescapably explicit. The ESV translation accurately reflects the meaning of the Greek text - ***“Since also the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things.”*** It is not possible to evade the plain sense of the words short of outright denial. The language ***“share in flesh and blood”*** is bluntly graphic. He does not merely assert that Christ took on a physical body. Rather he shares ***“in flesh and blood.”*** This vivid pictorial terminology specifies the core components of physical existence while at the same time it forcefully calls to mind the centuries of flesh and blood sacrifices upon the altars of Israel and the gruesome destruction of the flesh and blood of Christ Himself in His crucifixion and the tortures which preceded it. There is nothing left to chance in this description. No ambiguity remains which would facilitate the denial or the minimization of the humanity of Jesus Christ.



***“The Temptation of Jesus”***

In the historical debates over the two natures in Christ which wracked the early church, the

denial of Christ's human nature is identified as "*docetism*" from the Greek verb "*doceo*" which means to appear or to seem. The heresy was the application of classical Greek dualism which despised the flesh and glorified the spirit. To such thinking the concept of the incarnation of the Son of God was incredible and repugnant.

*"A type of doctrine prevalent in certain sections of the church in New Testament times and later, to the effect that Christ had not come in the flesh. The doctrine might take the form of a denial that the humanity of Jesus was more than an appearance - He only seemed to have a physical body - or it might consist in the teaching that the divine Christ came into or upon the human Jesus - perhaps at His baptism, and withdrew from Him before the crucifixion, at no time being really identified with Him. This kind of teaching presupposed a dualistic view of the world according to which it would have been impossible for a divine being to assume human flesh. Since there was no doubt of Jesus' divinity, the reality of His humanity was questioned or denied."* (Interpreter's, I p. 860)



***"Christ Victorious Over Sin, Death, And Satan" by Lucas Cranach the Elder***





*“Mankind Driven Into the Flames of Hell by Death and the Devil” - Cranach*

***“That through death He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to life long slavery.”*** - The culmination of Christ’s incarnation, the point and purpose of His taking on flesh and blood, was His death. This magnificent series of phrases defines the wondrous irony of that which Christ has accomplished for His people through His substitutionary death upon the cross. Death has been destroyed by His death. The power of death and the dominion of the devil - ***“him who has the power of death”*** has been broken by His death. The bondage of mortal men who have lived their lives on earth in constant fear of death has been ended by His death. The dark shadow of the valley of death loomed over every moment of every man’s life until Christ destroyed death and its master the devil.

*“The fear of death brings man into a perpetual state of bondage, so that the whole course of his life has as its inseparable accompaniment the fear of death, making him to be neither master of himself nor capable of true enjoyment. The life of men before the incarnation and the Lord’s victory over death was a perpetual fear of dying...The contemplation of death and of the dark and cheerless place of death (Hades) in the background was even for the faithful among Israel under the Old Testament unendurable.”* (Delitsch, p. 135)

Saint John Chrysostom rejoiced in the marvelous appropriateness of God’s wisdom in



turning the devil's own weapon against him to destroy and defeat him. *"Do you see what great goodness death has wrought?"*

*"Next he sets down the cause of the economy of salvation, 'that through death' he says, 'He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil.' Here Paul points out the wonder that through that by which the devil prevailed, the devil was himself overcome. By the very thing that was the*

*devil's strong weapon against the world - death - Christ struck him. In this, Christ exhibits the greatness of the conqueror's power. Do you see what great goodness death has wrought?" (ACCOS, X, p. 46)*



***"The Destruction of Death and the Devil"***  
***by Lucas Cranach***

The Greek verb translated here as ***"destroy"*** literally means to deprive a tyrant of his power. Lucas Cranach the Elder, foremost artist of the Lutheran Reformation, depicted this precious Gospel truth in what many believe to have been the artist's greatest masterpiece, the altar painting of the Herder Kirche in the German City of Weimar. It because Cranach's personal confession of the evangelical faith in that he included himself in the painting, standing at the foot of the cross with the cleansing blood of his Savior spurting across the painting from the spear wound in Christ's side to splash down upon the artist's forehead. The crucified Christ slumps down in death upon the rough hewn cross. John the Baptist also stands at the foot of the cross pointing toward the Savior designating him as the *"Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin Of World."* That message is visually reinforced by the figure of a lamb holding a victory banner at the foot of the cross. The scenes in the background depict the domination of mankind by the curse of sin with the hideous figures of death and the devil driving Adam toward the fires of hell. The incarnation is shown by the angel choir announcing the birth of the

Savior to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem. The victory of life over death through Christ is demonstrated by the figures of the risen Christ outside of the empty tomb crushing the death and devil figures beneath His feet. Seldom has the message of the gospel been so accurately and so comprehensively been presented in a single work of art.

Satan is the one who ***“has the power of death”*** in that it was his malicious temptation in the Garden which originally brought the curse of death down upon our first parents and all of their descendants. In that sense, the curse of death placed him in a position of dominion over the creation in which death is now the predominant reality. At the same time, the devil gleefully serves as the prosecutor, so to speak, in that he delivers sinful mankind over to the judicial punishment of death and demands the implementation of that punishment as the requirement of God’s own justice and righteousness. The devil is not a free agent in the exercise of this power. He always remains, to use Martin Luther’s colorful phrase *“God’s Devil”* (German - *“Gottes Teufel”*) As intense as his hatred for God and the humanity whom God loves may be, he cannot exceed the sovereign purpose of God. Gregory the Great (6<sup>th</sup> Century Bishop of Rome) correctly observed: *“The will of Satan is always wicked, but he does not ever have the ability to impose the injustice which he always desires because his power comes from God.”* (Delitsch, p. 133) The exposure of the devil himself as man’s spiritual adversary in this fight demonstrates the necessity for the Son of God’s personal intervention in this warfare as humanity’s champion. No mere man could ever have hoped to defeat the Prince of Hell and his minions. Without that intervention man would have



***“The Risen Christ Demonstrating His Victory Over Death And The Devil In Hell” by Rochegrosse***



been doomed to remain helpless and hopeless through all of eternity.

*“The identification of the tyrant as the devil reveals the depth of the human plight. The devil did not possess control over death inherently but gained his power when he seduced humankind to rebel against God. The representation of death as a henchman in the devil’s service and the threat of death as an instrument by which he bludgeons humanity into submission is based upon Genesis 3...It is ironical that human beings, destined to rule over creation, should find themselves in the posture of a slave, paralyzed through the fear of death. Hopeless subjection to death characterizes earthly existence apart from the intervention of God. Moreover, the presence of death makes itself felt in the experience of anxiety...The crisis faced by the Hebrew Christians to whom the Epistle is addressed was demonic in character.” (Lane, p. 61)*

St. Paul sounds the same note of triumphant victory over death and the fear of death in the great resurrection chapter of the New Testament 1 Corinthians 15:

*“For as by a man came death, so also by a man came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all sleep, so also in Christ shall all be made alive...Then comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be*



*“The Shrine of the Cathedra of St. Peter in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome Upheld by Ambrose, Athanasius, Augustine, and Chrysostom*



***destroyed is death... Then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:21-26; 54-56)

St. Athanasius, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Bishop of the Egyptian city of Alexandria and Primate of the Coptic Church, was one of the foremost defenders of the divinity of Christ in the bitter controversy against the Arian heretics. His importance in the history of Christianity is demonstrated by the fact that he was one of only three Greek church fathers formally recognized by the Roman Church as a “*Doctor of the Church*” that is, one of a small handful of teachers whose confession of the faith played a pivotal role in preserving the Gospel. There were eight Doctors of the Church at the time the Bernini monument was cast. There are presently thirty-five. The other Greek Doctors of the Church are John



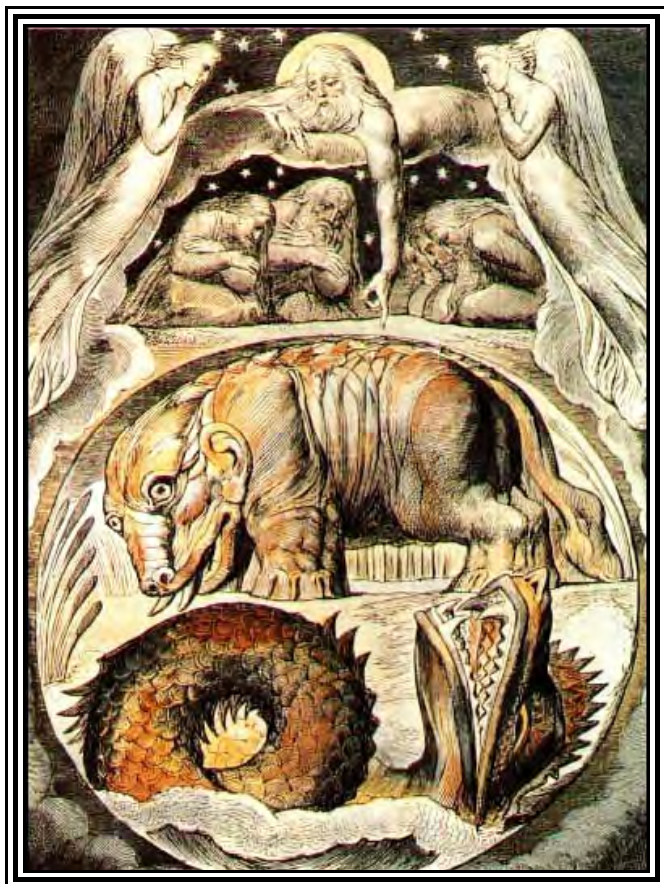
***“Athanasius Defending the Deity of Christ Before the Council of Nicea” by Vasily Surikov***

Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nazianzus. The crucial significance of these faithful confessors was acknowledged in the massive shrine included in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome to house the relic which was believed to be the original wooden chair which was the “*cathedra*” of St. Peter the Apostle. That precious bishop’s seat was encased in bronze and

gold by the master Renaissance sculptor Bernini, upheld by the four primary Doctors of the Church - Ambrose, Bishop of Milan; Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, Augustine Bishop of Hippo and John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople. Bishop Athanasius cited this phrase in his cogent explanation of the essential significance of both the human and divine natures of Christ in the death of Jesus for all mankind as the means by which death and the devil were utterly destroyed.

*'The body then, as sharing the same nature with all, for it was a human body, though by an unparalleled miracle it was formed of a Virgin only, yet being mortal, was to dies also, conformably with its peers. But by virtue of the union of the Word with it, it was no longer subject to corruption according to its own nature, but by reason of the Word that had come to dwell in it was placed out of the reach of corruption. And so it was that two marvels came to pass at once, that the death of all was accomplished in the Lord's body, and that death and corruption were wholly done away with by reason of the Word that was united with it. For there was need of death, and death must needs be suffered on behalf of all, that the death owing from all might be paid. Whence, as I said before, the Word, since it was not possible for Him to die, that He might offer it as His own in the stead of all, and as suffering through His union with it, on behalf of all, **'bring to nought, him that had the power of death, that is, the***

***devil; and might deliver them who through the fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.'***"  
(Allen, p. 221)



*"Behemoth and Leviathon" - W. Blake*

The commentaries of the early church fathers recognize the theological importance of these verses and described their meaning in vivid detail. Christ is depicted as a skilled hunter who stalks his satanic prey with such skill that the beast is caught completely unaware or a mighty warrior who overwhelms and destroys His enemy on the battlefield. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 315-386), followed the concept of the Apostle Paul who asserted that baptism was our connection to the death and burial and resurrection of Christ. The apostle used the image of a Roman Triumph in which the empire's defeated foes were paraded through the streets of Rome to demonstrate



the totality of their defeat by the legions.

*“We have been buried with Him in baptism in which you were also raised with Him through faith...and you who were dead in your trespasses...God made alive together with Him, cancelling the record of the debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities, and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them.”* (Colossians 2: 12-15)

Cyril enhanced the drama of the image by incorporating the dreadful monster Behemoth from the book of Job. Behemoth fit comfortably in the baptism context because he was so massive and powerful that he could swallow up the waters of the Jordan in his gaping jaws. In Cyril’s metaphor, Behemoth became the terrifying personification of death. By humbling Himself to come down into this world where death and the devil had prevailed for so long, Christ, as it were, dared to face the monster on his own ground. By His incarnation and His death on the cross the Lord charged fearlessly down into the depths to confront the hideous monster of death in its own dark lair. He destroyed the raging beast of death and his Satanic master with the very weapon by which they had held mastery over fallen mankind:

*“The dragon, according to Job, was in the water, he who received the Jordan in his gaping jaws. When, therefore, it was necessary to crush the heads of the dragon, descending into the water, Christ bound the strong one, that He might receive power ‘to tread upon serpents and scorpions’ (Luke 10:19). This was no ordinary beast, but a horrible monster. No fishing ship could last under a single scale of his tail, before him stalked destruction, ravaging all in her path. But life charged forward into the gaping jaws of death that they might be slammed shut and all who were delivered from death might say: ‘O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?’ Baptism draws death’s sting.”* (ACCOS, X, p. 45)



*Christ Destroying Death and the Devil By Means of the Cross - 18<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*



Dutch master painter Peter Paul Rubens catches the sense of the text precisely in his portrait of Christ rising from the broken tomb of Joseph, no longer draped in the pale white grave clothes but in a brilliant swirling red robe with the unfurled banner of victory, displaying a blood red cross on a pure white field, suggesting the cleansing of sin by the shedding of blood. The angels swirling around him are sounding the trumpets of victory and placing the laurel wreath of the conqueror upon his brow. Most dramatically, however, the victory is portrayed by the skeletal figure of death whose skull is being crushed beneath his right foot as it claws desperately at the side of the stone casket trying to escape and the coiling serpent being smashed beneath his left foot as he steps up out of the grave. Death and its master, the devil have been broken and destroyed forever! The means by which this victory has been achieved is also evident from the nail wounds in the Savior's feet and the gash in His side which had certified His own death as the atonement price.



*“Christ Rising Victorious From The Tomb Crushing Death And The Devil Beneath His Feet” - Peter Paul Rubens*

Jesus made use of the same metaphor of battle between two mighty enemies to describe His defeat of death and the devil in response to those who had argued that He could only cast out demons because *“the Prince of Demons”* had granted Him that power. *“Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then, indeed, he may plunder his house. Whoever is not with Me is against Me.”* (Matthew 12:26-30) The parallel text in Luke makes the warfare language all the more clear: *“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted, and divides up the spoils.”* (Luke 11:21-22) The image of the



*"The Dead Body Of Christ In The Tomb" - Hartenstein*

Messiah as the Champion of Israel which Jesus used in these texts is ultimately drawn from the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah:

***"Can plunder be taken from a champion, or captives rescued from a tyrant? This is what the Lord says, 'Yes, captives will be taken from a champion and plunder retrieved from the tyrants. I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children will I rescue...Then all humankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior.'" (Isaiah 49:24-26)***

***"For surely it is not angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham."*** - The thrust of this entire segment has been setting forth the necessity of Christ's human nature to explain why He became a man to accomplish the plan of salvation. Some of those who were offended by the Son of God humbling Himself in this radical manner had concluded that Jesus was therefore inferior the angels who appeared to be so much greater and more glorious than the God/man. The preceding paragraph had dramatically demonstrated why the death of Christ was the key component of the salvation plan thereby necessitating Christ's humanity. Now, the text goes on to explain that this all makes perfect sense in that God's gracious gift of salvation was not intended for angels but for ***"the offspring of Abraham."*** A human/divine Savior submitted to physical death to deliver humanity from the curse of death. Angels have no role to play in this plan for they are not the beneficiaries of salvation.

They were created in the beginning, like everything else, for the benefit and blessing of humanity. The two key terms in this sentence are the verb ***“helps”*** and the object of that help, namely ***“the offspring of Abraham.”*** The verb ***“helps”*** literally means *‘to seize with a firm hand.’* The word can be used in either a negative sense - to seize someone in order to restrain them - or a positive sense - to pull someone back from danger or to extend one’s hand in friendship. The context determines the sense of the verb. Paul used the word in 1 Timothy to describe clinging to the promise of eternal life:

***“Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses...They are to do good, to be rich in good works and to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”***

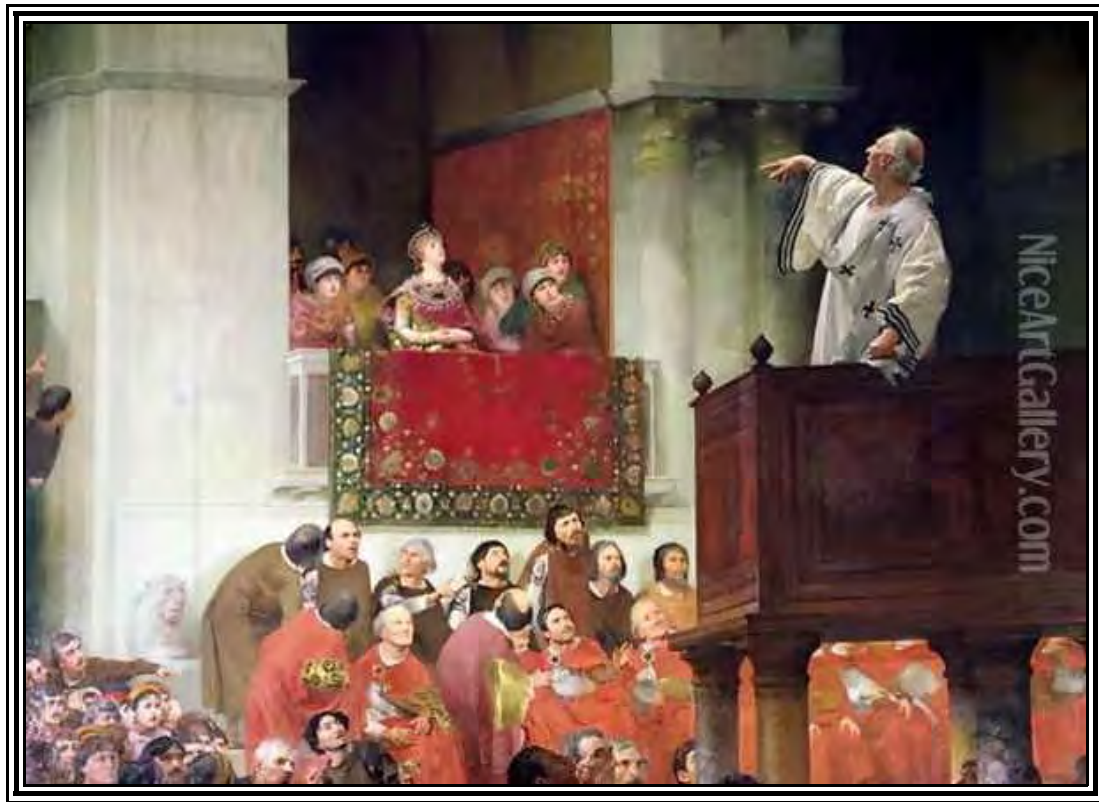
The Gospel of Luke, in contrast, uses the same word to describe the enemies of Jesus using clever terminology in a malicious attempt to trap and discredit Him:

***“So they watched Him and sent spies who pretended to be sincere that they might catch Him in something He said, so as to deliver Him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the government...And they were not able to catch Him in the presence of the people to catch Him in what He said, but marveling at His answer they became silent.”*** (Luke 20:20,26)



***“The Scribes And The Pharisees Trying To Trap Jesus With His Words” “Tissot***





***“Chrysostom Denouncing The Heretical Empress Eudoxia” - Constant***

In this instance, the word would seem to refer to the incarnation by which Christ took on humanity, that is, he seized mankind in a firm grip by becoming a man Himself. Chrysostom contends that the use of this particular verb is of profound theological significance in understanding the nature of God’s gracious love for mankind. At the same time, he offers a vivid explanation of the specific application of the verb in this context as he marvels at the fact that God would have chosen to help lowly ungrateful men rather than glorious angels:

*“Paul, wishing to show the great kindness of God toward humans and the love which God had for the human race, after saying, ‘Since therefore children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same,’ follows up the subject in this passage. For do not regard lightly what is spoken or think of it as a trifle that He takes our flesh...’ For truly He does not take hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham.’ What is it that he says, ‘He took on not an angel’s nature but humanity’s.’ But what is ‘He takes hold of’? Why did he not say ‘He took on him’ but ‘He takes hold of’? It is derived from the image of those pursuing those who turn away from them, doing everything to overtake them as they flee and to take hold of them as they are bounding away. For when human nature was fleeing from Him, (and fleeing far away, for we ‘were far off’), He pursued after and overtook us. He showed that He has done this out of kindness and love and tender care, When he says ‘Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation’ he shows His extreme interest in behalf of human nature, and that*

*God makes great account of it. So also in this place he sets it forth by nature of a comparison, for he says, 'He does not take hold of angels.' For indeed it is a great and wonderful thing and full of amazement that our flesh should sit on high and be adored by angels and archangels, by the cherubim and the seraphim. For having oftentimes thought upon this myself, I am amazed at it and thought unto myself great things concerning the human race."* (ACCOS, X, 49)

***"The offspring of Abraham"*** is most certainly not a reference limited to the blood descendants of the patriarch. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Abraham was the father of believers regardless of their ethnic descent. Thus, St. Paul in Romans and Galatians -

***"But it is not as though the Word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham are his offspring, but, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."*** (Romans 9:6-8)



***"God's Covenant With Abraham" - Winter***

***"Know then that it is the sons of faith who are the sons of Abraham, and the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' So then, those who are of faith shall be blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith...Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring. It does not say 'and to offsprings', referring to many, but referring to one, 'and to your offspring' who is Christ...For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring according to the promise."*** (Galatians 3:7,16,26-29)



Commentator Franz Delitsch is both accurate and eloquent in his summary of the intended sense of the phrase ***“the offspring of Abraham”***:

*“By this term he designates...the whole Church of God, beginning from the Old Testament and continuing into the New, founded on the call and faithful obedience of Abraham, embracing Israel and all believers from the rest of mankind in the same fellowship, and constituting the whole of that good olive tree which has the patriarchs for its sacred root (Galatians 3:29; Romans 4:16; 11:16). The proof that Jesus became man to die for men is drawn from the fact that His redeeming work is not angels, but this Church of the living God, whose members are gathered from the whole family of man...The author’s meaning is this: Christ became man in order to die for men; He layeth not hold of angels to make them a church of His redeemed, but of Abraham’s seed; these, a church gathered from among men who are living in the flesh, subject to death and in need of redemption - these He lays hold of, to these He associates Himself, to become their Redeemer and raise them in the end to honor above that of angels.” (Delitsch, I, p. 138 ff.)*

***“Therefore, He had to be made like His brothers in every respect...”*** - The Greek phrase begins with the words ***“in every respect”*** to place particular emphasis upon the comprehensive character of the human nature of Christ. Although Himself not poisoned by sin, the God/man chose to submit to all of the consequences of sin which afflict fallen mankind that He might truly be one with them in order to genuinely serve as their Mediator. All of the pains, struggles, disappointments, anguish and perils, culminating in grim death itself - to all of these things it was necessary for the divine Son of God to subject Himself to accomplish His task. The necessity of this self-subjection is clearly expressed by the verb - ***“He had to be made.”*** This was not optional. It was essential. The goal and purpose to be accomplished by this necessity is asserted with equal clarity - ***“so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”*** This is the first instance in the Epistle where Christ is identified as ***“high priest.”*** Its appearance here might seem rather abrupt were it not for the fact that virtually every word in this context relates intimately to the office and function of the high priest. The high priestly office of



***Marble Statue of Aaron the High Priest In His Sacred Vestments***



the Old Testament, and indeed the entire complex system of sacrifices and offerings of which the high priest was the personification, were genuine prototypes of the Messiah Who was to come and the task which He was sent to accomplish. The consequence of a failure to recognize this reality is a fatal misunderstanding of the entire Old Testament covenant.

*“The author does nothing more than point out the significance of the death of Christ in relation to sin, the consequence of which He has experienced and endured, in such a manner as to exhibit in His death the completion of that work of God which was prepared for and foreshadowed in the church of the Old Testament. That Christ is called ‘high priest,’ not simply ‘priest’ is the necessary consequence of the divine elevation from which He came down, and up to which He returned; for this reason, He is High Priest, that is, priest in sole and absolute eminence. Yet it is not His personal dignity, which in itself alone makes Him High Priest, but at the same time the nature of His work intimately connected with it; which work has its most closely corresponding type in the peculiar official functions of the Levitical High Priest.” (Delitsch, I, p. 143)*



**“The High Priest Aaron Before the Ark”  
by Abraham Bloemaert - 1648**

Inherent the priestly office of mediator is by definition, the necessity that the priest be a part of the group which he is to represent before the deity. This will later be explicitly stated in Hebrew 5:1 - **“For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”** If the Messiah was to fulfill His mission as **“a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people”** it was essential that He Himself be one of the people. The two adjectives which here describe the Messianic High Priest - **“merciful and faithful”** **“are inseparable as a comprehensive description”** (Cockerill, p. 149) of one who will appropriate carry out the responsibilities of the high priestly office. The most basic function of the High Priest is to convey the mercy of God to the congregation which He represents. This task can only be

accomplished if that High Priest is ***“faithful”*** that is perfectly obedient to the will and purpose of God. The Epistle repeatedly stresses the absolute submission of Christ to the will of His heavenly Father as the basis for the effectiveness of His priesthood. Two examples will suffice here.

***“In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, being designated by God a High Priest of the order of Melchizedek.”*** (Hebrews 5:7-10)

***“Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifices and offerings You have not desired, but a body have You prepared for Me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings You take no pleasure. Then I said, Behold I have come to do Your will, O God, as it is written of Me in the scroll of the Book.’ When He said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the Law), then He added, ‘Behold I have come to do Your will. He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ Jesus, once for all.’”*** (Hebrews 10:5-10)



***“Melchizedek the High Preiost of Salem  
Accepting the Offerings of Abraham”***

The function of the High Priest in obtaining mercy from God for the people is also highlighted elsewhere in the letter as the ultimate object of the mediation and intercession of his ministry. In this way the High Priest also reflected the character of God Himself and anticipated the divine nature of the Messiah to come: ***“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed” ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.’”*** (Exodus 34:6)

***“Since then we have a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one Who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us***



*then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace, to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)*

*“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places through the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great High Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some,; but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:19-25)*



*“Caiaphas And Annas At The Trial of Jesus”  
From the Passion Play at Oberammergau, Bavaria*



The office of the High Priest was debased and corrupted throughout its long history by the sinful weakness of the men to whom the office had been entrusted. That corruption achieved its deepest degradation in the person of the High Priest Caiaphas who led the evil conspiracy which condemned and murdered the true Messianic High Priest. In this context, the symbolic rending of the High Priest's vestments by Caiaphas in the mock trial of Jesus constituted the most grotesque irony. The scathing pronouncement of God's judgement upon the failed priesthood of Eli in the days of the Judges, characterizes that failure and promises the coming of the true Messianic High Priest:



*"The Death of the High Priest Eli" - Tissot*

*"Thus says the Lord, 'Did I indeed reveal Myself to the House of your father Aaron when they were in Egypt, subject to the House of Pharaoh? Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to go up to My altar to burn incense, to wear an ephod before Me? I gave to the House of your father Aaron all My offerings by fire from the people of Israel. Why then did you scorn My sacrifices and My offerings that I commanded for My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me...Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel declares: I promised that your house and the House of your father Aaron, should go in and out before Me forever, but now the Lord declares, Far be it from Me, for those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father Aaron's House, so that there will not be an old man in your house...And I will raise up for Myself a faithful Priest, Who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. And I will build Him a sure house and He shall go in and out*



*"Aaron In the Tabernacle"*  
James Tissot

*before My Anointed forever."* (1 Samuel 2:27-35)

The nature of the High Priest's service to God is defined as ***"to make propitiation for the sins of the people."*** ***"Propitiation"*** refers to the removal of anger by means of an offering. In Scripture the term is used with specific reference to the removal of the righteous wrath of God against sin. Both in reference to the sacrifices of the Old Testament and the once for all sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross which they prefigured, it is God Himself Who provides the means by which the divine wrath of the Holy One is to be removed. This is the essential difference between the ancient sacrifices of the heathen and the work righteousness of all humanly devised religion. The sacrificial system of the Torah was a gracious gift from God by means of which He granted atonement in anticipation of the sacrifice of His own Son. ***"For the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your sins."*** (Leviticus 17:11) The justice and holiness of God required that the wages of sin be paid in full. ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 6:23) Christ is Himself both the High Priest and the offering. The fact that God is both the instigator and the implementor

of this sacrifice of propitiation is the decisive demonstration of salvation by grace. Thus in his First Epistle, St. John can rightly declare:

***"But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world...God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."***  
(1 John 2:1-2; 4:9-10)

In the language of theology this is identified as the *"substitutionary atonement"* in that the innocent Christ took the place of sinful mankind and as our substitute died a death He did not deserve to die so that we, the guilty who fully deserved to die, might be delivered from the curse of death. ***"All this is from God, Who through Christ, reconciled us to Himself...For our sake, He made Him to be sin Who knew no sin, so that in Him we***

*might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18,21)*

*“For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”* - The Chapter concludes with another expression of the solidarity of our great High Priest with those whom He represents before the Father, a solidarity which is founded in the reality that Christ is one of us. He has lived in the world as a man and has Himself experienced the suffering and torment associated with temptation. The Hebrew Christians to whom the letter is addressed are struggling to remain faithful while confronted overwhelming pressure to mislead them back into their former condition. But the Messiah, who has called them to be His own, never yielded to those temptations despite the difficulty of the opposition of the world and the Tempter. Our Lord’s anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane is, perhaps, the most powerful example of the suffering which He endured in the face of the temptations of the Adversary. In this way, His example of faithfulness becomes a source of encouragement and hope for those who are currently called upon to persevere and endure. Furthermore, the fact that He remained completely faithful has enabled Him to serve as the great High Priest for His people as they now confront their own temptations.

### ***Hebrews Chapter 3***

*(1) Therefore, holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, (2) Who was faithful to Him Who appointed Him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house. (3) For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses-as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (4) For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. (5) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, (6) but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are His house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (7) Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear My voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness, (9) where your fathers put Me to the test and saw My works for forty years. (10) Therefore, I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known My ways.’ (11) As I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ (12) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have come to share in Christ, if, indeed, we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (15) As it is said, “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was He provoked for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness. (18) And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*



### **Chapter 3:1-6**

***Therefore, holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, Who was faithful to Him who appointed Him just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses-as much more glory as the builder of a house has much more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the Builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a Son. And we are His house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.***



***“Christ - the Angel of the Lord - And Moses Upon Mount Sinai At The Burning Bush”***

***“Therefore, holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling...”*** - The text continues its admonition to faithfulness on the part of the Hebrew Christians by comparing them to their ancestors, the Children of Israel, who proved themselves to be unfaithful by their rebellion against the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai. That comparison appropriately begins with a comparison of Jesus and Moses since Moses was the foremost prophet of the Old Testament, the mediator of the covenant at Sinai, and the leader of the nation throughout the forty years of wandering in the desert. This comparison serves to emphasize the point that the ministry of Messiah Jesus is the continuation and the fulfillment of one and the same divine work. ***“First and foremost both the Son and Moses function in the one house of God composed of the wilderness generation led by Moses as well as those who have received God's Word in His Son, Because of this continuity, God's***

***OT people can serve as both negative (3:7-4:11) and positive examples (11:1-40) for His people today.”*** (Cockerill, p. 153)

The author addresses his readers as ***“holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling.”*** This is the only instance in the New Testament where this form of address appears and as such it has elicited significant discussion among commentators. Elsewhere the apostolic audience is identified as ***“brothers,” “my beloved brothers,”*** or even ***“brethren beloved of God”*** but this is the sole instance where the designation ***“holy brothers”*** occurs. The use of the brethren terminology serves both to broaden the address beyond Hebrews to also include

Gentiles and to identify the writer more closely with those to whom he is writing. The adjective **“holy”** is that of the Temple and its worship and would thus fit nicely with the contextual emphasis upon Christ as the superlative High Priest. The combination here appears to be designed to emphasize at the same time the intimate fellowship of believers with one another as brothers of Christ. This reiterates the message of the preceding Chapter:

*“Holy brothers and sisters reminds them of who they are as the people of God and of the divine initiative for their salvation. The Son who was not ashamed to own them as ‘brothers and sisters’ before the Father (2:12) took on their humanity as the One who makes them ‘holy’ (2:11) by cleansing them from sin (9:11-14)...The Son makes them ‘holy’ so that they can truly be ‘partakers in the heavenly calling.’”* ((Cockerill, p. 158)

The language beautifully intertwines the concepts of the bond between believers, the bond between believers and God, and the divine grace which is the sole source of this unity:

*“Here the text explains more than the relation in which the writer stands to those whom he addresses; their common brotherhood with Christ is the main thought in his mind. Of this he has already spoken (2:11). The redeemed are with the Redeemer all children of the one Father; the Sanctifier, therefore, stands in brotherly relation to those whom He sanctifies. He is the one who makes holy, they are the holy ones through Him, and they are holy brothers with Him and toward one another.”* (Delitsch, I, p. 153)

These people may properly be addressed as **“you who share in a heavenly calling”** because that which defines and unites them is the fact that God has called them to faith through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They share together in a calling that it from heaven and to heaven and it is Christ alone Who has enabled them both to hear and to respond in obedience to His call. This bond of commonality is more significant than any and all of their other differences which fade into insignificance in light of that which Christ has done for all of them. St. Paul describes the profound unity of the body of Christ in his Letter to the Colossians specifically as the result of our common calling in Christ:

***“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all in all. Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and , if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. And above all these, put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.”*** (Colossians 3:11-15)

***“consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession”*** - The author invites his readers to carefully assess the example of ***“Jesus”*** Whom he identifies as ***“the Apostle and High Priest of our confession”*** as the perfect model of the faithful obedience to which he seeks to encourage them. Both of these titles are unique to this text and are not applied to Christ anywhere else in the New Testament. An ***“apostle”*** is a messenger, one who has been sent as an envoy or representative of another to convey information from the one by whom he has been sent. While the title itself is not applied to Jesus elsewhere, the concept of Christ have been sent by God the Father is common, particularly in the Gospel of John, where it occurs seventeen times. ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”*** (John 3:16-17) Commentator Paul Ellingsworth presents this helpful summary of the usage:

*“Within the NT itself, the idea that Jesus was sent by God is widespread and deeply rooted; e.g. Mt. 15:24; Mark 11:37; Luke 10:19; Gal. 4:4. It is particularly strong in John where “to be sent” is used 17 times of Jesus being sent by God...It is tempting to speculate that John avoided applying ‘apostolos’*

*to the Twelve because for him, as for the author of Hebrews, Jesus was the Apostle par excellence. The author of Hebrews lack of interest in the Twelve (they are at most alluded to in 2:3) opens up the possibility of using ‘apsotolos’ as a name for Jesus.”* (Ellingsworth, p. 199)



***“Moses With the Tablets of the Law”  
by Michaelangelo***

The concept of Jesus as the ultimate apostle, sent by God Himself, as God Himself to announce and to implement the divine plan of salvation fits perfectly with the theme of Hebrews affirming Jesus as the final and decisive revelation of God, superior to the prophets, the angels, and even to Moses, who was the supreme agent of God’s revelation in the Old Testament. The nature of Christ as ***“High Priest”*** has already been introduced and will be extensively discussed throughout the remainder of the epistle. The intriguing addition here is the phrase ***“of our confession.”*** It would seem to imply that already at this early date the worship of the people of God involved some sort of formal confession of the content of





*“My God! Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?” - J. Brunet*

the Christian faith, that which was believed by those who truly were Christians. In the specific context of this segment of Hebrews, that confession would have pertained directly to the identity of Jesus and that which He has done. *“What we confess is that we have in the man Jesus one sent of God to bring us the message of salvation and a high priest to accomplish it.”* (Delitsch, I, p. 155)

***“Who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, just as Moses also was faithful...”*** - The object of the consideration commended in Verse 1 is the faithfulness of Jesus in comparison to that of Moses. The salvation of the Hebrews is the result accomplished by that faithfulness, and accordingly, it is most appropriate that they should accord it their most careful and deliberate attention. The imperative verb used here for ***“consider”*** is typically used for the most intense, prolonged, earnest, searching consideration. This is an urgent matter of particular importance. The key term in this sentence is ***“faithful.”*** As in the preceding Chapter, faithfulness refers to perfect submission to the will and Word of God and its implementation. In the Greek text the verb is a present participle - literally *“being faithful”*.

*“This faithfulness includes both the incarnate obedience of Jesus and the resultant continuing trustworthiness of the exalted Apostle and High Priest...The deliberate use of the present participle, ‘being faithful’, encompasses both past earthly and present heavenly faithfulness in one continuous reality. The earthly obedience of Christ endures as the source of*

*the exalted One's saving efficacy (10:5-10). That earthly faithfulness is the premier example for emulation (12:1-3) and the guarantee of Christ's present dependability as Savior.” (Cockerill, p. 162)*

**“Him Who appointed Him”** is God the Father Who determined the plan of salvation from eternity and designated His Son as the agent through whom that plan would be executed and accomplished. Christ has done everything which the Father appointed Him to do without exception or omission, thus accomplishing the plan of salvation.

**“Just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.”** - The comparison between Christ and Moses is introduced using the words of Numbers 12:7 - **“Not so with My servant Moses,. He is faithful in all My house.”** The remarkable assertion of the unique status of Moses is made in the context of a rebellion by Aaron and Miriam against the authority and status of their brother. They resented the preeminence of Moses and asserted that as his siblings they should have equal status and power. God's response described the unique role of Moses among the prophets of the Old Testament in this way: **“Hear My words: if there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses...With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly.”** The designation of the work of God as **“all God's house”** was , no doubt the result of the fact that the rebuke of Aaron and Miriam as spoken on the steps of the Tabernacle.

**“And suddenly the Lord said to Moses, and to Aaron and Miriam, ‘Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting.’ And the three of them came out and the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both came forward.”** (Numbers 12:4-5)



**“Aaron And Miriam Rebel Against Moses” - 17<sup>th</sup> Century Woodcut**

***“For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses....”*** - The difference between Jesus and Moses is not merely one of degree. This is not a comparison between two important leaders of the people of God, one of whom happened to be somewhat more significant than the other. Rather, this is a difference in kind. Jesus and Moses cannot even be considered in the same category.

*“The vocation of Jesus Christ is so much the more glorious, as in Him has appeared the promised Savior, Who should belong as a Son to the almighty Creator of the church and of all things; whereas Moses was but a part of the church himself, and therein, only a servant, and giving prophetic testimony to the Gospel of the future.”* (Delitsch, I, p. 158)

That categorical distinction between Jesus and Moses is now set forward and defined in greater detail by the illustration of the difference between ***“the builder of a house”*** and that of ***“the house itself.”*** The illustration effectively uses the terminology drawn from Numbers 12 which had been cited in Verse 2 - ***“just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house.”*** As previously noted, the *“house”* terminology in Numbers 12 was derived from the fact that Aaron and Miriam had been rebuked while standing on the steps of the Tabernacle which was literally the house, the dwelling place, of God in the midst of the Israelite encampment. It would seem that ***“God’s House”*** should be understood more broadly to refer not merely to a place of worship but to the leadership entrusted to these two examples. In Moses case that would be the nation of Israel and his responsibility to liberate them from slavery and lead them out of the House of Bondage in Egypt, to the establishment of the covenant at Sinai, and the delivery of the purified nation to the borders of the promised land after forty years of wandering in the wilderness. ***“God’s House”*** in reference to Christ is the church, the people of God in every time and place from the creation to the judgement, and the accomplishment of the plan of salvation by which this house was brought into being, sustained and preserved. The identification of the church as the household, house, or temple of God is common throughout the New Testament;

***“I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”*** (1 Timothy 3:15)

***“As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*** (1 Peter 2:4-5)

***“According to the grace of god given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take***



*care of how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ..Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.” (1 Corinthians 3:10-16)*

*“So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure, being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-21)*



*“Moses Receiving The Tablets - Miriam And Aaron At The Base of the Mountain” - Tremignon - The Church of Saint Moses the Prophet - Venice*

Both Moses and Christ were entrusted with a task to perform by God. Both were **“faithful”** in carrying out the mission to which God had called them. As St. Paul observed in 1 Corinthians 4:2 - **“It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.”** Jesus

consistently made it clear that He regarded His task as a mission entrusted to Him by the Father. Thus, for example, a series of texts from the Gospel of John -

***“My teaching is not Mine, but His Who sent Me...I have not spoken on My own authority; the Father Who sent Me has Himself given Me commandment what to say and what to speak...The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father Who dwells in Me does His works.”*** (John 7:16; 12:49; 14:10)

The emphasis in the comparison here is upon the faithfulness which characterized the ministries of Christ and Moses. Nonetheless, the categorical difference between Christ and Moses remains. The phrase ***“as much more glory as the builder of a house has than the house itself.”*** The manner in which the phrase is cited suggests this to be a familiar saying or proverb. Jesus, as the Son of God, is to Moses as the builder of a house is to the house which he has built. Moses was himself a part of the household of faith. Christ, unlike all the faithful prophets who preceded Him and apostles who would come after Him, was not merely another man called to reveal God’s Word to men. He was Himself the source and content of the Word which He revealed - in the construct of the comparison - not merely part of the house, but the builder of the house. The point of comparison can be clearly seen in the Prologue of John’s Gospel, even to the point of including a specific comparison between Christ and Moses:

***“In the beginning was the Word, and the was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...For the Law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father’s side, He has made Him known.”*** (John 1:1-3,14,17-18)

***“(For every house is built by someone, but the Builder of all things is God.)”*** - The point



***“In The Beginning Was The Word”***





*“Moses Return From the Mountain”  
James Tissot*

of the distinction, and the difference in distinction between faithful Moses, the man, and faithful Jesus, the God/Man is explicitly connected to the deity of Jesus. God, by Biblical definition (Exodus 4:14), is **“I Am”** - the only independent existence. He does not have a source, He is the Source of all things, or as Hebrews here states - **“the Builder of all things is God.”** Other than the Creator God Himself, everything else that is, whether than be the physical creation or the church - the particular point of reference here - has come into existence as the result of divine action.

**“Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant”** - The comparison between Christ and Moses continues and concludes in these verses. The writer does not denigrate Moses in the least, but begins with yet another assertion of Moses’ faithful service of God with a second citation of Numbers 5:12. This could very well have become a point of contention among the Hebrew Christians to whom the epistle is addressed if the comparison were perceived to be an attack upon Moses. The unique role of Moses as the prophet through whom the Old Testament covenant was established and by whom the Israelite nation was

led to the Promised Land is carefully recognized and affirmed and thereby the Children of Israel are also recognized as having been the chosen people of God and rightly designated as a part of **“God’s House.”** The deliberate use of the repeated citation of the Torah serves to make this point in a manner which would have been familiar and reassuring to the readers of the letter. The distinction is reinforced by the contrast between the role of Moses **“as a servant”** and that of Christ **“as a Son.”** The shift in prepositions signals the contrast. Moses was faithful **“as a servant in God’s house”** while Jesus was faithful **“over God’s house as a Son.”** Moses’ mission as a servant was **“to testify to the things that were to be spoken later.”** Christ’s mission as a Son was not merely to prophesy events in the distant future but to fulfill all of the promises and prophecies which had been spoken across the ages. Christ’s task transcends time to embrace past, present and future. As the prophet Nathan had promised King David, in words which Hebrews had previously applied to the Messiah (1:5):

***“I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall built a house for Me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to Me a son...I will***



***confirm him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.” (1 Chronicles 17:11-14)***

***“And we are His house if indeed we hold fast our courage and our boasting in our hope.”*** - The explicit definition of ***“God’s house”*** as the people of God concludes this segment. The pronoun ***“we”*** which serves as the subject of the sentence refers to believers. In this context, those believers are primarily, although not exclusively, Jews. This group is identified in contrast to others ***“is not that of race, or even generation, but essentially the opposition between faith and obedience on the one hand, and unbelief and rebellion against God on the other.”*** (Ellingworth, p. 210) The assertion that ***“we are His house”*** is combined with the encouragement to ***“Hold fast our courage and our boasting in our hope.”*** These words set the stage for the admonition to come, based upon the negative example of Israel in the wilderness. The writer’s concern throughout the letter is that the Hebrews will fall back into their former ways in the familiar patterns of Judaism. In this way the pattern of their ancestors in the wilderness would be repeated. He pleads with them to ***“hold fast”***. The verb is particularly intense, suggesting a grip that clings to something for dear life, with firm desperation, recognizing the unique urgency of the situation. That which is to be seized with such a grip is ***“our courage and our boasting in our hope.”*** The noun ***“courage”*** literally means ***“all speech”***. In secular Greek it described the freedom enjoyed in the Greek democracies to to openly express one’s convictions and beliefs without restraint or limitation. That etymology suggests that the courage of which the writer is speaking here is linked to the willingness of the Christian to openly confess and witness to his faith in Christ without allowing himself to be intimidated, compromised or silenced by a hostile culture or by false teachers who have deviated from the truth. The essence of that Gospel truth here, in the aftermath of the preceding paragraphs, is the confidence of the believer that we have access to God in Jesus Christ as our great High Priest. ***“Our boasting in our hope”*** is the unshakable confidence of the believer, the pride and joy which is God’s gracious gift to us in Jesus Christ. Given the negative connotation of the English word boasting (absent in the Greek), it may be preferable to follow the advice of Franz Delitsch and translate the term as ***“our rejoicing.”*** Accordingly, the phrase refers to the joyful expression of the confident hope of the believer based upon the intercession of Christ as our Mediator and High Priest.



***“Christ The Great High Priest Icon”***

*“If the New Testament Church of God holds fast the treasure of hope, notwithstanding all the contradictions between the present and the promised future, in the midst of all the dangers of offense and falling away which confront her by the threatenings and allurements of the enemies of the cross, then, and only then, does she continue as the House of God, under the faithful and fostering care of Christ, the now exalted, and only, Son of God, her Brother, her Apostle, and her High Priest.” (Delitsch, I, P. 165)*

### **Chapter 3:7-11**

***Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put Me to the test and saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation and said, “They always go astray in their heart; they have not known My ways.” As I swore in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest.”***

***“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear...’”*** - To illustrate the importance of his admonition to stand firm in the faith and document the life and death urgency of that warning, the writer turns to Psalm 95 and its warning not to repeat the fatal mistake of Israel at Meribah in the Wilderness of Sinai, where the people rebelled against the Lord and at Kadesh-Barnea when they panicked over the spies’ reports of the strength of the Canaanites and rose up against Moses. These people were punished by an additional forty years of



***“Moses Drawing Water From The Rock At Meribah”***

wandering in the desert, during which the entire generation which had been involved in that disobedience perished before the entrance into the Promised Land (Psalm 95:7-11). The progression flows smoothly from the preceding comparison between Christ and Moses, which had demonstrated that Christ as the Son of God was infinitely superior to Moses, the foremost of the prophets of the Old Testament. In substance the thrust of the argument flows logically from the lesser to the greater. Israel rebelled against the Word of God as it had been revealed to them by Moses. For that rebellion a dreadful judgement of death descended upon an entire generation who perished under the wrath of God. If that disobedience resulted in such a fearsome judgement upon Israel of old, how much great will the judgement of God be upon those who reject or fall away from the Word of God today which has been revealed to them, not be a mere prophet like Moses, but by



the Son of God Himself, the greatest of apostles, and by the apostles whom the Son of God had directly called to be the messengers of His Word. This stern reminder of the judgement of God which had been imposed upon their forefathers who by their unbelief and their disobedience had forfeited their salvation could not help but have made a strong impression upon the men to whom this epistle was addressed. Hebrews Chapter 3 demonstrates, once again, the deft use of the Torah to lend weight and substance to the writer's argument as he addressed an audience with profound respect for the Torah as the Word of God. The formula which is used to introduce that quotation - ***“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says...”*** indicates the nature of that respect and the basis for it. The words are not unusual. In Hebrews 9:8 the text defining cultic practice in the temple is introduced - ***“By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet open...”***. Later, in Hebrews 10:15, a quotation from Jeremiah is cited with this introduction: ***“And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us, after saying, ‘This is the covenant...’”*** These references are neither casual nor insignificant. Rather, they express the basic conviction of the people of God that the Scriptures of the prophets and the apostles are in fact the Word of God. The human authorship of a particular passage is insignificant, because whomever that human author may have been he was acting under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, so that each and every word that was written was actually the Word of God.



***“The Report of the Spies At Kadesh-Barnea” - Hoyt***

*“Every word of Scripture is, as such, a word of the Holy Ghost; for all Scripture, in all its parts is ‘God-breathed’ (2 Timothy 3:16). It is the Holy Ghost, surveying at once all times, who forms the words applicable to the present, and at the same time meeting the exigencies of the future. In this, and in no other sense, does our author regard the Psalm, which, moreover, by that sudden introduction of the Lord speaking, assumes the character of a prophetic Psalm.” (Delitsch, I, p. 168)*

Commenting on this phrase, Dr. Phillip Hughes affirms the same historic conviction of Christendom and cites St. Thomas Aquinas in vigorous support of that conviction:

*“For him, as for the other apostolic authors, the message of Scripture is the*



voice of the Holy Spirit. It is plain too that for this very reason, he regards Scripture not as a dead letter of a bygone period, but as fully existential in its significance, so that what was spoken or written in the wilderness situation centuries before continues to have a dynamic applicability to the people of God in his own day. This vitality of Scripture in terms of its divine origin and its contemporaneity is corroborated by a passage like 2 Timothy 3:16 which teaches that not only is all Scripture God-breathed but also continuously ‘profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness’ which is precisely the use to which the author puts the quotation before us. Aquinas comments accordingly: “The authority of the words arises from this, that they are not the products of human invention, but of the Holy Spirit...He adduces the words of the Old Testament for the New, lest it should be thought that their reference is only to the Old Testament, and to a former time, instead of also to the New. And they are words of the Holy Spirit, because, as declared in 2 Peter 1:21, ‘no prophecy ever came by the impulse of men, but men moved by the Holy Ghost spoke from God.’ For David himself says in 2 Kings 23:2 of himself - ‘The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me.’ This, therefore, demonstrates the genuineness of the authority, because it derives from the Holy Spirit.” (Hughes, pp. 141-142)



***“Moses Drawing Water From The rock At Meribah” - Assemetto***

Psalm 95 is anonymous in the Biblical text, that is, it does not include a heading which identifies the human author or the circumstances of its composition, as do many of the



*“Samuel Anointing David As King of Israel” - Veronese*

Psalms. Ancient rabbinic tradition ascribes the Psalm to David on the occasion of his anointing to become the King of Israel by Samuel. In the next chapter of Hebrews, the inspired author of this epistle also identifies it as Davidic (4:7). The majority of the Psalm celebrates the faithful love of God and praises Him as a God above all the false gods of men. It rehearses His unfailing care and protection of Israel and then issues the warning cited here on the basis of prime examples of Israel’s unfaithfulness at Meribah and Kadesh-Barnea in the wilderness. The unique significance of Psalm 95 is indicated by its liturgical usage both in Judaism and Christianity. In the worship of the synagogue the Psalm is used in the preface of the service both on the eve of the Sabbath, and the morning service on the Sabbath itself. In Christian liturgical tradition the Psalm is the “*Venite*” - the opening canticle in the Matins service. The contrast between the consistent faithfulness of God and the constant unfaithfulness and ingratitude of Israel from the very beginning of the covenant becomes the backdrop for the urgent admonition.

Hebrews emphasizes the permanent relevance and authority of the Old Testament text by the use of the verb which describes the action of the Holy Spirit in the present tense: ***“as the Holy Spirit says.”***

***“Today if you hear My voice, do not harden your hearts...”*** - The writer’s quotation begins in Verse 7 of the Psalm with the warning not to repeat the fatal mistake of their ancestors. The ***“today”*** of the Psalm was hundreds of years after the actual events to which it refers, and the quotation of the Psalm here is many centuries after the time in which the Psalm was written. But because the text is the Holy Spirit speaking such distinctions in time make no difference whatsoever. What was true in Moses’ time, and in David’s time, is equally true for the Hebrews to whom the epistle was written in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. In the word order





*“Pharaoh Grieving the Death of His Son and Heir” - Alma-Tadema*

of the original Greek text the word **“today”** placed prominently for particular emphasis. The conditional phrase **“if you hear My voice”** is the contrast to its opposite, the hardening of the heart which follows. To hear the voice of God is an encouragement to hear and heed the voice of God in faithful obedience, unlike the fathers whose disobedience brought down God’s fearful wrath upon and entire generation. The hardening of the heart as a metaphor for the stubborn rejection of God’s Word and subsequent defiant disobedience to it is common. Note that the hardening is self-inflicted - **“do not harden your hearts.”** The foremost example of heart hardening in the Old Testament is Pharaoh’s resistance to the demand of Yahweh that he release the Hebrew slaves. His resistance prompts the series of plagues, culminating in the death of the first born on the first Passover night. Through the first five plagues the Exodus text indicates that Pharaoh hardened his heart. In plagues six thru ten the language shifts and indicates that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Accordingly, man may choose to stubbornly reject and disobey the Word of God. However, there comes a point in that ongoing process of deliberate disobedience and defiance that God intervenes and confirms the defiant sin in his sinfulness. At that point, repentance is no longer possible, and the sin which the sinner has chosen becomes its own punishment, and the self-destructive consequences inherent in sin become the judgement of God upon that chronic sinner. Dr. Franz Pieper, classic LCMS theologian notes this judgement dimension of the hardening of the heart, in his defense of the Biblical doctrine that the offer of God’s grace is always genuine and effective:

*“On the contrary the Scriptural doctrine of obduration (hardening) proves that God always willed the salvation of these men. According to Scripture, God does not harden these men according to an absolute decree, but his*



hardening results from his own guilt, from man's own resistance to God's will and Word. Obduracy is God's dreadful judgement upon those who despise the grace offered them and resist the work of the Holy Ghost. It sets in, as Romans 11:9 expressly states, **'as a recompense unto them.'** That is clearly seen too in the context of the passages in the Gospels, which speak of hardening, blinding, hiding of grace, etc. (John 12:40; Matthew 13:14-15; 11:25-26; 23:38, etc. The words of John 12:40 - **'He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,'** are preceded by the words, **'yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you...While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide Himself from them. But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him.'** The account of the hiding of grace, Matthew 11:25 - **"Because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent"** is preceded by the account of how urgently God had offered His grace to them v.20ff. **'Then He began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not,'** etc. And by describing those from whom God's grace had been hidden as **'the wise and the prudent,'** Christ indicates that here is a judgement being executed upon people who set their own wisdom against the divine revelation of grace. Yes, it is stated that God withdrew His grace from the Jews (Matthew 23:38) - **'Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.'** But mark well the words that immediately precede are these: **'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, how often would I have gathered thy children together and ye would not.'** If Jews were hardened, this hardening came upon them because, as Stephen tells them, **'Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did, so do ye.'** (Acts 7:51)" (Pieper, II, 30-31)



**"Jesus Weeping Over Jerusalem"**

***“As in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your father put Me to the test,”*** - The psalmist had used two of the most glaring examples of Israelites ingratitude and disobedience to illustrate his point. The use of the definite article ***“the rebellion”*** indicates that he is referring to a particular incident which is well known and familiar to his readers. The first took place shortly after the exodus from Egypt as the Children of Israel moved forward into the desert. They camped at Rephidim and found themselves short of water. They immediately began to complain and challenged the leadership of Moses. ***“Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”*** (Exodus 17:3) The Lord enabled Moses to bring forth water from the rock to meet their needs. The episode concludes with the report: ***“And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because the tested the Lord by saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’”*** The writer takes the Hebrew names ***“Massah”*** - which means *“testing”* and ***“Meribah”*** - which means *“rebellion”* and translates them into Greek to connect his warning to this unfortunate episode with the defiant disobedience against which he seeks to warn his readers at this time.

*“The perverseness of ingratitude and faithlessness is nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in the history of the Israelites in the wilderness. The goodness of God who had raised up a great leader for them, and had brought them safely out of the misery and bondage of Egypt, never failed them. Yet, over and over again they rebelled against Him and behaved as though He were their enemy instead of their deliverer...The single shameful incident recollected in the passage cited by our author was characteristic, indeed symptomatic, of their whole attitude of deep rooted rebellion and unbelief.”* (Hughes, p. 142)

***“And saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation and said: ‘They always go astray in their heart. They have not known My ways. As I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”*** - The second flagrant demonstration of hard hearted disobedience to the Lord which the Psalm describes is recorded in Numbers 14. The twelve spies had been sent out into the land of Canaan. When they returned they announced the bounteous abundance of the land. But they also lamented the mighty power of the Canaanites who would be invincible foes against the Children of Israel, The nation rose up in rebellion against the Lord and His chosen leaders Moses and Aaron:

***“Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them; ‘Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into the land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ And they said to one another, ‘Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.’”*** (Numbers 14:1-4)



*"The Return Of The Spies" - Leinweber*

***"And saw My works for forty years."*** - The point of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness had been to create a new generation of spiritually mature Israelites who would be prepared to undertake the task of conquering the land of Canaan. The Lord here laments that although the exodus generation witnessed both the miracles of the Lord in faithfully providing for the peoples' every need and His consistent judgements upon those who disobeyed or defied Him - they remained unfaithful and unprepared. Therefore, after the rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea, the Lord decreed that Israel would remain in the wilderness until those who had left Egypt were dead and a new generation had come forth.

*"In their obduracy they failed culpably to learn the great lesson of God's unfailing faithfulness, with the result that He was provoked by the repeated manifestations of their mutinous temperament ('They always go astray in their hearts.')* to punish them by causing them to forfeit the blessing of entry into the 'rest' that lay ahead for the people of God." (Hughes, p. 143)

***"Therefore, I was provoked with that generation and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known My ways. Therefore I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest.'"*** - The quotation here is from Psalm 95:10-11. The Lord's judgement was pronounced at Kadesh - ***"None of the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I wrought in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and yet have put Me to the test these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice, shall see the land which I swore to give their fathers."*** (Number 14:22f.) Thus Israel turned away from the land of promise and spent the next four decades wandering in the wilderness. The constant demonstrations of God's faithfulness continued throughout that time but still they would not learn, and so they died



in the desert. The author holds this most tragic example of the human capacity to recognize the overwhelming evidence of the faithful love of a gracious God before his readers and pleads with them not to repeat the fatal mistakes of their forefathers in the past.

The identification of the Promised Land as ***“My rest”*** is drawn from the wording of Psalm 95. The concept of Canaan as a place of rest refers to the security and safety which having a homeland of their own would afford the Jews. Moses spells this idea out more specifically in his farewell address to the people:

***“You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for you have not as yet come to the rest and the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you. But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and when He gives you rest from all of your enemies around, so that you live in safety, then to the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make His Name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I shall command you, your burnt offerings and your sacrifices.”*** (Deuteronomy 12:8-11)



***“The Return of the Twelve Spies At Kadesh”  
by James Tissot***

Saint John Chrysostom, along with other fathers of the early church, observed that the term ***“rest”*** is used in a threefold sense in Scripture. This is a most significant word which describes God’s original intent for man and the work of the Messiah whom God would send to undo the damage of sin and restore His original intent. First, the reference is to the Sabbath rest of creation on the seventh day, which became a part of the identity of the people of God both to remind them of God as their Creator and anticipate the restoration of that perfect rest when the Messiah would restore creation to its original peace and harmony. The second rest of Old Testament Scripture was, as in this instance, the Promised Land itself - a homeland of safety and security under the divine governance and protection of the Lord of the covenant. Finally, and ultimately, both of these rests would be fulfilled and consummated in the eternal rest of salvation in heaven, accomplished by the Messiah.



*"The Exodus From Egypt" - Cabenet*

### **Chapter 3:12-18**

*(12) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another everyday, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (15) As it is said, 'Today, if you hear my voice do not harden your hearts in rebellion.' (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled/ Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses. (17) And with whom was He provoked for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

*"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart...." - The admonition of Verse 7 which had introduced this segment is now repeated. The same verb "take care" is used in both instances. Here it is coupled with the personal expression "brothers" which expresses the author's concern for an individual connection with the audience to whom the epistle is addressed. The plural form suggests that this threat is perceived to imperil the entire community not merely particular individuals. The same had been true before when the faithless fears of the spies had spread throughout the camp like a deadly spiritual contagion, robbing the host of their trust in God and His presence among them. The peril which confronts them is the infection of "an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." This is serious, severe language indicating that salvation itself is at stake in this matter. That indication of severity is consistent with*



the episodes from Israel's past which had been used as examples in the preceding paragraph. These people remain believers at the moment, but find themselves in a situation which could very well result in a total loss of faith. The New English Bible's translation of the phrase captures the dire urgency of the circumstance - *"the wicked, faithless heart of a deserter."* The term **"heart"** indicates *"the center and source of the whole inner life with its thinking, feeling, and willing."* (Ellingsworth, p. 221) The nature of the absence of faith to which the phrase refers is suggested by the parallels which have been drawn between the Israelites at Meribah and Kadesh and the current situation of these Hebrew Christians. Like Israel of old. These Christians find themselves on the verge of the Promised Land. The Messiah has come. The plan of salvation has been accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The temptation which faces these people is to reject the truth that God is present among them in the person of Jesus, and relapse back into the familiar patterns of the past.

*"The writer does not compare Christian existence to a long period of wandering in the desert, but to the situation of a people whose pilgrimage was almost over, and who were on the verge of attaining what God had promised. The eschatological conviction of the writer is that Christians stand in a comparable situation with respect to entrance into God's rest. The basis of the comparison between Israel at Kadesh and the Christian community addressed is the unresolved tension of standing before the promise of God in a moment conditioned by trials and peril...The fundamental failure of the desert generation was their refusal to believe that God was actually present among them, directing them through His word. Refusing to acknowledge His presence and voice, they forfeited the possibility of entrance into God's rest. In calling*



*"Israel In The Presence Of The Living God At Mount Sinai"*



*attention to their fate, the writer warns the community not to lose faith in the presence of God with them that is celebrated whenever the Word of God is read or the Gospel tradition is proclaimed.” (Lane, I, p. 90)*

The ultimate peril here is that those who are infected by ***“an evil unbelieving heart”*** will ***“fall away from the living God.”*** The Greek word used in this ominous phrase is *“apostenai”* from which the English word *“apostasy”* is derived. This is the strongest term in Scripture for one who leaves the faith. It denotes deliberate, defiant, decisive rejection. *“It is the refusal to believe in God. It leads inevitably to a turning away from God in a deliberate act of rejection.”* (Lane, I, p. 86) The title ***“the living God”*** is the characteristic Old Testament designation of the true God in contrast to the false idols of the heathen. These gods and goddesses were not real. They had no life because they were nothing more than figments of human imagination.



***“David Slaying Goliath”***

***“For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire as we have, and has still lived? Go near and hear all that the Lord our God will say, and speak to us all that the Lord our God will speak to you and we will hear it and do it.”*** (Deuteronomy 5:26-27)

***“And Joshua said, ‘Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you, and He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing before you into the Jordan.’”*** (Joshua 3:10-11)

***“And David said to the men who stood next to him, ‘What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach for Israel. For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God...Your servant has struck down both lions and bears and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them for he has defied the***

*armies of the living God.” (1 Samuel 17:26,36)*

*“How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs, yes, faiths, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God...O Lord God of Host, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Behold our shield, O God! Look on the face of Your anointed.” (Psalm 84:1-2; 8-9)*



*“Early Christian Congregation Worshiping In The Catacombs”*

*“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’..... - The method which the Epistle proposes to avoid the wretched fate of apostasy is the mutual admonition and exhortation of the brethren. This is a concern which the entire community of believers must be aware of and deal with together as brothers and sisters in Christ who are bound together by the Lord in their care and concern for one another. The corporate nature of the church as a family of faith interdependent upon and responsible to one another is clearly indicated in this phrase.*

*“Christians have a corporate as well as an individual responsibility. Personal concern that is merely introspective and introverted is both selfish and unhealthy. In practice as well as in theory the truth should not be overlooked that ‘we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.’ (Romans 12:5) Mutual concern and encouragement are of constant value in the church, not least in repelling the menace of false teaching; hence, the writer’s desire that his readers should ‘exhort one*

***another***, not just occasionally, or in one particular situation, but every day...exhortation and moral encouragement are not a function reserved to the leaders of the church, but a duty of each Christian.” (Hughes, p. 147)

The phrase **“every day, as long as it is called ‘today’”** refers back to the beginning of the quotation from the Psalm which had begun with the word **“Today.”** **“Today”** was the moment of temptation for Israel in the wilderness. It was also the time when the psalmist was inspired to write the warning of Psalm 95. And as the Hebrews of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. are confronted with the same temptation to doubt the faithfulness of God, fail to trust His Word, and fall away from the faith it is that same **“Today”** once again. The repetition of the word binds all the situations together.

*“The urgency for encouragement and reproof is that the community of faith experiences an unresolved tension between peril and promise. The danger of deception by sin and apostasy persists so long as the moment of demand and opportunity which is called ‘today’ is valid. The initial word in the quotation from Psalm 95:7 - ‘Today’ - provided the writer with a catchword for bringing the Biblical statement before his hearers sharply. ‘Today’ is no longer the ‘today’ of the past, surveyed by the psalmist in his situation, but the ‘today’ of the present which continues to be conditioned by the voice of God that speaks day after day through the Scriptures and the Gospel tradition.”* (Lane, I, p. 87)

This usage of the word **“Today”** will continue on into Chapter 4.

The dire peril which the Hebrews now confront is restated in the same stern language of previous phrases - **“that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”** The devil is the Master of Deception. Everything he says or does is false and misleading.

*“Sin, nonetheless, is a constantly present reality which makes its inroads by way of deceitfulness. Personified here, sin first deceives and then hardens, leaving its victims in an irretrievably hopeless position. The background of this concept is undoubtedly the account of the Fall. Satan, with serpent-like guile, insinuates himself into the consciousness of the woman, whom he completely deceives,*



**“The Deception of Eve”**



and she, in turn, tempts the man to disobey the Word of God with the result that the blessing of Paradise is exchanged for a curse, and this, the original apostasy, produces a harvest of incalculable bitterness. 'It is rightly called the deceitfulness of sin,' Luther declares, 'because it deceives under the appearance of good.'” (Hughes, p. 148)



*“Water From The Rock At Meribah”*

*“For we have come to share in Christ, if, indeed, we hold...”* - That which unites the members of the congregation as one is that they *“have come to share in Christ.”* The all have in common the identity of sinners who have received forgiveness by grace through faith in Jesus. At the same time they all share in the daily struggle between their own sinful nature and the new men and women that they have become by grace through faith. Thus the conditional phrase is added - *“if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”* That which has been given can be cast aside if we allow the deception of sin to replace the truth of God, and if our own doubts and fears are permitted to replace our *“original confidence”* that God’s promises always hold true and that He will not abandon or forsake us. Again, the language suggests that the Hebrews remain in the faith. They have not yet fallen away but are being confronted by temptation to do so. The *“original confidence”* terminology of the Verse is borrowed from the world of

business. It refers to a firm guarantee which cannot be broken. *“The relationship between Christ and the community is conceived in the binding terms of a business partnership. The community can rely on the faithfulness of Christ, but they too must display good faith. They have been placed under obligation.”* (Lane, I, p. 87) They need not be concerned about Christ keeping His end of the deal, so to speak. That which Christ has promised is their participation in His eternal rest. Once more, the well chosen language of the writer, urging his readers to *“hold our original confidence firm to the end”* - serves to remind the Hebrews of just how high the stakes are in this matter.

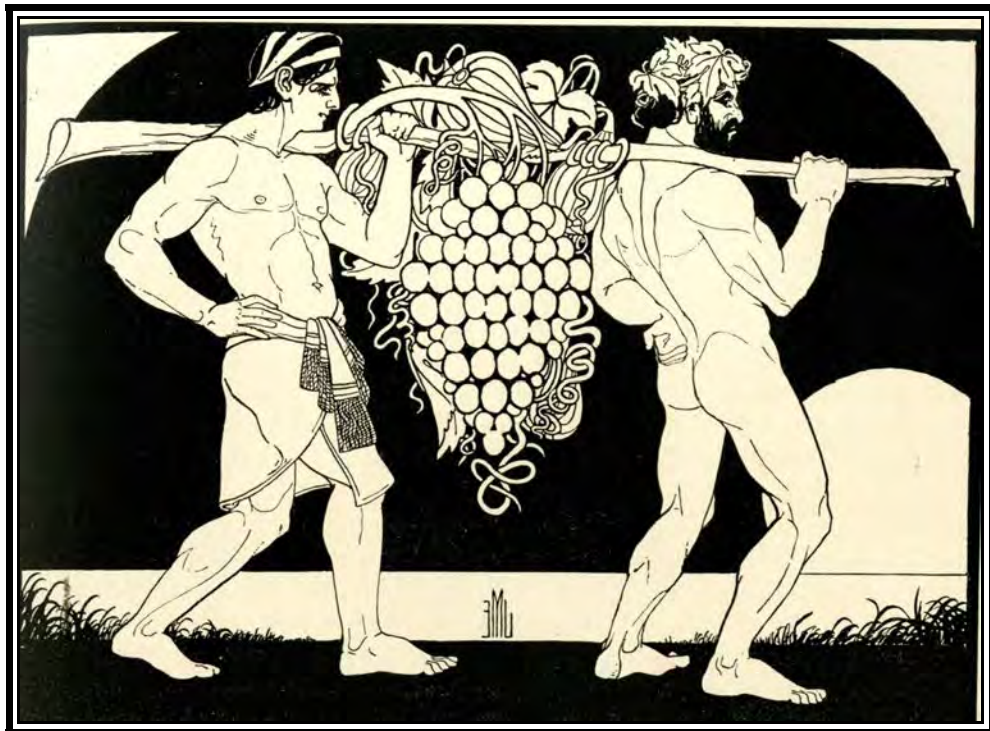
*“Thus as partners of Christ, persevering believers will enter with Him into the inheritance of rest. But this is no partnership of equals, for the benefits are all provided by Christ to be enjoyed by His faithful people! Believers are*

*‘participants’ or ‘sharers’ in Christ, just as they are ‘participants’ or ‘sharers’ in ‘the heavenly calling’ (3:1) and ‘the Holy Spirit’ (6:4). They participate in the Son who brings ‘the sons and daughters’ to glory, who acknowledges them as His ‘brothers and sisters’ and ‘children’ - even to the point of ‘partaking’ of their humanity through the incarnation. Continuing participation in Christ is dependant upon, and therefore motivation for, the perseverance enjoined by the contingent conditional clause...The hearers are to hold their initial steadfastness ‘firm’ because the saving revelation of God upon which it is based is utterly ‘firm’. ” (Cockerill, p. 188,189)*

***“As it is said, ‘Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts in rebellion.’” -***

The theme from Psalm 95 is restated to hammer home the point. The situation which confronts the Hebrews now is every bit as serious as that which confronted the Israelites then. They all forfeited their rest. The same could very well happen now. The precise parallel is restated with uncomfortable accuracy.

***“For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?” -*** A series of rhetorical questions serve to make the writer’s point. These were people who could and should have known better. Their rebellion was an act of deliberate defiance against a God who had blessed them in an unprecedented way beyond anything which they could ever have imagined. They had seen the power of God over and over again: the power that had sent plagues upon Egypt until the mightiest nation on the face of the earth was humbled and broken; the power which set them free after four centuries of



***“The Return Of The Spires” - Lillien***



*“The World’s Scornful Rejection of the Cross”*

wretched bondage in the clay pits of Egypt; the power which had parted the Red Sea and then engulfed and drowned chariots and the horsemen of Pharaoh; the power that provided manna, quail and water in the desolation of the desert. The list could go on indefinitely. They had seen the faithful love of God who had chosen them as His own; who had forgiven them despite their constant unfaithfulness and ingratitude. This was the God who had spoken to them at Sinai through Moses His chosen prophet; the God who had entered into covenant with them and promised them a land flowing with milk and honey as their own. They had heard and seen for forty years but still they would not hear or heed. The self-destructive idiocy of their behavior boggles the imagination. And yet, the point is - you Hebrews to whom I am writing this letter are no different than they were. You are every bit as self-destructive and as foolish as the Israelites of old. The promised Messiah has come, and you know it. Through the Word of the Gospel you have heard everything that God did through His Son - the story of His life, death, and resurrection for you and for your salvation. The grim words which describe their should toll in the ears with the solemn finality of a funeral bell - ***“Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient. So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”*** The fatal problem was precisely the same then and now - sinful human unbelief.

*“The point is that this generation which had firsthand experience of the goodness of God in bringing them from slavery to freedom, comprised the very last group of persons one would have expected to rebel against their Savior*



*God. Still more unthinkable is the prospect of hardhearted rebellion by Christians against the Lord who at the price of His own lifeblood has ransomed them from the dark power of Satan and led them into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Yet this was precisely the danger threatening the community to whom the letter was addressed.” (Hughes, p. 154)*



*“The Temptation Of Jesus In The Wilderness”*

## ***Hebrews Chapter 4***

***(1) Therefore, while the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. (2) For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened. (3) For we who have believed enter the rest, as He has said; ‘As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,’ although His words were finished from the foundation of the world. (5) For He has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.’ And again in this passage He said, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ (6) Since, therefore, it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, (7) again He appointed a certain day, ‘Today’ saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, ‘Today, if you hear My voice, do not harden your hearts.’ (8) For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. (9) So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, (10) for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from His. (11) Let us, therefore, strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall from the same sort of***

*disobedience. (12) For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (13) And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account. (14) Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (15) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (16) Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*



*“The Seven Days Of Creation” - Burne-Jones*

## **Chapter 4:1-5**

*(1) Therefore, while the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should have seemed to have failed to reach it. (2) For the good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. (3) For we who have believed enter the rest, as He said, “As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. (4) For He has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.” (5) And again in this passage He said, “They shall not enter My rest.”*

*“Therefore, while the promise of entering His rest still stands....* - The author now proceeds to specifically apply the tragedy of their forefathers in forfeiting their entry into God’s **“rest”** in the Promised Land to the Hebrew Christians who are the recipients of his epistle. The same terminology used in the preceding chapter will be repeated to connect his present admonition and encouragement to the historical circumstances of Israel in the time of Moses and Joshua, now long in the past. The core concept here advocated is that the



**“rest”** of the Promised Land only prefigured the perfect **“rest”** of eternal life with God in heaven. Christ has opened the doorway to that complete rest fulfilling all of the Old Testament prototypes from Israel’s past history. Christians, like ancient Israel on the verge of the Promised Land, still have access to the perfect rest if they will avoid the fatal mistakes of their forefathers, who failed to trust in God and disobeyed His Word. The linking word which connects the two segments of the discourse is **“Therefore”** at the beginning of Verse 1. It indicates that what follows are the appropriate conclusions to be drawn and application to be made from that which has gone before.

*“In the passage which this verse introduces, our author’s purpose is to apply (‘therefore’) to his readers still more insistently the solemn lesson which the history of their forefathers in the wilderness teaches, and in doing so, he makes it plain that the scope of the promise of entering into God’s rest extends far beyond the historical event of the entry of the Israelites into Canaan under Joshua’s leadership. The possession of the land of Canaan was indeed a fulfillment of the promise, but only in a proximate, this-worldly, sense. The perspective of faith discerns its ultimate fulfillment in the entry into a heavenly country (11:16) and a heavenly Jerusalem (12:22), in an eternal consummation effected by the redemptive mediation of the incarnate Son. And this perspective is integral to our epistle.” (Hughes, p. 155)*

This perception of the covenant history of the Children of Israel as precursors which were to be fulfilled in the messianic ministry of Jesus and His accomplishment of salvation for Israel and for humanity is, in fact, the central idea of the letter to the Hebrews. God’s covenant with Israel was never an end in itself, designed to accomplish salvation for a



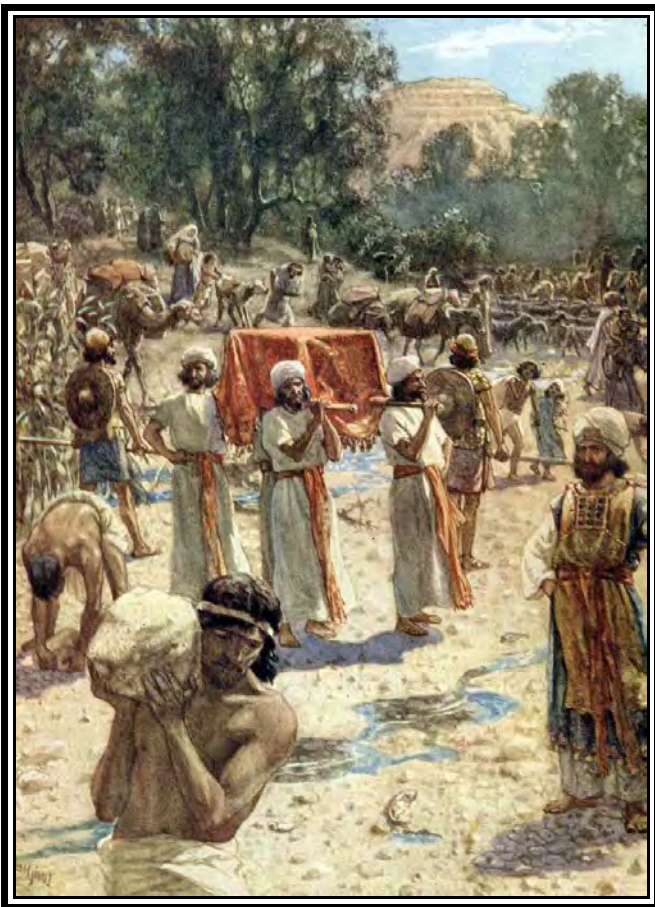
***“Israel Crossing The Jordan To Enter The Promised Land”**  
James Tissot*



spiritual elite whom God had chosen to save out of the mass of humanity because of their inherent spiritual superiority. Instead, God's covenant with Israel had always been, one component in His plan for the salvation of mankind by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The failure to recognize that reality was the basic cause of Israel's rejection of Christ as the promised Messiah and Judaism's continued rejection of Christ as the Savior of the world to this day. Sadly, this same fatal error is perpetuated by the flawed eschatology of much of contemporary Protestant Christendom which contends that God's promises of national glory to the Jews remain unfulfilled.

***"While the promise of rest still stands"*** - redirects the attention of the readers from the historical events of Israel's past to their own present situation. They, like Israel of old, stand on the verge of the rest of God. In their situation that rest is not the Promised Land of Canaan but the perfect rest in Christ which Canaan prefigured. Accordingly, their situation is identical to that of their forefathers in that, at this moment, their opportunity to become recipients of the rest of God is still available. However, that parallel also means that they could very well repeat the mistake of their forefathers and deny themselves entry into the rest of God because of unbelief and disobedience. The words of the text convey a definite sense of urgency. Both the opportunity and the peril are very real and must be recognized

before it is too late. The proper attitude in response to this urgent situation is ***"let us fear."*** ***"Fear"*** in this instance is the reverent awe of the believer before the holy/righteous God. This fear is the realistic recognition of categorical difference between the Creator and the creature. Such fear makes it impossible for the believer to disregard or disobey God's Word simply because it is the Word of God. When God makes a promise, that promise will always - without exception - be fulfilled. When God issues a warning, that warning will also - without exception - be fulfilled. That ***"fear of the Lord"*** is, as it has always been, the beginning of all true wisdom. (Proverbs 9:10) Israel doubted God's ability to fulfill His promise and give them the land of the Canaanites. Israel disregarded the inevitable punishment of God, and an entire generation died because of it. The same promise and the same judgement now confront the Hebrew Christians:



***"Israel Crossing the Jordan to Enter the Promised Land"***



*“Joshua Directing The Ark Across The Jordan” by Benjamin West*

*“Hence the admonition ‘Let us fear lest...’ for there is not attitude more dangerous for the church than that of unconcern and complacency. Paul’s warning written with reference to the same background of the judgements that overtook the uncaring Israelites in the wilderness, namely, ‘Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.’ (1 Cor. 10:12) is a warning of perennial force.” (Hughes, p. 156)*

Note, once again that the inspired author includes himself in his admonition to the congregation - **“let us fear”** - thus expressing his own vulnerability to the same temptation.

The verb that is used to describe the peril faced by those who do not fear God and trust His Word is **“to have failed to reach it.”** “The spatial concept in this verb is drawn from the original failure of the wilderness generation of the Children of Israel who were not allowed to enter into the Promised Land. They lost the promised rest in the Land of Canaan, and died in the wilderness rather than cross the Jordan with their descendants because of their unbelief and disobedience.

**“For the good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them...”** - In both instances those who have been given the opportunity to enter the Lord’s rest have been fully informed of the blessing which God has graciously set before them. For the Israelites of old that was the conquest of the land of Canaan and the possession of a safe and secure homeland for the first time in this history after 400 years of horrible bondage.



In the case of the Hebrew Christians that **“good news”** is the Gospel of Salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus and the promise of everlasting life with Him in the eternal promised land of heaven. Neither the message, nor the recipients’ understanding of that message is the problem in either case. God’s command and promise are unmistakably clear sin both instances. For the Israelites the faithful messenger was the prophet Moses who convey the Word of God exactly as he had received it upon Mount Sinai. For the Hebrew Christians the Messenger was the Son of God Himself, the incarnate Christ who came down to this earth to do whatever needed to be done through His perfect life, innocent death, and triumphant resurrection. The Gospel was then dispersed through the apostles whom Jesus had personally designated to be His messengers. The message in both instance was the same. It was and is the Gospel of Christ. Only the time perspective was different.

*“There is a real equivalence between the promise in the Old Testament and the Evangel of the New Testament, for their essential content is the same; the former looks ahead to fulfillment in Christ, the latter proclaims the accomplishment in Christ of what had been promised.” (Hughes, p. 156)*

***“But the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened.”*** - The cause of Israel’s failure was not the message but the absence

of faith on the great majority of those who heard the message. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, pleaded with the people to trust in the Lord and heed His Word:



***“The Prophet Moses”***

***“And Joshua , the son of Nun, and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel; ‘The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, He will bring us into this land, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord and do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them’ Then all the congregation said to stone them with stone. But the glory of the Lord appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the people of Israel.”*** (Numbers





*“Joshua And Caleb Plead With Israel To Trust the Lord” - Lanfranco*

14:6-10) But that wise counsel was spurned and only the interjection of the Shekinah saved the two bold witnesses from being stoned to death by the mob of panicked Israelites. Neither the message nor the messengers are the problem here. The problem is the response on the part of Israel - ***“The message which they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened.”*** The absence of faith on the part of the multitude is placed in stark contrast with the faith of Joshua and Caleb. They had seen the same evidence. They had seen all the same things which the other ten spies had seen. The abundance of the land was viewed as the wondrous fulfillment of God’s promises to them and to their forefathers. The formidability of the inhabitants of the land was recognized as an opportunity to glorify and honor God by conquering foes which by any human judgement were far superior to them. All of their confidence was based not upon the military prowess of Israel but upon their faith that God would give them the victory - ***“Do not fear the people of the land for they are bread to us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them!”*** The colorful phrase ***“They are bread to us”*** might be translated into the contemporary English idiom - ***“We will chew them up and spit them out!”*** Isn’t it remarkable how faith transforms one’s assessment of a situation! The other ten had all the same information. They had seen all the same things. But their reaction was not confident eagerness to get the job done but desperate fear. They would not trust God or believe His Word. Faith is the difference between life and death; the difference between



***“The Dispute Among The Spies”  
18<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving - Hoet***

entering into God’s promised rest or being sent back into the wilderness to die.

*“The past generation received the promise in vain because they refused to believe the word they heard. They did not share the faith of Joshua and Caleb who listened to the promise of God and regarded it as certain...The generation in the desert did not trust the unproved word they had heard and so were disqualified from enjoying what had been promised...Hearing a message of good news does not guarantee that what has been promise will be received. Only faith, as confident expectation for the future, can secure the promised reality.” (Lane, I, p. 98)*

The writer’s point to the recipients of this epistle is that if they allow themselves to fall into the same trap of unbelief they would be even more culpable than their forefathers. They have no excuse whatsoever. They have witnessed the fulfillment of all God’s promises in Christ. The stern words of Jesus Himself come to mind: ***“He who rejects Me and does***

***not receive My sayings has a judge, the Word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.”*** (John 12:48)

***“For we who have believed have entered that rest, as He has said, ‘As I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’” - “We who have believed”*** are Christians who have come to faith in Christ as their Savior, the promised Messiah. They are ***“the Israel of God”*** which has always been defined by faith rather than ethnic descent:

***“Be it far from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything not uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule; peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:16)***

Their faith is the emphasis here in contrast to the unbelief of those who have been denied the rest of God. The writer seeks to encourage his readers with the assurance that their faith has set them apart from those who forfeited their entrance into the rest so that they may be

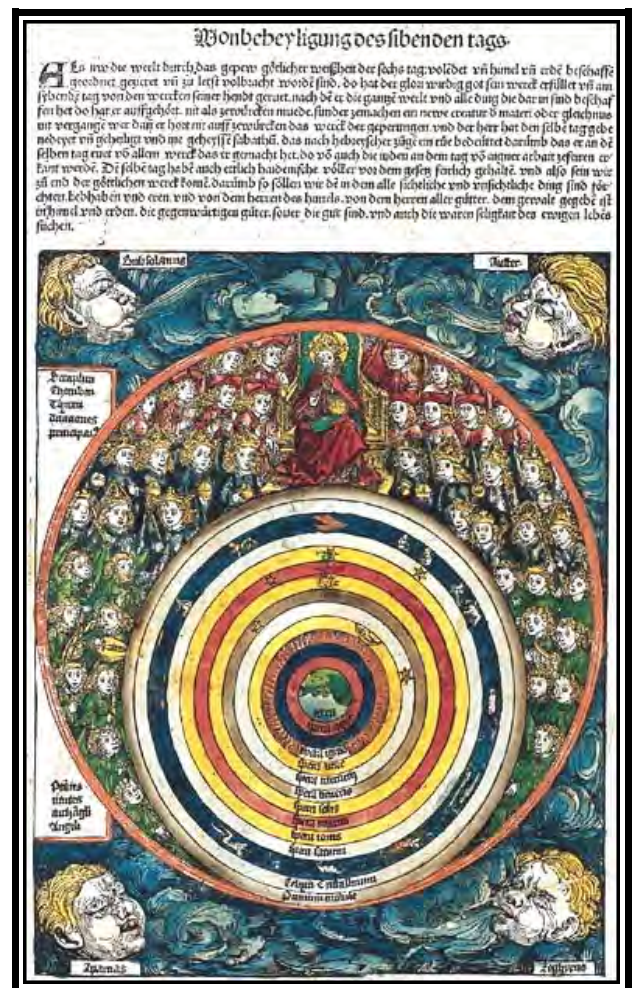


strengthened in their ongoing ability to resist the constant temptation to doubt and unbelief. Believers have already entered the rest of God by virtue of their faith relationship with Him and that rest will be consummated by their ultimate entrance into the eternal life of heaven. Thus, the **“rest”** of which is spoken here is the peace and security of the believer in Christ, whose sins have been forgiven, and who trusts in God’s promises of love, protection and guidance throughout this life which will, in turn be followed by eternal life with Christ in heaven. This is the sense in which St. Augustine used the term **“rest”** in his renown Confessions which open with the assertion of man’s inherent need for God:

*“Great art Thou, O Lord and greatly to be praised. Great is Thy power, and of Thy wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of Thy creation desires to praise Thee, man who bears about with him his mortality, the witness of his sin, even the witness that Thou ‘resisteth the proud’; yet man, this part of Thy creation desire to praise Thee. Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee, for Thou hast formed us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.”* (NPNF,I, I, p. 45)

***“As He has said, ‘As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter into My rest’ although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.”*** - The text returns to the Psalm 92 to reaffirm the reality of the **“rest”** in the words of God Himself even as He denies **“My rest”** to those who have refused to trust in Him and obey His Word at Kadesh in the wilderness. They could not have been denied the **“rest”** if it had actually been available to them at that time. The **“rest”** which the Israelites lost was the occupation of the Promised Land as a safe refuge from their enemies. The Promised Land was merely an incomplete foreshadowing of the eternal rest which God would perfect in Christ. God’s **“rest”** has been genuine and available for believers throughout time. That point is now made by a reference to the Genesis creation account.

***“For He has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way; ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.’ And again in this passage He said, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”*** - Genesis 2:2 is cited to demonstrate that



***“God Resting On the Seventh Day”  
Hartman Schedel - Nuremberg Chronicle”***





*“Mosaic Of The Report of Joshua And Caleb And The Attack Upon Them”*

God’s work of creation was complete when He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the epistle’s author concludes, God’s **“rest”** - which must have been created along with everything else within the six days of the creation week - was still available to those who chose to forfeit it by their unbelief in the day of Moses at Kadesh. He repeats his quotation of Psalm 95 to place that rebellion alongside the creation reference. The writer’s implication is that if the **“rest”** was still available then, in the days of Moses, thousands of years after creation, , the **“rest”** which had come into being in the beginning would remain available as long as creation endures. Accordingly it was there for his readers in the first century A.D. and would remain available to believers until the end of creation when Christ returns on the Last Day. The point of all this was to assure Christians that they, by faith could enter God’s **“rest”** today.

### ***Chapter 4:6-10***

***Since, therefore, it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again, He appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, ‘Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest, has also rested from his works as God did***



*from His.*

***“Since, therefore, it remains for some to enter it...”*** - The argument is summarized in Verse 6, assuring Christians that they also have the opportunity to enter into God’s rest by faith even though the Israelites forfeited their right to enter it because of unbelief long ago. Just as God Himself rested on the seventh day of creation, so also He has graciously provided rest for His faithful people. It should be noted that God’s rest on the seventh day does not indicate that He was worn out or weary from the work which He had performed in creation. Rather, it suggests that the purpose of creation was to fashion a resting place where He would dwell among His people, enabling them to live in perfect fulfillment, peace, and security. This insight makes the discussion of the divine ***“rest”*** here in Hebrew a great deal clearer and more profound.

*“The repeated comment that God rested does not imply that He was weary from labor. The effortless ease with which everything was done in Chapter 1 suggests otherwise. Rather, the motif of God’s resting hints at the purpose of creation. As reflected in various ancient Near Eastern accounts, divine rest is associated with temple building. God’s purpose for the earth is that it should become His chosen dwelling place; it is not simply made to house His creatures. God’s activities on the seventh day (He ‘finished’ ‘rested’ ‘blessed’ ;made it holy’) all fit this delightful pattern. The concept of the earth as a*



***“The Seventh Day of Creation” - Carolsfeld***

*divine sanctuary is developed further in 2:4-25, runs through the whole Bible, coming to a climax in the future reality that the apostle John sees in his vision of 'a new heaven and a new earth' in Revelation 21:1-22:5." (ESV, p. 52)*

The point of this segment of Hebrews is simply that the prominence of the concept of rest from the creation texts, to the exclusion of the unbelieving Israelites, to the admonition of Psalm 95 from King David, indicates a permanent reality which culminated in Christ and is now available to Christians, during the final era of human history in a uniquely urgent sense. The completion of Christ's life, death, and resurrection have inaugurated the End Times and the perfect rest which was God's intent from the beginning is now closer than it has ever been before.

***"Again He appoints a certain day, saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted; 'Today, if you hear My voice, do not harden your hearts.'"*** - The writer again emphasizes the use of the word ***"Today"*** in Psalm 95:7 to stress the constant urgency of the opportunity to enter into the rest of God. The same point had been made in Chapter 3:12-15. The fact that David could speak of ***"Today"*** in the Psalm, so many centuries after the entry of Israel into the Promised Land demonstrates that Israel's occupation of the land was only a preliminary example of the ***"rest"*** which God graciously makes available to all of His people in every generation by grace through faith. Thus, that same opportunity remains open to the Hebrew Christians whom the apostle addresses ***"today"***. St. Paul had expressed the same concept to the Corinthians, quoting from the ancient warning of the Prophet Isaiah to a complacent Israel on the eve of its judgement (Isaiah 49:8) -

***"Working together with him then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation."*** (2 Corinthians 6:1-2)

Of course this also means that contemporary Christians are confronted by the same deadly temptation to ***"harden your hearts"*** by refusing to hear and heed the invitation of God into His perfect ***"rest"*** - eternal life with Him in heaven thru Christ.



***"Icon Of Joshua"***



***“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.”*** The repetition of the warning in David’s psalm conclusively demonstrates that the occupation of the land in the days of Joshua was not the ultimate fulfillment of the God’s promise of rest for His people.

***“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever enters God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from His.” -***

The inescapable conclusion to be drawn from the texts cited in Genesis, Numbers, and Psalms is that the ***“rest”*** which God had created for His people in the beginning is still available for the people of God today and will be culminated at the end of time. The rest is identified here as ***“a Sabbath rest”*** to connect the concept more clearly with the rest of God on the first Sabbath, the seventh day of creation. The ***“works”*** from which believers will rest are the temptations and struggles of life in this sinful world, the daily battle between my old sinful nature and the new man that I have become by grace through faith. All these things will be no more in the perfection of heaven where we will all have been restored to the righteousness and innocence in which mankind was created in the beginning to enable him to live forever in the wondrous presence of God.



***Joshua Commanding The Host Of Israel***

## ***Chapter 4: 11-13***

***Let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.***

***“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest...”*** - Having begun the Chapter with the stern admonition to ***“let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it,”*** the author now issues the positive encouragement to ***“Let us therefore strive to enter the rest.”*** The intervening verses 2-10 had described the wonder of the Sabbath celebration which God had prepared and provided, based upon the model of His own seventh day rest from the work of creation. The ***“therefore”*** of Verse 11 links this admonition to the description and the miracle of that which God has prepared for His faithful people. The quality of the goal is more than adequate as motive for the striving which is here encouraged.

*“Since this rest is God’s own ultimate rest, the goal of creation, and the intended destiny of God’s people, they must pursue it with a new diligence. The pastor would awake them from the lethargy implied by the ‘drifting’ and ‘neglect’ against which he had warned them in 2:1-4, lest they too fall into apostasy. He would replace slothfulness with zealous pursuit of entrance into God’s rest through a life of faithful obedience. He has focused the readers’ vision on the magnitude of the goal and the dire consequences of its loss.”* (Cockerill, p. 212)

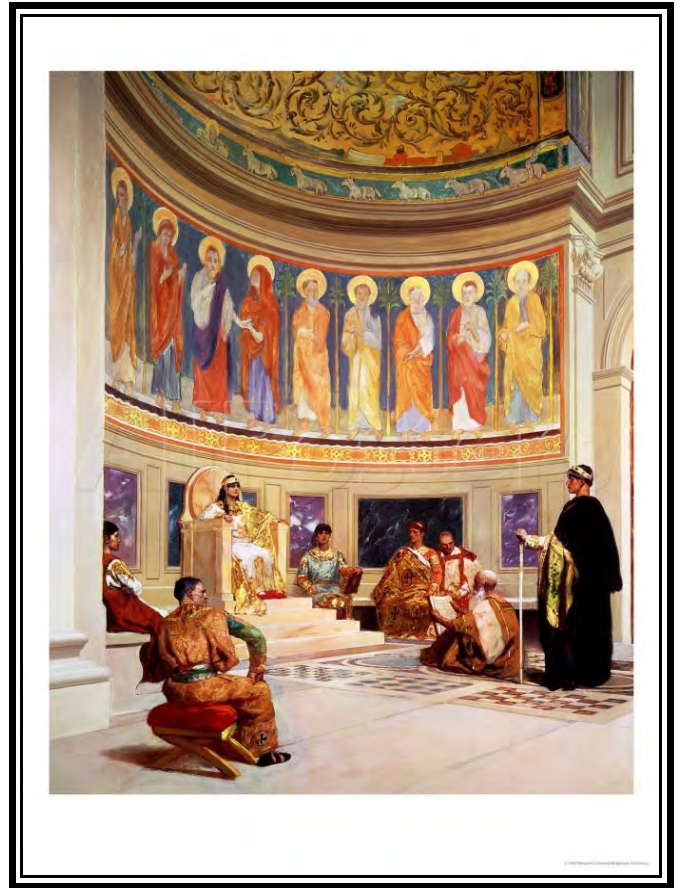
The ominous nature of the peril which is posed by sinful inaction and disobedience is indicated by the use of the verb **“fall”** in his description of the potential consequence - **“so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”** The word recalls the earlier references to apostasy, a deliberate abandoning of the faith altogether and the consequent loss of salvation. In the Greek text the linking language **“same sort of disobedience”** is placed in a prominent position at the beginning of the phrase to emphasize the connection between the current peril and that which brought about God’s judgement upon the unfaithful Israelites in the wilderness.

**“For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...”** - Let no man conclude that he may trifle with God for **“the Word of God”** is a fearsome weapon from which nothing can be concealed or hidden. Saint John Chrysostom, the **“Golden Mouth”** orator of the early church offers this magnificent description of the significance of this metaphor for the Word of God:

*“Do not then, when hearing the Word, think of it lightly. For it is sharper, he says, than any sword. Observe God’s condescension, and consider then why the prophets also needed to speak of saber and bow and sword. ‘If a person does not repent,’ it is said, ‘God will whet His sword; He has bent and strung His bow.’ For if even now, and after so long a time, and after being perfected, He cannot smite down by the Name of the Word alone, but needs these expressions in order to show the superiority arising from the comparison of the gospel with the law, much more was this true of old...He judges the inner heart, for there He passes through, both punishing and searching out. ‘And why do I speak of men,’ He says, for even if you speak of angels, of archangels, of the cherubim, of the seraphim, even of any creature whatsoever, all things are laid open to God’s eye. All things are clear and manifest. There is nothing able to escape it. ‘All are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.’ But what is meant by ‘open’? The metaphor comes from the skins that are drawn off from the prey...When one has killed them and drawn aside the skin from the flesh, he lays open all the inward parts and makes them manifest to our eyes, so also do all things lie open before God. And observe, I ask you, how he constantly needs bodily images, which arise*

*from the weakness of the hearers. For that they were weak He made plain when He said that they were 'dull' and had need of 'milk not solid food.'*  
(Ancient Christian Commentary, Volume X, p. 22)

The urgency of seeking to enter God's rest by humble submission to His divine will and word is signaled by the conjunction ***"For"*** which begins Verse 12. Disobedience is pointless and self-destructive for nothing can escape God's notice and every indulgence in self-will and disobedience of His Word will be completely uncovered and justly punished. This sweeping assertion of the power and potential of the written Word of is completely consistent with the repeated citations of the Scriptures to illustrate and validate the author's argument up to this point. Documents written centuries earlier, by God's prophets, and documents being written at this moment in history by Christ's apostles remain completely relevant and authoritative in a manner which would have been inconceivable for anything that had merely been composed by men. This Word of the prophets and apostles can never be



reduced to the status of a dead letter because each and every word of the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Ghost and are therefore dynamically alive with His power and permanently pertinent in every time and place. God's Word can accomplish that which would otherwise have been impossible. The divisions and discernments cited to illustrate the capability of the ***"two-edged sword"*** of ***"the Word of God"*** - ***"the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart"*** can only be accomplished by the supernatural power of God. Otherwise they would always remain indivisible and utterly hidden from discernment. Therefore this divine Word is ***"living and powerful"*** like the God from whom it originated.

***"And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom they must give an account."*** - God is the Creator, the ultimate Source of all that is. His absolute authority over the entire creation is the unavoidable consequence of that fact. The use of creation language here - ***"no creature"*** - is no coincidence. It is designed to humble the audience to whom the epistle is addressed, fill them with an overpowering sense of awe, and remind them both the unshakable solidarity of His promises (Gospel) to strengthen the faith of the doubters and the inescapable judgement which must



inevitably fall upon those who defy and disobey His Word (Law) to warn the disobedient. As the Creator, the Lord God will also be the ultimate Judge of humanity - ***“to the eyes of Him to whom we must give and account.”*** In this context further doubt can only be seen as utter foolishness and further defiance fatal folly.

*“Clearly, as God is by His Word the creator and sustainer of the whole order of creation, all, that is, all things which includes all men, are open and laid bare to Him. There is not and cannot be any part of reality which is unknown or incomprehensible to Him, who is the source of all being and the font of all knowledge. Every creaturely covering and pretext is stripped away. There is no recess, no dark depth, that is not wide open before Him.”* (Hughes, p. 167)



*Contemporary Icon of Christ Our Great High Priest Assisted At The Altar by Saint George The Martyr And Saint John The Apostle*

## **Chapter 4:14-16**

***“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”***

***“Since then we have a great high priest...”*** - Having used the history and fate of unfaithful

Israel to illustrate the accountability to which God's people must be held and the concomitant importance of faithful obedience to God's Word, the theme of the discourse now shifts to the second major concept of the epistle - the presentation of Jesus the Messiah as the fulfillment and the perfection of the office of High Priest which God had established as the core component of the rituals and sacrifice of the Tabernacle and the Temple throughout the Old Testament covenant. The significant advantage which Christians now enjoy over the saints of the former covenant rests in the fact that they are represented before God by a perfect High Priest who is both one of us, a human being, and the sinless Son of God Himself. This reality becomes an all important resource in the struggle of God's people to remain faithful to His Word.

*“As their High Priest, the Son is both the fulfillment of God's previous revelation and the God provided way for His people to avoid the fate of the disobedient. Thus, in Hebrews 4:14-10:18 the pastor describes the Son as the all sufficient High Priest, and the fully adequate resource for perseverance in faithful obedience. Those who take advantage of God's marvelous provision not only avoid the fate of the faithless but they join the grand company of the faithful whose story is told in 10:19-12:29, and who are destined to receive an ‘unshakeable kingdom’ (12:28).” (Cockerill, p. 219)*

**“Since then we have”** is the phrase which signals the transition to the second portion of the epistle. It will recur in Hebrews 10:19 to indicate the transition from part 2 into part 3. Jesus is the **“great high priest”** for a number of previously stated reasons. The designation is deliberately redundant, designed to express the immeasurable superiority of Christ and the absolute sufficiency of that which He has done. Literally the title reads - *“the great great priest”*. Christ alone is worthy of this title because, as has been set forth in the preceding segment of the epistle - He is highly exalted; superior to Moses, Aaron and the



*Christ - Robed As Priest - Administering The Eucharist*



entire Levitical priesthood; and He is designated as the Son of God. The designation of ***“Jesus, the Son of God”*** appears to have been intended to emphasize both the divine and the human natures of Christ. The phrase ***“who has passed through the heavens”*** is an allusion to the triumphant ascension of Christ to the right hand of God in heaven, thereby indicating that everything which He had descended to earth to accomplish by means of His life, death, and resurrection had been perfectly achieved. He did not merely ascend but rather transcended all the limited of time and space to which He had subjected Himself. The ascension marked the end of Christ’s earthly sojourn and the beginning of the final era of human history, the interval between the first and second coming of Christ which Scripture identifies as the end times.

The admonition which concludes this introduction is based upon who Christ is and all that which He has accomplished - thus the introductory word ***“Since.”*** “Because of our great, great High Priest, and all that which He has graciously accomplished on our behalf it is realistic for the author to urge his readers to ***“let us hold fast to our confession.”*** What

Christ has done is only foundation upon which that which we are called to do can possibly be built. To ***“hold fast”*** denotes tenacious endurance in the doctrines of the Christian faith in word and deed, that is, not only an adherence to the true doctrine but a willingness to fearless profess that doctrine and live a life which reflects those convictions in every way.

***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize...”*** - The focus of the text shifts from the divine nature of our High Priest and His exaltation to the right hand of God in heaven to His human nature, the cumulative experience of His life on earth as a man, and the manner in which that experience uniquely enables Him to serve as the priestly Mediator between God and man since He alone is, in fact, both God and man. He has confronted all of the trials and temptations which every one of us must confront - ***“One who in every respect has been tempted as we are.”*** In that respect He is exactly like us. The crucial difference, however, is that despite subjecting Himself to all of those same trials and temptations He remains, nonetheless ***“without sin.”*** The Second Adam succeeded where the First Adam failed. He has successfully overcome



***“Get Thee Behind Me Satan”***



all of the wiles and trickery of the Adversary. The unusual double negative in this sentence ***“we do not have...who is unable”*** serves to place particular emphasis upon this critically important point. The verb ***“sympathize”*** is particularly emphatic in the Greek. This not merely a passive emotion.

*“This is a sympathy that leads to active assistance. It finds expression and is embodied in the grace of forgiveness and the victory over temptation that this High Priest ministers to those who come to God through Him. His sympathetic help empowers us in the midst of all those inherent human limitations to make us vulnerable to temptation.”* (Cockerill, p. 225)

Unlike the Aaronic high priests of the Old Covenant who could stand before God within the Holy of Holies only on rare occasion under meticulously defined circumstances - once a year on the Day of Atonement after having made blood offering for their own sins - this perfect High Priest is both God and Man. Those among the Hebrews who may have entertained doubts about Christ's capacity to empower His people in their human weakness and enable them to persevere and to overcome in the face of Satan's constant assaults can take comfort and hope from the fact that this great High Priest has personally accomplished the very thing which He has promised to do for them. His victory under those same assaults becomes the unshakable foundation for our confidence in His ability to enable us to ***“hold fast our confession”*** just as He did.



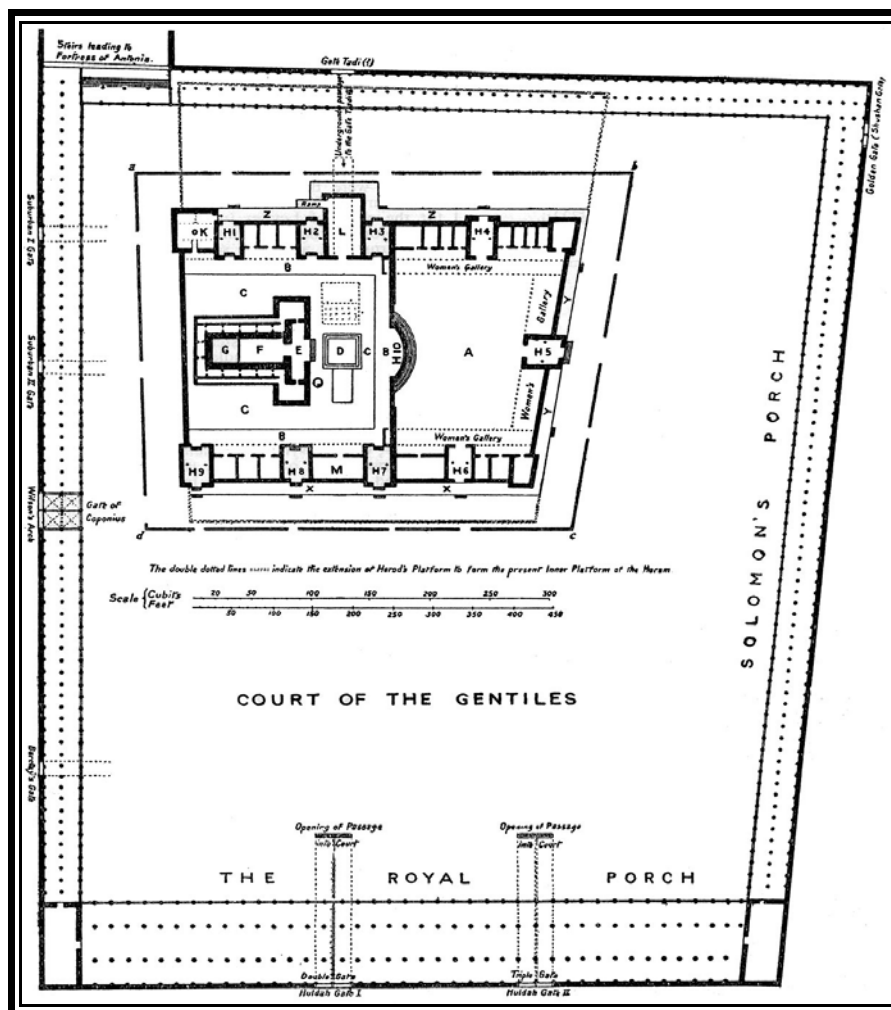
***“All This I Will Give You If You Will Bow Down And Worship Me!”***

*“The past temptations of Christ have abiding sympathetic results for us who are tempted...the point here is that Jesus likeness to us via the incarnation means that He was tempted in the same way that all humanity is tempted, but with this difference, He never sinned.”* (Allen, p. 304)

The combination of the similarity and the difference render Jesus uniquely qualified to stand before the holy God as His holy divine Son with a perfect understanding of the excruciating dilemma of mankind since He Himself is truly a man who has personally encountered and overcome the same temptation to sin with which men must contend everyday. He is substantively linked to both parties in this all important act of mediation.

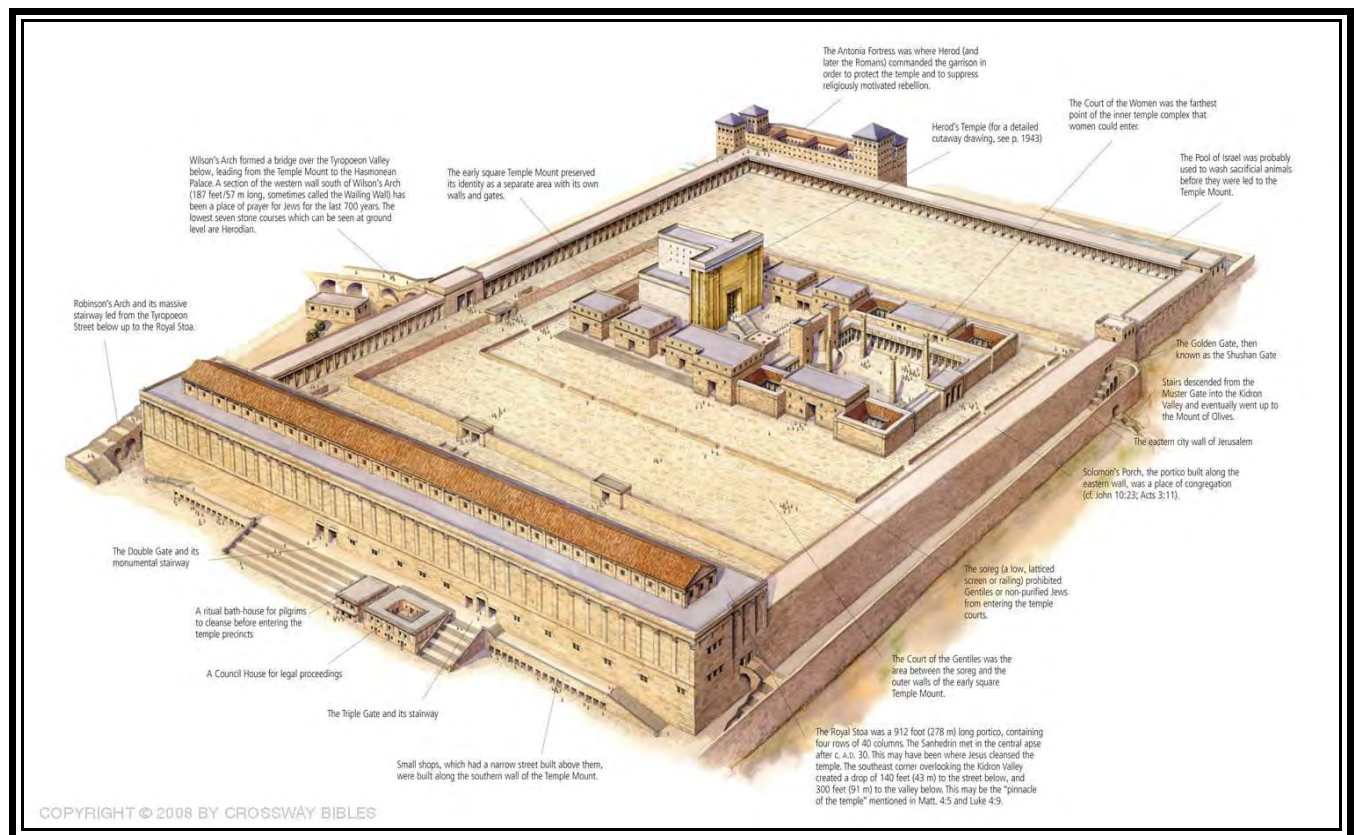
***“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy***

*and find grace to help in time of need.”* - Given the identity of the divine Mediator to whom we pray, the God/Man who has personally experienced all of the trials and temptations of the sinful world with which we must struggle every day, it is possible for us to *“with confidence draw near to the throne of grace”* so that Jesus may provide the assistance we need to overcome the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. The terminology here reflects the Temple of the Old Covenant in which the gracious presence of God was signified by the sacred Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies. The verb *“draw near”* is derived from the increasingly inclusive design of the Temple which began with a series of courtyards - first the huge Court of the Gentiles which was open to all; next the Court of Israel to which all Jews had access; next, the Court of the Men of Israel which was accessible to all Jewish men; followed by the Court of the Priests to which only Levites could enter; then the Worship Area itself with the Great Altar of Burnt Offerings and its attendant facilities and the front half of the Sanctuary, the Holy Place with its furnishings and altar for the daily rituals. The most sacred space within the Temple was the Holy of Holy behind the sacred curtain. Until the Babylonian destruction of the Temple the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the Holy of Holies. It was only entered on one day of year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and then only by the High Priest, once to sacrifice for his



*Diagram of Herod's Temple*





### ***The Courts of Herod's Temple In The 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D.***

own sins and once for the sins of the people. In this context the ***“draw near”*** language of would have been vividly effective to an audience of Hebrew Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. In the same way, ***“the Throne of Grace”*** would have resonated in terms of the most powerful sacred object of Old Testament Judaism, the Ark of the Covenant. Contrary to the popular misunderstand Holy Ark of the Old Covenant did not signify God Himself. Such a view would have been correctly perceived as blasphemous and perilously similar to the idol figures of paganism. The true God cannot be visually represented without denying His absolute transcendence. Rather, the Ark served as the Throne of God, the place where God had gracious condescended to indicate His dwelling in the midst of His people by means of the ***“Shekinah”*** pillar of cloud and fire which rested over the Ark within the Holy of Holies. This truth is repeated revealed in the Old Testament's designations for God. For our purpose, a few examples must suffice;

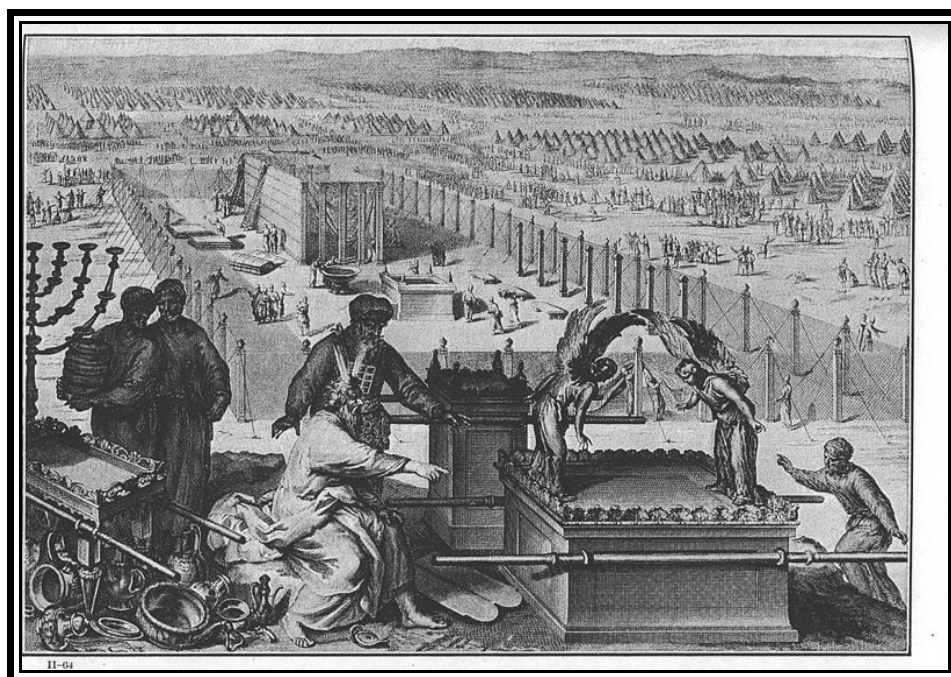
***“There I will meet with you, and from above the Mercy Seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the Ark of the Testimony, I will speak with you.”*** (Exodus 25:22) ***“And Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord. He heard the voice speaking to him from above the Mercy Seat that was on the Ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim, and it spoke to him.”*** (Numbers 7:89) ***“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.”*** (Psalm 80:1) ***“So the people sent from there to Shiloh, and brought forth the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim.”*** (1 the





*of furniture that God's audible voice was heard speaking to Moses the Lawgiver and to Aaron the High Priest (Leviticus 1:1). Every other article in the Tabernacle took a place of subordination in relation to the Ark of the Lord. If the Ark of God's Presence were to be removed from the Tabernacle all that would remain would be empty form. For without the Presence of the Lord as upon that Ark and Mercy Seat, all our ritual is meaningless and powerless. All Israel's worship was directed to JEHOVAH who dwelt upon that blood stained Mercy Seat. (Psalm 80:1) God begins with Himself, where He must begin. For He alone is God from everlasting to everlasting. This is a picture of the grace of God. God dwelling in eternity becomes flesh and 'tabernacles' among us (John 1:14). God begins first with His throne, the Ark of the Covenant, and proceeds in grace to man and the place of sacrifice, the Brazen Altar. This is the opposite of man's approach to God. Man must begin at the Brazen Altar and the experience of the Cross and the Blood before he can approach the Ark of His Glory. This, indeed, is a true picture of the grace of God. For unless God first comes out to man, man, approaching in the prescribed way through the Blood, was slain. Violation of God's order means death. The Ark and all it contains are representative of the holiness of God. The brazen altar is necessary because of man's sinfulness. But because of the provision of God in the brazen altar, there is a day when the High Priest can enter beyond the Veil to the very throne of God (Hebrews 9). (Conner, pp.19ff.)*

That which the Ark of the Covenant foretold has now been perfectly accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That conclusion is indicated in the opening phrase of Verse 16 - ***"Let us then..."***. The imperfect antetype of the sacrificial blood which



*The Construction of the Tabernacle and Its Furnishings*



*“Christ foreshadowed In the Mercy Seat of the Ark”*

had been sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat annually on *Yom Kippur* has been perfectly fulfilled in the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world upon the cross. The very significance of the sacred ark has been radically transformed:

*“Under the Old Covenant, none could ‘approach’ ‘God’s Throne’ - the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place, save the High Priest, save the High Priest, and he but one day in the year. This annual approach was with great fear because God’s Throne was the place of judgement against sin. Now, however, God’s people are urged to draw near to the true heavenly ‘throne’ of God, a throne of ‘grace’, a true ‘Mercy Seat,’ for those who approach God through Him, God is no less holy than He was in the Old Testament (cf. 4:12-13; 12:25-29); but Christ’s obedient sacrifice has taken away the sin of the faithful and ‘cleansed’ their ‘consciences from dead works’ (9:14) so that they can come into the presence of the Holy God. Thus, the ‘confidence’ (3:6; 10:19-23,25) with which God’s people approach is more than a feeling. Through the work of Christ, they have received authorization to enter God’s presence. As God’s people the recipients of Hebrews and we their heirs can be sure of God’s gracious acceptance.” (Cockerill, p. 228)*

The result of that which Christ our great High Priest has accomplished is that every believer **“may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need.”** Christ has opened the way to God which had been barred by the guilt of man’s sin. Perhaps the most theological significant event on Good Friday was the dramatic rending of the Temple Curtain at the moment of the Savior’s innocent death. The barrier of sin which had separated mankind from the righteous God, and the liturgical manifestation of that barrier in the massive curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies were torn apart by the Savior who removed man’s guilt.



## HEBREWS CHAPTER 5

*(1) For every high priest chosen among men is chosen to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. (2) He can deal gently with the ignorant and the wayward, sin he himself is beset with weakness. (3) Because of this, he is obligated to offer sacrifices for his own sin just as he does for those of the people. (4) And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. (5) So also Christ did not exalt Himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by Him who said to Him, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’ ; (6) as He also says in another place, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’ (7) In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. (8) Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. (9) And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, (10) being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. (11)\_About this we have much to say and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, (13) for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the Word of righteousness, since he is a child. (14) But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*



*“Abraham Receiving The Blessing Of Melchizekek High Priest And King of Salem” by Peter Paul Rubens*

## Chapter 5:1-3

*“For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this, he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins, just as he does for those of the people.”*

*“For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed...”* - The conjunction “for” links that which follows to the final paragraph of Chapter 4 (vss. 14-16) leading most commentators to conclude that the chapter division was misplaced and should have occurred three verses earlier. The preceding argument that the role of priestly mediator requires a substantive connection to humanity and a personal understanding of human weakness and susceptibility to temptation is the basis for that which will now follow with specific application to the identity of Jesus Christ the God/Man as the Great High Priest who alone is capable of perfecting and completing that which had been exemplified in the imperfect high priesthood of the heirs of Aaron. *“Every high priest”* without exception because of the nature of the high priestly office as the mediator on behalf of mankind - must be *“chosen from among men.”* The language of the opening phrase is deliberately comprehensive. It denotes an essential qualification of a true high priest. No exclusions or exemptions to this solidarity between the mediator and those for whom he mediates are conceivable. As Hebrews 2:17 had previously stated, Christ *“had to be made like His brothers in every way.”* Early Church father Theodoret of Cyr states the obvious:

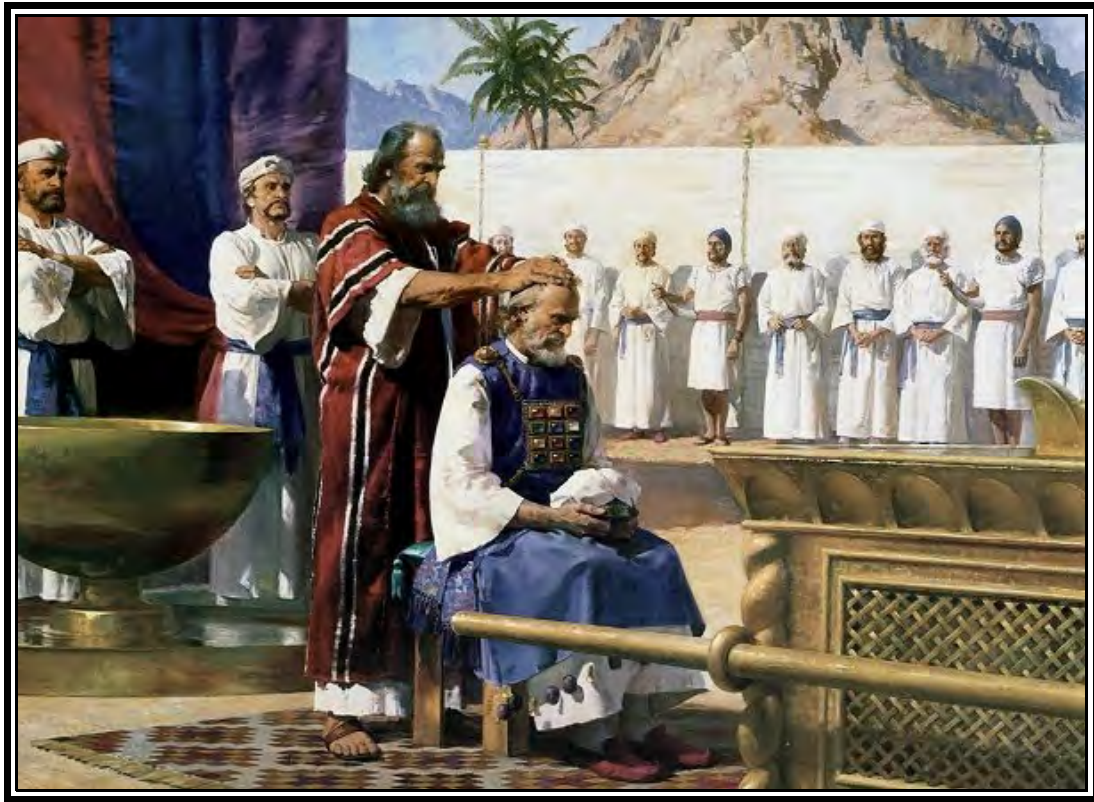


*“Aaron the High Priest” - William Etty*

*“Even under the Law it was not an angel that was appointed to act as priest for human beings, but a human being for human beings, with the same nature, affected by the same passions, understanding the weakness of nature, assigning pardon to the recalcitrant, offering a hand to sinners, treating what affects the neighbor as his own. This is the very reason that he is appointed to offer sacrifices not for the people alone but also for himself.”* (ACCOS, X, p. 70)

This solidarity authenticates and personalizes the intercession. Luther perceptively notes: *“It is not enough for a Christian to believe that Christ was instituted high priest to act on behalf of men, unless he also believes that he himself is one of those men for whom Christ was appointed high priest.”* The text further





*Moses Anointing Aaron As The First High Priest*

emphasizes that the high priest must be **“chosen.”** The verb is passive, indicating thereby that choice is not made by the priest himself but by another. The decision and the action are that of God alone. Thus, the choice of Aaron as the first high priest was not that of Moses, as might have been expected, but that of God Himself. It is significant to note that the author shows no interest in either the pagan priesthoods of the Gentiles or in denouncing the corruption and decadence of the office of High Priest under its current occupants in Jerusalem. His sole concern in this segment is to characterize the office as it was designed to be in the purpose of God and then to demonstrate how that ideal office has been perfectly accomplished and fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus.

The essence of the role of the priest in general, and that of the High Priest in particular was **“to act on behalf of men in relation to God.”** Unlike the office of the prophet, whose responsibility was to represent God to men, as he faithfully and forthrightly spoke the Word of God which had been revealed to him, the priest’s role moved in exactly the opposite direction. He represented man to God rather than God to man. This reality is the basis for the necessity of the intimate relationship between the High Priest and the people whom he represented. The emphatic focus on the humanity of Christ, the God/Man, evident throughout this entire portion of the letter (4:14-5:10), reflects both the nature of the Old Testament office and its ultimate fulfillment in Christ

*“The logical connection with what precedes, is that fellow humanity such as Christ took to Himself in the incarnation, involving fellow feeling with out*

*susceptibility to human weakness and temptation, is a necessary qualification for one who is to function as our high priest - though for the moment, our author is speaking more generally of the qualities and duties required of every high priest, as a pattern to which Christ must also conform. An essential characteristic of high priesthood is that the holder of this office is “**chosen from among men**”; only one who is himself man is fitted to serve, as the representative of his fellow men before God. No angel, for example, would be capable of assuming such an office. It is in particular as man, that a high priest is qualified, to “**act on behalf of man.**” (Hughes, p. 176)*

The Jews tended to stress the dignity and exalted position of the high priest. Hebrews moves in exactly the opposite direction to set the stage for the presentation of the incarnation and suffering of Jesus as the means by which our Savior accomplished His task as the perfect High Priest. The great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas took a similar approach stressing the servant role of the high priest in contrast to the widespread abuse of priestly power which was taking place throughout the church of his day:

*“Thomas Aquinas, fitting his remarks to the conditions of his day, comments that a high priest ‘is not appointed for the sake of glory, nor for the sake of amassing riches, nor for the sake of enriching his relatives’ and he adds that if anyone inquires as to how he is going to profit from his office, his attitude is not pastoral but mercenary.” (Hughes, p. 175)*

The means through which the high priest is to accomplish his task of representing the people before God is defined in the text as **“to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”** The terminology **“gifts and sacrifices”** reflects the Greek of the Septuagint and indicates a familiarity on the



***“The Scapegoat Driven Into The Wilderness On Yom Kippur”***



part of the author with the rituals and services of the Temple. With laser-like precision, the writer focuses upon the heart and core of the priestly office - dealing with the malignancy of sin and its fatal consequences.

*“Particularly important is the purpose of these gifts and sacrifices, our author states, ‘for sins.’ In saying this there is little doubt that he has particularly in mind all that was done by the high priest on the Day of Atonement, specifically related as it was to the expiation of the sins of all the people (Leviticus 16). The high priest was something more than a cultic or liturgical specialist. His office was concerned, above all, with the radical problem of human sinfulness, and the need of the people for reconciliation with God. This was the intent of all his sacerdotal actions, which reached their highest expression on that one day in the year when the sins of the people were confessed over the head of the scapegoat and the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat within the Holy of Holies for the purpose of making atonement **“because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel, and because of all their transgressions, all their sins.”** (Leviticus 16:16)*



***“The High Priest Before The Ark On The Day Of Atonement”***

***“He can deal gently with the ignorant and the wayward....”*** - The humanity of the high priest enables him to understand and sympathize with the shortcomings of his fellow human beings since he is subject to the same difficult circumstances. As a man the high priest can to deal with them in a manner which is both patient and loving. The Greek verb here translated ***“He can deal gently”*** indicates the happy medium between two extremes.

*“A priest would need to avoid personal feelings of impatience or disgust with the sinner while interceding with God on the sinner’s behalf. Since the high priest, as a man himself, could err in two extremes, irritation and indulgence, a balance between the law and love, between Stoic indifference and exasperated anger, is needed. The present tense of the verb signifies a timeless, eternal truth.”* (Allen, p. 316)

The sinners who are the subject of this phrase are characterized as ***“the ignorant and the wayward.”*** These are not the hardened defiant sinners of Chapter 4, who forfeited the ***“rest”*** of God because of their recalcitrant refusal to trust and obey the command of God. In this instance, the sin is one of weakness, committed because of a lack of knowledge -

***“the ignorant”*** - and those who have inadvertently wandered from the path of God’s will. The Torah spends considerable time emphasizing the difference between deliberate and unintentional sin. For example:

***“But if you sin unintentionally and do not observe all these commandments that the Lord has given to Moses, all the Lord has commanded you by Moses from the day that the Lord gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations, then if it was done unintentionally, without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer one bull from the herd for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma to the Lord, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the rule, and one male goat for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the people of Israel, and they shall be forgiven because it was a mistake.”***  
(Numbers 15:22-25)

The unintentional sin is still a sin and atonement must be made for it, but unlike deliberate, wilful sin, it does not reflect defiant disobedience of God and deliberate rejection of His will

and is therefore less serious in terms of the spiritual damage incurred by the sinner. The Hebrew idiom for intention deliberate sin is *“to sin with a high hand”* - the metaphor being that of a fist raised toward heaven in angry defiance. In such instances the punishment must be much more severe:

***“You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the people of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourns among them. But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or sojourner, reviles the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the Word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off, his iniquity shall be upon him.”***  
(Numbers 15:29-31)

The moderation and compassion of the ordinary high priest is the result of the fact that ***“he himself is beset with weakness.”*** The high priest must humbly recognize his own limitations in the face of snares and temptations of the Adversary. He must constantly be aware of how difficult - yes,



***“Aaron In The High Priestly Vestments***





***“Caiaphas The High Priest Rending His Robes At The Trial of Jesus”***

impossible - it is for men to consistently resist those temptations. This “*community of weakness*” (Hughes, p.177) explains both the imperfection of the priesthood of Israel and the identification of the high priest with the other sinners whom he has been called to serve.

***“Because of this, he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins, just as he does for those of the people.”*** - The double sacrifice of the Day of Atonement is cited as the prime demonstration of the sinfulness of all the ancient high priests. The annual repetition of this ritual served to constantly remind the high priest of his sin.

*“He asserts that the high priest’s oneness with other men and women in human weakness and need was kept alive by his continual obligation to make atonement offerings for himself as well as for others in Israel. This is a distinctive interpretation of the provisions governing the high priest in the OT. Although his life had to be as morally blameless as personal discipline could achieve, and the regulations governing his life were stricter than those affecting an ordinary priest (cf. Leviticus 21), he remained fallible, and provisions were made for an appropriate sacrifice in the event of his sin(Leviticus 4:3-12). On the Day of Atonement, he was required to make atonement for himself, for his immediate household, as well as for the congregation of Israel. In the time of the Second Temple, the high priest customarily uttered three prayers on the Day of Atonement as he laid his hands on the sacrificial bull and goat: 1. For his own sins and those of his household; 2. For his own sins, those of his household, and those of the Aaronic priests; and, 3. For the sins of the house of Israel.” (Lane, I, 117)*

The need for a perfect High Priest who would not yield to sin and thus could offer the

perfect, once for all, sacrifice which would never need to be repeated is the bottom line in the comparison which takes up a significant part of the Epistle. Later, in Hebrews 7, the contrast between the sinful high priests who succumb to the weakness and the perfect Messianic High Priest - who, although confronted with the same temptations did not yield to sin - is sharply drawn:

***“For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a High Priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, since He did this once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath which came later than the Law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.”*** (Hebrews 7:26-28)



***“Aaron - High Priest of Israel”***

Paul does not hesitate to apply the ***“weakness”*** which is addressed here in Hebrews to Christ Himself in His willingness to submit Himself to all of the temptations, sufferings and indignities which had to be endured in order to accomplish the plan of salvation.

***“Since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me, He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but in dealing with you we will live with Him by the power of God.”*** (2 Corinthians 13:3-4)

But while Christ shared fully in human nature, as the God/man He did not share in the human depravity which was the consequence of the original sin in the Garden. Nevertheless, as true man he submitted to and endured all of the painful circumstances and suffering which humanity must now endure including grim death itself.

***“That Christ did not share in our sinfulness does not in any way invalidate this fellow feeling for us and with us in our weakness. The common ground with us was that of His fellow humanity***



which was subject to temptation or testing. The difference between Him and us is that He unfailingly overcame temptation, whereas we have been overcome by temptation. For Him to have been our fellow in defeat would have been of no worth to us. The levitical high priests were sinners and were thus no less in need of atonement than the people on whose behalf they ministered. Hence the imperfection of that system with its constantly repeated sacrifices which could never take away sins and cleanse the conscience (Hebrews 10:1-11). What we, and they, needed was not a fellow loser, but a winner; not one who shares our defeat, but one who is able to lead us to victory; not a sinner, but a savior. For Jesus to have been our companion in evil would have vitiated His high priesthood and rendered Him no more capable of being our redeemer than were the high priests of old. By reason of its very inadequacy, the old order awaited the appearance of the priest who would offer up the perfect and final sacrifice - perfect because, not now the offering of some dumb and uncomprehending beast, it is the perfect equivalent offering of His own unblemished and victorious self as one fellow man, and final because it avails for all sin and for all eternity.” (Hughes, p. 177)

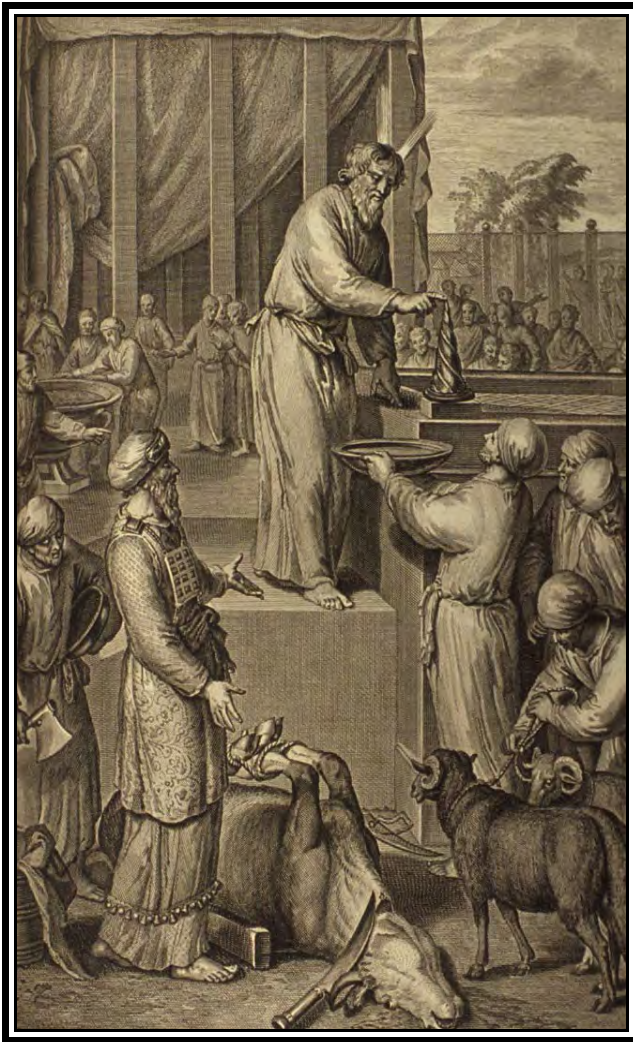


*“Aaron High Priest Of Israel”*

## **Chapter 5:4-10**

***“And no one takes this honor for himself, only when called by God just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt Himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by Him who said to Him; ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You;’ as He says in another place. ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’ In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the Source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, being designated by God a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.”***

***“And no one takes this honor for himself...”*** - The previously stated fact must be ***“chosen”*** and ***“appointed”*** (Verse 1) is now repeated and expanded. No one can seize the position on his own - ***“no one takes the honor upon himself.”*** Aaron had been chosen directly by God and the office became hereditary for his sons. ***“Then bring near to you Aaron your***



*"The Consecration Of Aaron And His Sons Before the Tabernacle" - 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Bible Engraving by Hoet*

*brother and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel to serve Me as priests - Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar." (Exodus 28:1) "And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood." (Numbers 3:9-10)*

*"So the Lord said to Aaron; 'You and your sons and your Father's house with you shall bear iniquity connected with the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear iniquity connected with your priesthood. And with you bring your brothers also, the Tribe of Levi, the Tribe of your father, that they may join you while you and your sons with you are before the Tent of Testimony...And behold, I have taken your brothers the Levites from among the People of Israel. They are a gift to you, given to the Lord, to do the service of the Tent of Meeting. And you and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood for all that concerns the altar and that is within the veil. And you shall serve. I give you your priesthood as a gift, and any outsider that comes near shall be put to death.'" (Numbers*

18:1-2,6-7)

The office of the high priest is not a human institution by a divine vocation. It is given as a gift from God, neither earned nor taken for themselves by those who hold that office, should add to the humility of the high priest and reinforce his inclination to sympathize with the weaknesses of those whom he has been chosen to serve. At the same time, this affirmation of God's choosing the line of Aaron as His high priests would have been a stinging rebuke to the high priests in Jerusalem at this time, like the family of Annas and Caiaphas, who were not descendants of Aaron and were nothing more than stooges for the Romans, using the sacred office as nothing more than a means to enrich and empower themselves and their cronies. Luther's application of this text to the bishops of his day was characteristically blunt:

*"The office of a bishop is nothing if it is not a work, and, moreover, a good*



*work...The others who climb to the top, and let us be honest about it, in a desire for a life of idleness and pleasure and high office - nay, rather, who lust after these things - they are they who 'take the honor upon themselves.'"*

***"So also Christ did not exalt Himself, to be made a high priest, but was appointed..."*** - The focus of the text now shifts from the imperfect Aaronic high priesthood to the perfection of that office in the Messiah. That which had been true of all of the high priests of the old order in the line of Aaron is in a preeminent sense also true of Christ the perfect messianic high priest. Unlike those who came before Him, appointed as hereditary heirs or as the result of political or economic influence, Christ appointment came directly from God Himself. The Epistle had previously identified Jesus as the Son of God -

***"In these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, who He appointed the heir of all things, and through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power."*** (Hebrews 1:2-3)

Jesus has further been identified as the perfect High Priest, fulfilling and completing all that had been foreshadowed in the high priests of the former covenant: ***"Therefore, He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people."*** (Hebrews 2:17) The two concepts of Christ as the Son of God and the perfect High Priest were combined in Chapter 4: ***"Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession."*** (Hebrews 4:14) Now that crucial combination is expanded, applied and documented, demonstrating its foundation and its fundamental importance for the work of the Messiah. ***"The Son is the effective Mediator that He is because He is the High Priest who suffered, and who now sits in heavenly glory."*** (Ellingsworth, p. 281)



***"Christ The Only-Begotten Son Of God" - Vasnetsov***

The unusual use of the formal messianic title ***“Christ” - “the Anointed One”*** - prepares the reader for that which is to come. This is the preeminent designation for the promised Messiah as the ultimate prophet, high priest, and king. Only these three sacred positions were anointed as a ceremonial recognition that only God chose these individuals to serve His chosen people. The scented oil poured out upon the head of the candidate signified the blessings of the God who had called him covering him and enabled him to carry out the task to which he had been divinely chosen. It implied the bestowing of power and authority from God Himself.

Given His identity as the God/Man appointed and anointed directly by God Himself, it goes without saying that ***“Christ did not exalt Himself.”*** Giving all the glory to God rather than exalting Himself is a major theme of Jesus’ preaching in the Gospel of John. When attacked by the Jews as a servant of the devil, Jesus responded that His willingness to give glory to God rather than seeking it for Himself was conclusive proof that He was God’s chosen servant: ***“I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. Yet I do not seek My own glory. There is One who seeks it and He is the Judge...If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing. It is My Father who glorifies Me.”*** (John 8:54); ***“My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me...The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him is true, and in Him there is not falsehood.”*** (John 7:14)



***“Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?”***

*“Indeed, if one thing is stressed throughout the NT, it is that in assuming the office of Savior and High Priest, so far was the Son from exalting and glorifying Himself, that He accepted it, knowing full well that it meant for Him the experience of the darkest depths of humiliation, rejection, agony, and*



*death. His office-bearing was the furthest possible removal from self-glorification. To put it colloquially, there was nothing in it for Him- only the certainty of unutterable anguish and alienation and immolation, suffered vicariously for our redemption.” (Hughes, p. 180)*

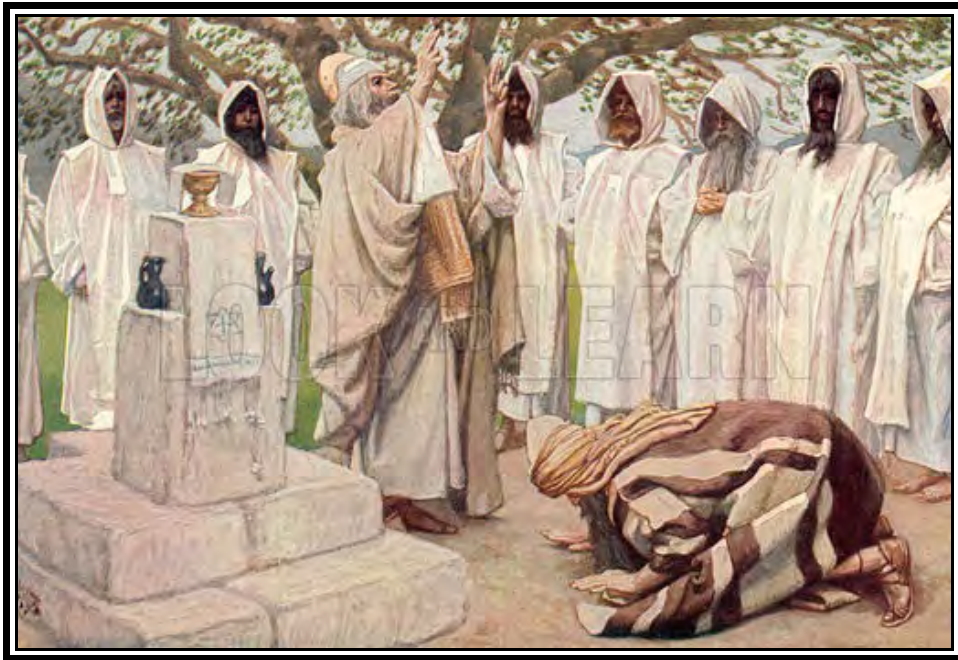
At the outset, two messianic texts from the Book of Psalms are cited as the Biblical basis in which the Sonship, the exaltation and the priesthood of Christ are affirmed. The first is Psalm 2:7 in which God identifies the coming Messiah as His Son. The text stresses the direct calling from God with the introductory phrase ***“But was appointed by His who said to Him: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.”*** The same Verse had previously been cited in Chapter 1 to document Christ’s divinity, enthroned in heaven as a royal monarch. In that citation, the author had added the first verse of the same Psalm to document the heavenly exaltation of the Son: ***“The Lord says to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’”*** The use of these verses here sets the stage for the Melchizedek reference from Psalm 110:4 to follow combining the royal and priestly role of the Messiah for the mysterious Jebusite king is the only king/high priest mentioned in the Old Testament. ***“As He also says in another place, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’”*** Melchizedek

will remain the theme character in defining high priesthood of Christ throughout this segment of the letter. This is also particularly appropriate in the context of the overall theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews because Melchizedek was not a Jew conducting a ministry to Israelites, but a Jebusite called by God outside of the family of Abraham to carry on a priesthood to Gentiles and this Gentile High Priest is acknowledged by Abraham.

***“In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications...”*** - In contrast to the former high priests, whose mediation on behalf of Israel was hampered and ultimately rendered ineffective, because of their own sinfulness, the high priesthood of Jesus is characterized by perfect obedience. The reality of His humanity is expressed four times in this paragraph - ***“in the days of His flesh”*** - ***“Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears”*** - ***“who was able to save Him from death”*** - ***“He learned obedience through what He suffered.”*** As stated above, the humanity of Jesus was an essential component of His priestly office as Mediator between man and God. Thus the



*Marble Statue of Melchizedek by  
Giovanni Morlati*



*“Melchizedek Blessing Abraham” - Jacque Tissot*

repetitive emphasis upon His genuine humanity here. Christ was true man, ***“beset with weakness”*** (vs. 2) like every one of his predecessors in the office of high priest, in that He submitted to all of the pains, sorrows, sufferings, and temptations, which sin had brought down upon fallen mankind. He suffered, He struggled, He wept, and He died. But He did not yield to sin, He did not succumb to temptation, He did not fail. This magnificent paragraph is equally clear in stressing this essential difference between Christ and all the high priests who had gone before. Again the phrases make their point by repetition - ***“He was heard because of His reverence”*** - ***“He learned obedience through what He suffered”*** - ***“and being made perfect He became the Source of eternal salvation.”*** Christ succeeded where all others had failed. He was what none of the others could ever have been and did what none of the others could ever have done. All this because He alone had been ***“designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”*** The language of the paragraph is so lofty and powerful in its identification of Christ and that which He alone has accomplished for His people that there is widespread speculation that these words came to be used as a creed or canticle within the earliest Christian congregations.

The psalmist’s phrase - ***“You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”*** - is designed to place the messianic high priest in an entirely different category than that of the Aaronic high priests of the former covenant. The specific nature of ***“the order of Melchizedek”*** and the decisive differences between it and the priesthood of Aaron will be detailed and defined specifically in Chapter 7. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran commentator R.C.H. Lenski offers this brilliant assessment of the impact which this introduction of the priesthood of Melchizedek would have had upon Hebrew Christians who were being tempted to revert to Judaism and the Aaronic priesthood of the Temple, reminding them of the incomparable superiority of the ministry of their great messianic High Priest:



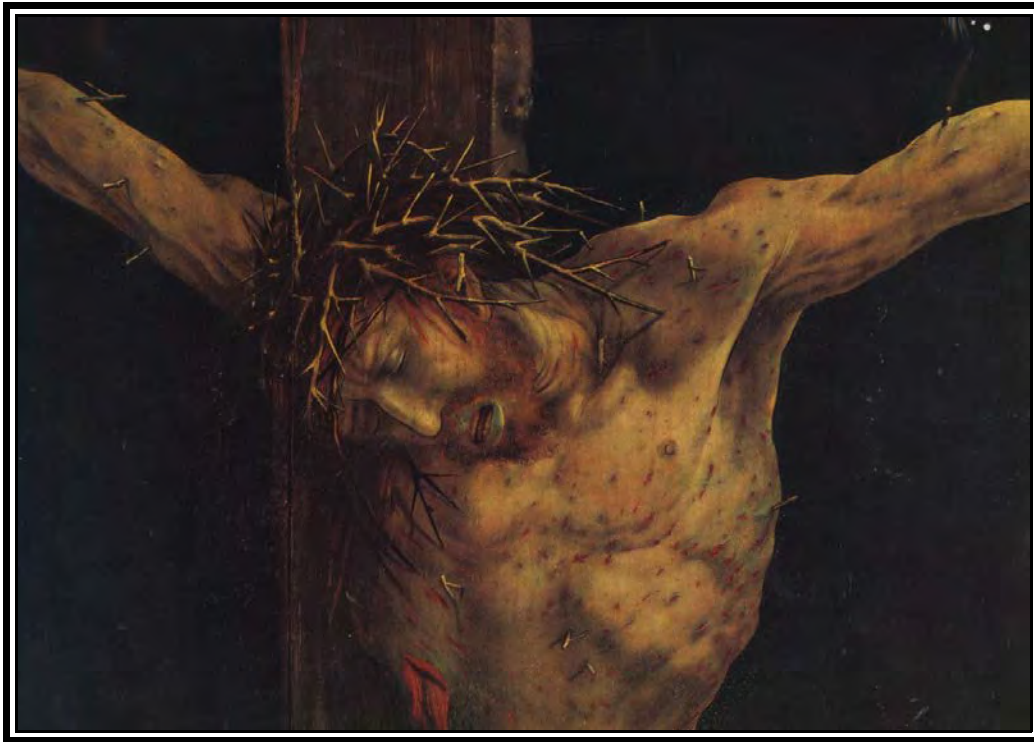
*“This must have had a tremendous effect on the readers who were former Jews. While they are thinking of going back to Judaism and its Aaronic, Levitical high priesthood because they regarded it as better than that of lowly Jesus, these readers are startled to find one that is greater than Aaron in their Old Testament, one whom Abraham himself honored as being no less than a king-priest. We should also see the wisdom of this writer; here, and in Verse 10, he does no more than use the Old Testament phrase, ‘**according to the order of Melchizedek.**’ God used this phrase with reference to the Messiah. Had the readers ever thought of that? Not at once and in one mass is the significance of this fact poured out upon the readers; they are to absorb its significance gradually. Thus, the object of the writer will be more completely attained. No mind will revert to Aaron; Melchizedek stands in the way! As sons of Abraham, who bowed before Melchizedek as a type of Christ (John 8:56), who never even knew the Aaronic high priesthood, these Jewish Christian readers must surely follow Abraham. Or do they intend to harden their hearts (2:8, etc.)? David too, Israel’s great king, who was in various ways a type of the Messiah, whose Psalm is quoted, saw in Melchizedek, the Royal Priest Christ, and sang about Him.” (Lenski, p. 160)*

**“Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears”** bring to mind the tumultuous events of Christ’s passion, first in the Garden of Gethsemane -

***“And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw and knelt down prayed, saying, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done. And there appeared to Him an angel from***



***“Jesus Praying In The Garden”***



*"Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?" - Grunewald*

*heaven strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood, falling from the ground."*  
(Luke 22:41-44)

and, a short time later in His anguished petitions from the cross upon Golgotha: ***"Eloi, Eloi, lema Sabachthani? which means "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** (Mark 16:33) ***"The Jesus called out with a loud voice and said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." and having said this He breathed His last."*** (Luke 23:46) The particular emphasis here upon the prayers of Christ is fully consistent with the role of the High Priest as the mediator and intercessor for the people before God.

***"He was heard because of His reverence."*** - Although Christ had to die in order to accomplish the plan of salvation, His prayers were heard and answered by God the Father, nonetheless, because He was not forsaken in death, but raised to life again on the third day. That triumphant resurrection and the exaltation which ensued was God the Father's positive response to the prayers and supplications of His Son. ***"His reverence"*** refers to the humble submission of the Son to the will and purpose of God the Father. Although Christ understandably dreaded the crushing burden of humanity's guilt and the condemnation of mankind's sin which was to come down upon Him on the cross - (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21 - ***"For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."***) - He nonetheless accepted the Father's will because ***"His reverence."*** Commentator Paul Ellingsworth offers this paraphrase of the paragraph which reflects the sense of the Greek original -



*“Jesus, in the face of the cross, offered strong and anguished prayers to God as the One who had the power to rescue Him from the power of death itself. God heard and answered His prayers, because in them Jesus submitted Himself humbly to God’s will. From the agony in which He prayed, and from His final acceptance of God’s will, He learned obedience, something necessary - even for One who was God’s Son.” (Ellingsworth, p. 291)*

These verses present to us a unique insight into the inter-relationship between what theologians characterize as the “*State of Humiliation*” and the “*State of Exaltation.*” This traditional terminology is derived from Philippians 2:5-11 -

***“Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, although He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him the Name that is above every name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”***



***“Abraham Receiving The Blessing Of Melchizedek”***

***“And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”*** - This same though had previously been expressed in Hebrews 2:10 - ***“For it is fitting that He for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the Founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.”*** The two verses are remarkably similar in their description of the perfect fulfillment of the ministry of Christ for the salvation of man.

*“We have the same Agent, namely God; the same means, namely suffering; the same verb ‘to make complete’; the same object ‘the Author of their salvation - the Cause of eternal salvation’, and finally, the same beneficiaries; many sons brought to glory, all those obeying Him.” (Lenski, p. 166)*

Having lived a sinless life after which He submitted to an innocent, substitutionary death upon the cross, Jesus had perfectly completed all that was necessary for Him to be ***“the Source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”*** The obedience in question here is that of faith, that is, the works which naturally flow from and are the inevitable expression of faith in Christ. The use of obedience terminology here in reference to believers is the application of the obedience terminology which has been used in Verse 8 in reference to Christ - ***“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered.”***

***“Being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek”*** - The segment concludes with a reassertion of Psalm 110:4's reference to a high priesthood of the order of Melchizedek. The mysterious figure of the Priest/King of the very city which was to become the site of the Holy Temple and the Royal Capital of the Israelite nation has always been the subject of profound fascination within Judaism. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, published in 1905 summarizes the lore regarding Melchizedek in this way:



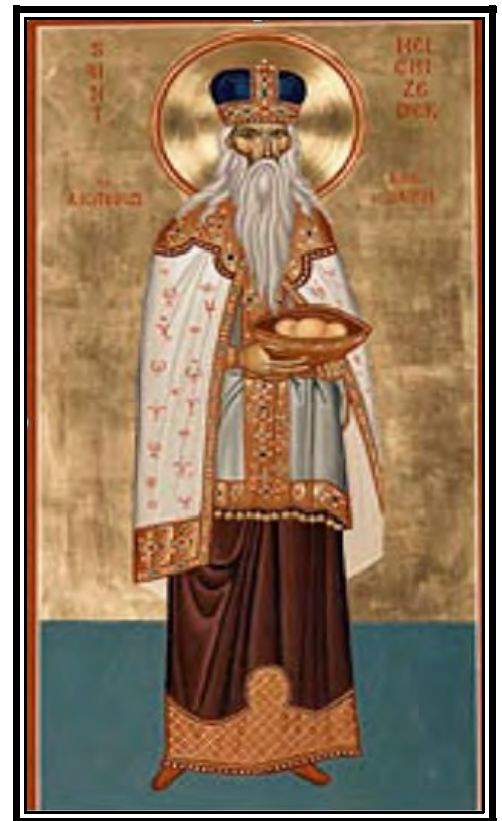
***“Abraham’s Encounter With Melchizedek”***

*“King of Salem and Priest of the Most High in the time of Abraham. He brought out bread and wine and received tithes from him (Genesis 14:18-20). Reference is made to him in Psalm 110:4, where the victorious ruler is declared to be ‘priest forever after the Order of Melchizedek.’ The story rests*



*upon ancient Jerusalemic tradition - 'zedek' being an ancient name for Jerusalem...The city's first king, accordingly, was known as 'Adonizedek' (Judges 1:5-7). The fact that he united the royal with the priestly dignity, like all ancient heathen kings, made him a welcome prototype for the composer of the triumphal song in Psalm 110. ...The rabbis of later generations identified Melchizedek with Shem, the ancestor of Abraham. A singular story of Melchizedek is told in the Ethiopian Book of Adam and Eve... There, Noah tells his son Shem, before his death, to take Melchizedek the son of Canaan, whom God had chosen from all generations of men, and to stand by the dead body of Adam after it had been brought from the ark to Jerusalem as the center of the earth and fulfill the ministry before God. The angel Michael then took away Melchizedek when fifteen years of age from his father, and having anointed him as priest, brought him to Jerusalem as the center of the earth, telling his father to share the mystery only with Shem, the son of Noah, while the Holy Spirit, speaking out of the ark when the body of Adam was hidden, greeted Melchizedek as 'the first created of God.' Shem went, carrying bread and wine, and assisted by the angel, brought the body of Adam to its destination. Melchizedek offered the bread and wine upon the altar they built near the place where Adam's body was deposited, and then Shem departed, leaving the pure lad in his garment of skins, under the sole protection of the angel, no one on earth knowing of his whereabouts, until, at last, Abraham met him." (JE, VIII, p. 459)*

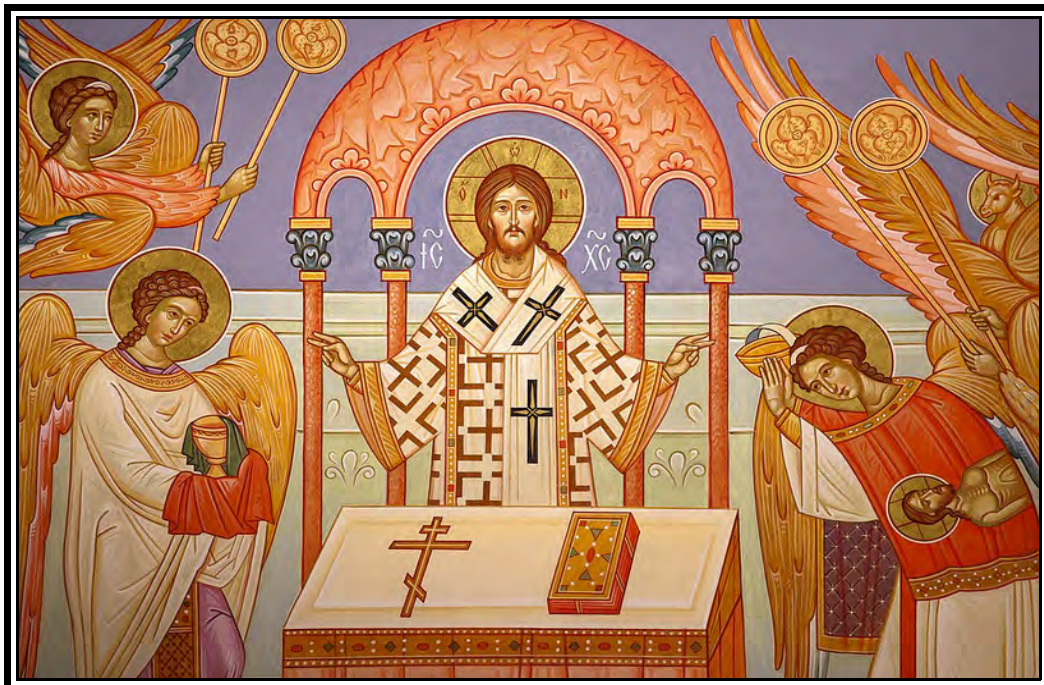
The substance of this discussion of the high priesthood of Christ, Aaron and Melchizedek is a study in contrast and comparison. The ministry of Christ is like that of Aaron in that neither of them exalted themselves to this position but were appointed by God. At the same time Christ and the Aaronic high priests are capable of being sympathetic to those on whose behalf they mediate because they have also experienced the trials and temptations of the human predicament. Unlike the Aaronic high priests, however, Christ did not yield to temptation and is without sin. It was therefore unnecessary for Him to offer sacrifices on His own behalf and unlike the imperfect priesthood of the old order Christ was capable of offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice to become the Source of Salvation for those who trust and obey Him. The introduction of Melchizedek into this comparison serves to reveal the fundamental difference between the perfect Messianic High Priest and the Aaronic high priesthood which had



*"Melchizedek Icon"*

inadequately prefigured Him

*“The likeness of Jesus to Aaron is shattered, however, with the citation of Psalm 110:4. The appeal to Melchizedek, who, as the first priest mentioned in Scripture is the archetype of all priesthood, validates Jesus’ priesthood as different from and superior to the Levitical priesthood. Christ enjoys a preeminence that removes Him from the sphere of comparison with Aaron. He was ‘without sin’ (4:15), and He is summoned to be ‘a priest forever’ (5:6). His priestly task is to create an order of salvation that is valid forever (5:9), which has the effect of rendering the Aaronic institution obsolete. The parallel between Aaron and Christ is infringed most sharply in the description of their respective priestly functions. In reference to the Levitical high priesthood, the writer mentions the cultic ministry of sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (5:1) and the extension of forbearance to those who are weak (5:2-3). In contrast to this, Christ’s high priestly offering culminated in the surrender of His life to the suffering of death in perfect obedience to God’s revealed will. This self-sacrifice is not only superior to the OT prototype. It represents an incomparably deeper and more radical identification with men and women in their weakness than was ever envisioned in the case of the Levitical high priest. The acceptance of Jesus’ completed sacrifice is celebrated in the affirmation that ‘He was heard’ (5:7) and has been pronounced ‘qualified’ to come before God in high priestly mediation (5:9). On this basis, He has inaugurated a new redemptive relationship between God and the human family that merits the perseverance of the community in faith and obedience.” (Lane, p. 123f.)*



**“Christ Our Great High Priest”**



### ***Verses 11-14***

***About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the Word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.***



***“Jeremiah Weeping Amid the Babylonian Destruction of Jerusalem”***

***“About this we have much to say...”***- The identity and ministry of the perfect Messianic High Priest will be the main topic of the balance of the epistle. There is a great deal more that must be said. However, before he proceeds, the author sternly admonishes his readers about their own spiritual immaturity which is the consequence of their ignorance of the Word of God. He warns that the fundamental material which he is about to convey will be ***“hard to explain.”*** The challenge which confronts him is neither the complexity of the topic nor insecurity as to his own ability as a teacher. The problem is simply that those to whom this letter is addressed ***“have become dull of hearing.”*** The choice of words suggests that this was not originally the case. It is a problem which has been allowed to become chronic over a protracted period of time by their neglect of the Word and their disinterest in the saving truth of that Word. The Hebrews have regressed to the perilous point where they require the most elementary instruction in ***“the basic principles of the oracles of God.”*** This sad state of affairs should not be the case and need not to have becomes the case. It is a problem which they have willfully brought upon themselves - ***“For though by this time you ought to be teachers.”*** ***“Their spiritual comprehension corresponds, to their shame,***



*"The Prophet Zechariah"*

*to that of children in kindergarten, who, unable to read or write, have to start at the very beginning by learning the ABC's." (Hughes, p. 190)*

As this stern rebuke is issued the Hebrew recipients of the epistle would immediately have recalled the similar denunciations of Israel by the OT prophets.

*"Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not; who have ears to hear, but hear not." (Ezekiel 12:2)*

*"To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen; behold, the Word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it." (Jeremiah 6:10)*

*"But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears that they might not hear. They made their hearts diamond hard lest they should hear the Law and the words that*

*the Lord of Hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore, great anger came from the Lord of Hosts. As I called they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear, says the Lord of Hosts." (Zechariah 7:11-13)*

Our Lord Himself lamented the unwilling of Israel to hear and heed the truth proclaimed by the prophets of God culminating in John the Baptist. *"For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to ear, let him hear." (Matthew 11:13-15)*

*"You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk...."* - These people have regressed to the point of spiritual infancy. They are no different than babies who are not ready to handle solid food but must still be bottle-fed with nothing more than milk. Paul had issued a similar rebuke to the Corinthians who were content to remain whining babies who did not know or care to know the truth of God's Word and were content to remain constantly demanding that someone take care of them rather than growing in their ability and eagerness to serve others. *"But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it, and even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh." (1 Corinthians 3:1)* The Hebrews are sadly still locked in nothing more than children who remain *"unskilled in the Word of righteousness."* The Greek noun for *"child"* in this verse



specifically describes one who is not yet capable of speech.

***“The Word of righteousness”*** ominously suggests a lack of trust and comprehension of the core doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ, and may suggest a reversion to the work righteousness of the Judaism from which they had come. If this were the case, the enunciation of the High Priesthood of Christ as the Messiah would be a most effective way to wean them away from their baby bottles back to a solid diet of Law and Gospel that they may be restored to maturity in their faith. ***“The mature”*** are defined as ***“those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”*** Growth in faith in a gradual ongoing process of regular interaction with the Word of God. ***“Constant practice”*** clearly indicates that ongoing process. One of the clearest indications of such spiritual growth is an ever increasing hunger for the Word and an insatiable appetite for the truth and life which it alone can convey.

At the same time, the language of the text stresses that Bible study is no mere intellectual exercise, the accumulation of abstract information. Immersion in the Word of God is imminently practical. Its purpose is to ***“have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good and evil.”*** Our Adversary the Devil is the master of deception. The Father of Lies has learned to conceal his falsehood beneath an appearance of truth, to make his deadly poison taste like the sweetest honey. The only way to penetrate through his artful facades is by means of the gift of ***“discernment.”*** ***“Discernment”*** is the spiritual gift bestowed by God in and through His Word to distinguish between true and false, right and wrong. Discernment can only take place on the basis of divine revelation. It is never the result of intelligence or human cleverness. Thus St. John Chrysostom notes:

*“He is not speaking now concerning life conduct when he says ‘to distinguish good from evil,’ for this is possible and easy for every person to know, but concerning doctrines that are wholesome and sublime and those that are corrupted and low. The babe knows not how to distinguish bad and good food, Oftentimes, at least, it even puts dirt into its mouth, and takes what is hurtful, and it does all these things without judgement; but not so the full grown person. Such babes are they that lightly listen to everything, and give up their ears indiscriminately; which seems to me to blame these Hebrews also, as being ‘lightly carried away’ and giving themselves now to these, now to those. This, he also hinted near the end of the epistle, saying, ‘Do not be lead away by diverse and strange teachings.’ This is the meaning of ‘to distinguish good from evil’ for the mouth tastes food but the soul tries words...But how do our faculties become trained. By continual hearing and experience of the Scriptures. For when we set forth the error of those heretics and you hear today and tomorrow, and prove that it is not right, you have learned the whole, you have known the whole, and even if you should not comprehend today, you will comprehend tomorrow.”* (ACCS, X, p. 80)

## Hebrews Chapter 6

*(1) Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on toward maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) and of instructions about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement. (3) And this we will do if God permits. (4) For it is impossible in the case of those who have been once enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and who have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the Word of Gods and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away,*

*to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt. (7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. (9) Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we are sure of better things - things that belong to salvation. (10) For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for His Name in serving the saints as you still do. (11) And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, (12) so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (13) For when God made a promise to Abraham, since He had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself, (14) saying, 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you.' (15) And thus Abraham,*

*having patiently waited, obtained the promise. (16) For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. (17) So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His promise, He guaranteed it with an oath, (18) so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge may have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. (19) We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, (20) where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.*



*"Christ Our Great High Priest"*



## Chapter 6:1-2

***“Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement.”***

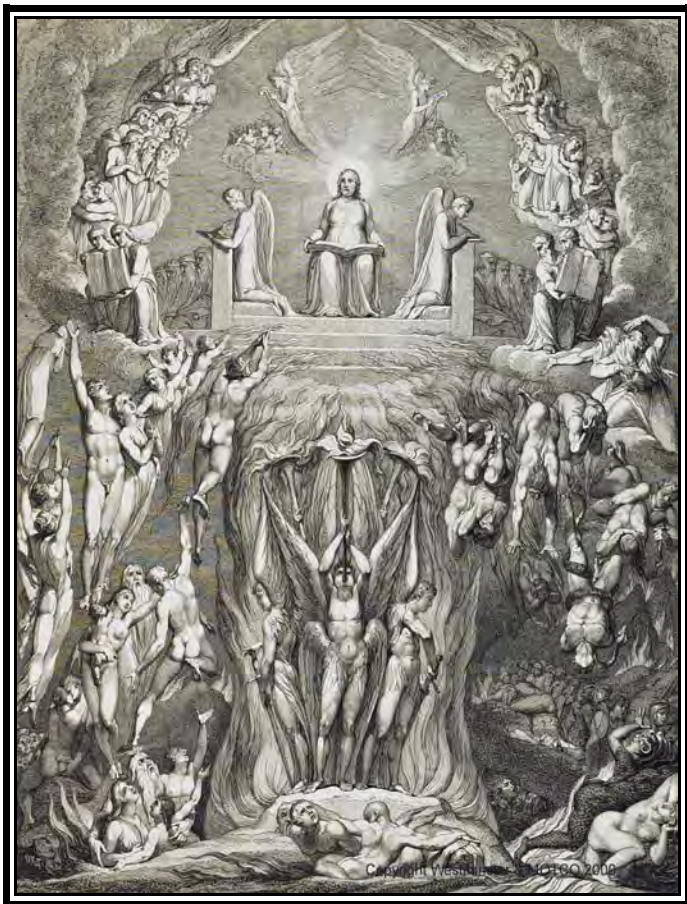
***“Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ...”*** - The chapter break interrupts to flow of the author’s admonition to move beyond spiritual infancy to a more mature relationship with Christ which had concluded Chapter 5. The conjunction ***“Therefore”*** clearly indicates the close connection between that which now follows and that which had preceded. While the Hebrews had allowed themselves to follow the path of least resistance and had relapsed back to ***“the elementary doctrine of Christ”*** that need not remain the case. The admonition here urges them to deliberately advance beyond *“their arrested growth as Christians, of which their spiritual immaturity and dullness of comprehension and discernment are symptomatic.”* (Hughes, p. 193) The author is not content to allow his readers to remain comfortably ensconced in their easy-going spiritual childhood. His intent is to compel them to move forward spiritually and confront the peril of relapse into the old covenant into which they have placed themselves. *“But he will not dismiss them as children. This rebuke is to drive the sluggishness out of their ears and to make them recover something of their maturity.”* (Lenski, 174) His urging to ***“let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ”*** is certainly not an instruction that these fundamental teachings be abandoned or contradicted, but rather that they be properly put to use as they were intended, as a firm foundation upon which a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the truth of God may be put to use in more consistent application in - to use the words of Chapter 5:14 - ***“powers of discernment, trained by constant practice to distinguish good from***



***“The Early Church Gathered For Worship” - Franz Florus***

*evil.*” The Greek verb which characterizes the desired action is simply translated “*go on to maturity*” in the ESV. This bland rendering misses the intensity of the Greek which expresses deliberate swift energetic movement toward the achievement of an urgent goal.

***“Not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God...”*** - The foundation upon which the Hebrews are to base their return to spiritual maturity is defined in a series of six categories - ***“repentance from dead works - faith toward God - instruction about washings - the laying on of hands - the resurrection of the dead - eternal judgement.”*** It would seem that they are three pairs of related topics - repentance and faith, baptism and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement. The first couplet deals with conversion to Christian faith. ***“Repentance from dead works”*** is a turning away as the result of a change of mind, heart and will (***“repentance”***) from evil thoughts, words and deeds which lead to death (***“dead works”***). ***“Faith in God”*** is the positive counterpart of that which had been stated negatively in its counterpart. The next noun ***“instruction”*** is the Greek term which is ordinarily translated as ***“doctrines”*** and should probably be rendered in its characteristic way here. Given its placement in the sentence it refers not only to the baptisms but all four of the remaining topics. ***“Washings and the laying on of hands”*** - the second couplet, refers the ceremonies which accompanied the entrance of new believers into the Christian Church. ***“Washings”***



***“The Final Judgement”***

is the Greek ***“baptismoi”*** and alludes to the sacrament. It is in the plural because the writer is referring the baptisms of numerous individuals. In the baptismal liturgies of the early church ***“the laying on of hands”*** was included in the ceremony to signify the imparting of the Holy Spirit. Appropriately, these four topics all pertain to the entry into the church which would naturally be of particular interest to new believers, still relatively immature in their faith. The final two topics on the list leap from the beginning to the end times and the termination of faith and life on earth. Their inclusion here is typically understood to suggest the entire gamut of fundamental teachings from the beginning to the end. The topic of the resurrection of the body was the source of significant controversy within Judaism between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and that may also have lingered on in arguments among





*“Christ the Judge” by Viktor Vasnetsov*

Jewish converts to Christianity, thus its inclusion here. The ***“eternal judgement”*** brings a decisive and most appropriate end to the representative listing of the elementary doctrines which constitute the foundation of the faith. The ***“judgement”*** is ***“eternal”*** in that it declares the eternal fate of every human being either for salvation or damnation. The substantive distinction between Christian doctrine and that of Judaism in regard to these topics is the recognition that all which had been taught by the prophets in regard to death, resurrection, and judgement finds its fulfillment in Christ the promised Messiah. In his concluding remarks the writer asserts the crucial role of Christ’s resurrection in fulfilling ***“the eternal covenant”*** and securing the hope of His people in this way: ***“Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will.”*** (Hebrews 13:20) The exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God in heavenly glory signals the beginning of the final era of human history, the end times, and anticipates His triumphant return as the divine Judge of mankind. The introduction to the epistle had emphatically asserted that fact in its citation of Psalm 110:1 - ***“Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”*** For the people of God the ***“eternal judgement”*** will mean the establishment of ***“a kingdom that cannot be shaken”*** (Hebrews 12:28) where we will live and reign with Christ forever.

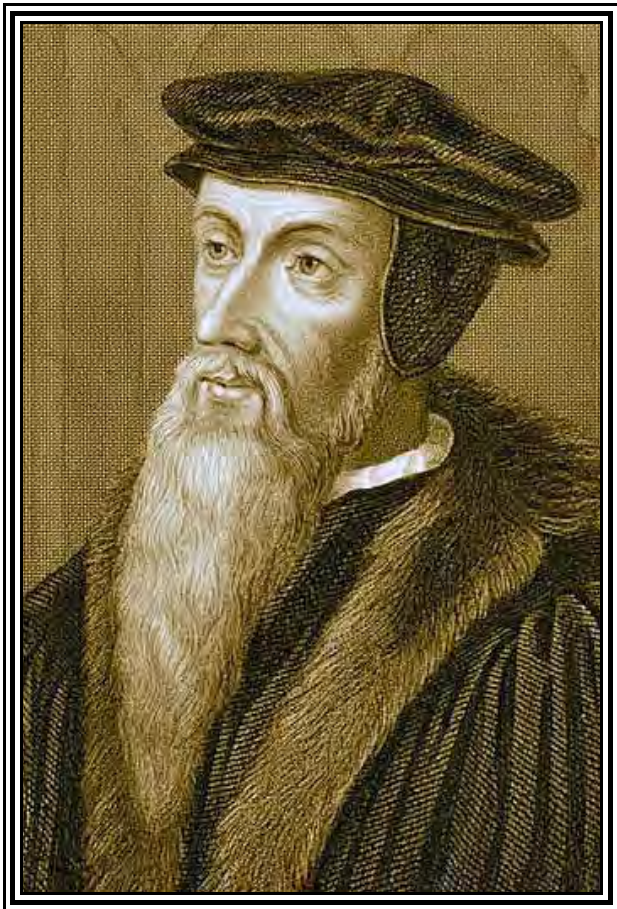
### ***Chapter 6:3-8***

***“And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop that is useful***

*for those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.”*

*“And this we will do if God permits.”* - The writer’s intent is to now proceed beyond the most elementary doctrines of the faith to lead them *“on to maturity.”* (Vs.1) The inclusion of the phrase *“if God permits”* is a deliberate assertion that both teacher and student are completely dependant upon the blessing and empowerment of God. Growth in faith and understanding of the Truth can only take place by the grace and power of God. In the context of the stern warning against the eternal consequences of apostasy which follows, these words also should be a sobering reminder not to trifle with the gracious longsuffering of the sovereign God.

*“For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened...”* - In the Greek text *“impossible”* is the first word in the sentence, its prominent placement designed to continue the ominous implications of the implied warning *“if God permits”* which had concluded the previous sentence. *“Impossible”* is an absolute term. It brooks no exceptions, exclusions, or exemptions. It refers to that which cannot occur under any circumstances. Classical scholar DeWitt correctly notes - *“The stern meaning of this ‘impossible’ is not to be meddled with.”* (Delitsch, I, p. 281)



*“John Calvin”*

The stern words of this most severe warning have been the subject of continuous debate throughout church history, particularly - since the time of the Reformation among John Calvin and his heirs, with the Geneva reformer’s characteristic emphasis upon absolute predestination both to salvation and damnation. The *“once saved always saved”* motto, which became the popular expression and application of this emphasis, is directly refuted by a natural reading of this paragraph, thus the ongoing debate with its endlessly varied attempts to evade the plain meaning of the text. Thus, Baptist commentator Dr. David Allen, offers the extravagant conclusion that these verses are *“considered by many to be the most difficult interpretive passage in all the Book of Hebrews, and some would say, in the entire New Testament.”* (Allen, p. 344) To his credit, Dr. Allen acknowledges that *“most attempts at analyzing this passage fall into the trap of putting theology before exegesis”* - particularly



within Calvinist and Arminian Protestantism for whom “*once saved always saved*” constitutes a core component of their theology. He reminds his fellow Protestants that “*it is at least incumbent upon each interpreter to suspend, in so far as is possible, presuppositions concerning the various theological positions centered around this text, since Biblical theology must precede systematic theology.*” (Allen, p. 344) This is, most certainly, a salutary and humbling reminder for every Bible scholar. His commentary then proceeds to spend no less than 50 pages on these 6 verses! The text itself hardly warrants such controversy. Its terminology and grammar are relatively straightforward. Were it not for its obvious clash with a number of prominently established theological positions, it would not be nearly so prominent or controversial.



*“Jacob Arminius”*

Verses 4-6 form one extended sentence in the Greek text. That which is “*impossible*” is not defined until the conclusion of the sentence, namely “*to restore them again to repentance.*” The intervening phrases identify those for whom restoration to repentance is an impossibility - “*those who have been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away.*” The continuity of the author’s thought is indicated by the five conjunctions which he uses to link all the phrases together - “*and...and...and...and...and.*” The first four phrases typically refer to those who are believers. The opening phrase - “*those who have been enlightened*” is even more conclusive in the Greek text which reads - “*those who have become light.*” The same verb is used in reference to conversion in Hebrews 10:32f.: “*But recall the former days after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ...But we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*” That this reference must refer to true believers becomes all the more clear in light of the contrast between them and those who had fallen from the faith just a few verses earlier in the same chapter: “*For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the Truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgement, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*” (10:26) As the Psalmist had rejoiced: “*For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light so we see light.*” (Psalm 36:9) The Lord Himself used the same imagery to describe Himself and His people: “*I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the*





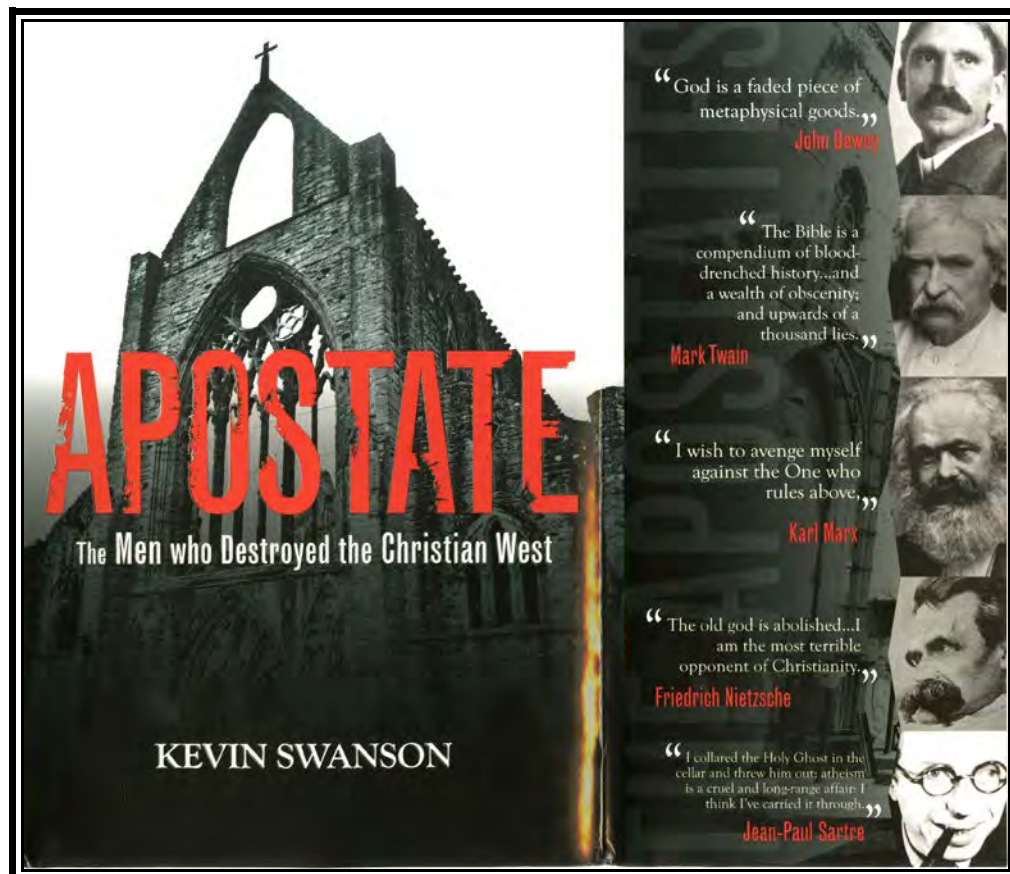
*“Christ The Light Of The World”*

*light of life.*” (John 8:12) The second phrase in the series - ***“who have tasted the heavenly gift”*** is also terminology that is used elsewhere in Scripture to identify those who are believers in Christ. The adjective ***“heavenly”*** identifies the source of the gift as God Himself, while the use of the word ***“gift”*** emphasizes that a faith relationship with Christ is completely by grace. Faith is never earned in any way by the believer. It is given by God as a free gift of His grace. Thus, the Apostle Peter declared to the crowd in Jerusalem at Pentecost: ***“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*** (Acts 2:38) The same language is used in Peter’s denunciation of Simon the Magician for attempting to buy faith and its power - ***“May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!”*** (Acts 8:20) The metaphor of tasting, eating, or drinking to denote full participation in something spiritual is also common throughout Scripture. ***“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”*** (Psalm 34:8) Peter used the same verbal image to urge believers to become more mature in their faith: ***“Like newborn infants, long for pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation - if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”*** (1 Peter 2:2) Earlier in the Epistle, Hebrews had used the same language to describe the substitutionary death of Christ for mankind: ***“But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”*** (Hebrews 2:9) The pattern continues in the phrase ***“and who have shared in the Holy Spirit.”*** The Greek text here literally says ***“and have become a partaker in the Holy Spirit.”*** These words have already occurred twice in Hebrews to express the intimate relationship which is established by faith between God the Holy Spirit, through

whom faith is given, and the believer. ***“Therefore holy brothers, you who share a heavenly calling...For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”*** (Hebrews 3:1,14) Franz Delitsch explains:

*“When a man has been divinely enlightened and has tasted the supreme good, salvation in Christ and a new life from God, he becomes, in the third place, a living member of the body of Christ, which is animated by the Holy Spirit. Of that Spirit he so partakes, as to carry that Spirit within him, as an abiding possession, an abiding power, an active source of life.”* (Delitsch, I, p. 285)

The taste metaphor recurs in the next pair of phrases - ***“and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come.”*** Taste is particularly apt in reference to the Word of God to express the truth that God’s Word becomes the constant source of nourishment, the daily bread, so to speak of every believer. The addition of ***“the goodness of the Word of God”*** serves to direct the attention of the reader specifically to the Gospel promises of God as the essential content of faith. Similar usage can be noted in the Old Testament: ***“Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to all the House of Israel had failed: all came to pass.”*** (Joshua 21:45) ***“And the Lord answered good and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.”*** (Zechariah 1:13) ***“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion,***

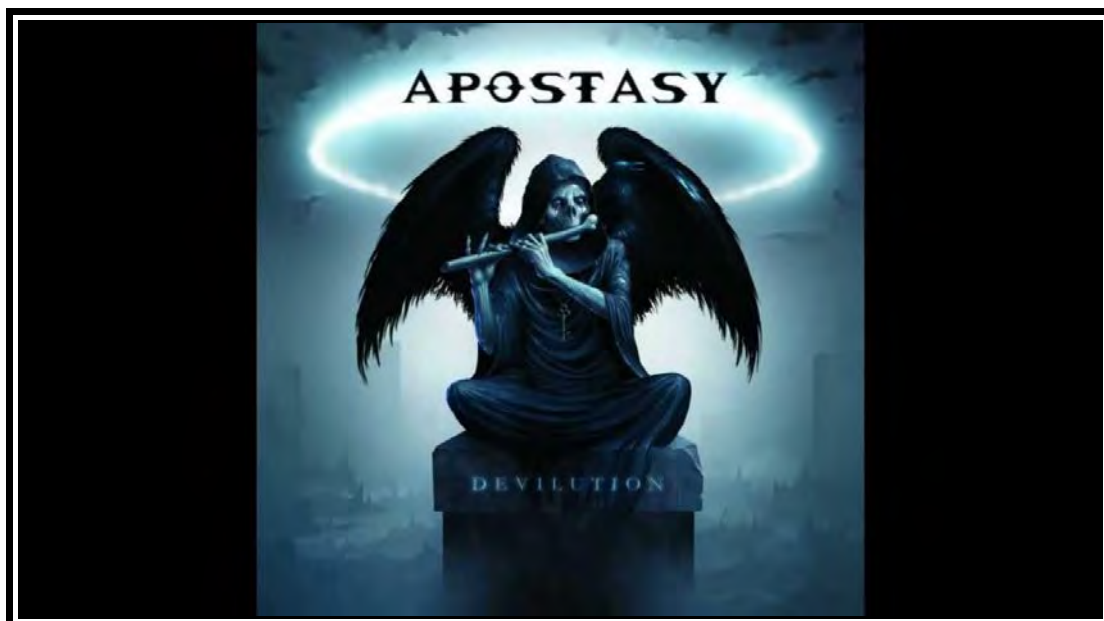




**‘Your God reigns.’**” (Isaiah 52:7) There is also an end times dimension to the faith of every believer, thus the reference to **“the powers of the age to come.”** We recognize that the central event of human history has already occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. We now live by faith in the interval between His first and second comings, eagerly anticipating His triumphant return in glory to judge the living and dead. At the same time, we who live by faith have already begun to experience the blessings and the power of the heavenly kingdom right here on earth and have thus **“tasted...the powers of the age to come.”** Any responsible student of the biblical text cannot avoid the conclusion that the individuals here described are true believers. Dr. Allen offers this comprehensive summary of the evidence as he comes to that reluctant conclusion:

*“How can it be conceivable that such descriptive phrases as enlightenment, experience of the heavenly gift of salvation, full sharing in the Holy Spirit, sharing in the Word of God, and the powers of the coming age do not have believers as their referent? Each of these statement finds their counterparts scattered throughout the New Testament, and when used in the same context as here, they refer to those who are genuine believers...By the descriptive language he chooses, he indicates their status as believers...if one follows the standard exegetical methodology of looking first at the pericope itself, honesty demands that Hebrews 6:4-8 speaks of true Christians...How can we doubt for it moment that it is the truly regenerate whom he is here describing?”* (Allen, p. 353)

**“And then have fallen away** - Having described the abundant blessings which God had showered upon these believers in a redundant series of four repetitive phrases, the writer bluntly depicts their terminal fall from grace and eternal salvation and



**“Contemporary Heavy Metal Band - - Apostasy”**



*“Apostasy Blasphemously Mocking The Last Supper And Holy Communion”*

from such an exalted spiritual stature with one horrible Greek word - **“Have fallen away.”** (Greek - “*parapesountas*”). The literal sense of the word is, as the English translation reflects, a loss or falling away from something - “*to fall aside, to go astray, to miss, fall away, commit apostasy.*”

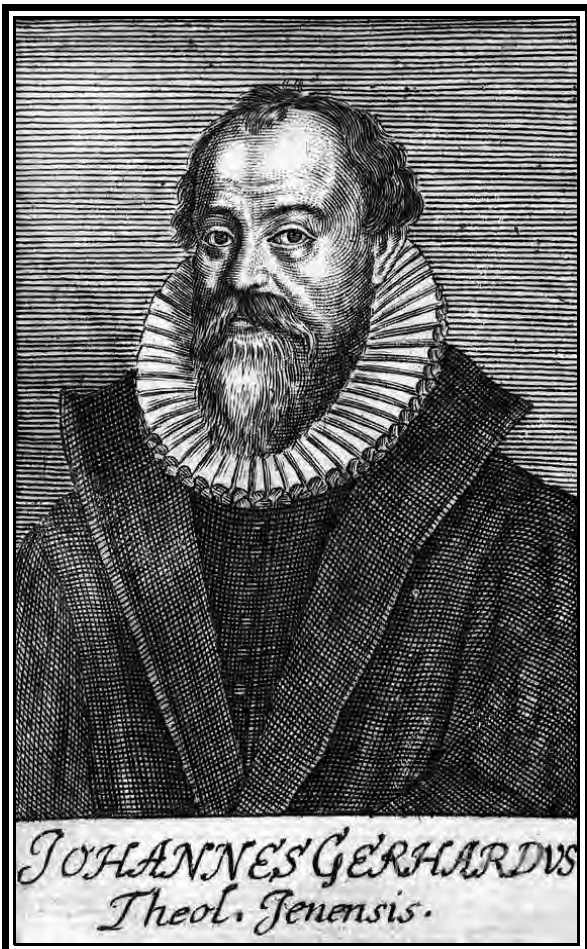
*“The final aorist participle introduces an abrupt and shocking change by describing the same people who have been genuinely converted to having ‘fallen away.’ ...By affirming the impossibility of renewing the repentance of those here described, the pastor leaves no doubt that they have fallen away into apostasy.”* (Cockerill, p. 273)

This is the only use of this word in the New Testament. In this context it refers to the repudiation and rejection of the Christian faith in such a way that one now defiantly opposes and denounces the wondrous grace which he had previously received. Christian theology has historically identified this unforgivable sin as the “*Sin Against the Holy Ghost.*” John Gerhardt, one of the premier theologians of the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, offered this meticulous definition of the sin against the Holy Ghost, citing Hebrews 6 as one of the Biblical proof texts which define the concept.

*“Finally, even though all other sins are forgivable, Christ establishes one as unforgivable, namely, the sin against the Holy Spirit. Concerning this, Augustine says: “God wants to exercise us with the difficulty concerning this*



*sin, because in all of Holy Scriptures there is perhaps no question greater nor more difficult.' ... (Matthew 12:31-2; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:10; Hebrews 6:4-6; Hebrews 10:26-29; & 1 John 5:16 are listed as the Biblical foundation for the doctrine of the Sin Against the Holy Spirit) The words of Christ in the evangelists were directed against the Pharisees, who contrary to the testimony of their conscience, were saying that the miracles of Christ were being performed through Beelzebub. The passage in Hebrews 6 is variously explained. Some take 'impossible' to mean 'difficult.' Some understand the text to be referring to penance after this life. Out of the word 'enlightened' some want to make it out to be about the renewal through baptism. In the end, the way to this explanation does not lie open. Rather, the passage is most suitably understood as a reference to the sin against the Holy Spirit, as the accurate descriptions of the subject show. While some distinguish the sin unto death about which 1 John 5:16 speaks from the sin against the Holy Spirit, it is more correctly understood as this sin. If the words and circumstances of these passages are carefully considered, it will be discovered that the sin against the Holy Spirit is the deliberate rejection of the truth of the Gospel which had been accepted and which was approved in conscience, which rejection is conjoined with a stubborn attack upon it and voluntary blasphemy.*



*For it must be observed that this kind of sin is rebuked by Christ in the Pharisees, who were constrained by the very force of the declared truth, were refuted in conscience by its brilliance, and yet kept raging against it with malicious wickedness, with the result that they were unashamed to ascribe the doctrine and miracles to Satan himself. The Epistle to the Hebrews describes those who sin against the Holy Spirit in this way; those who have first been illumined, who have even tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, who have also tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come (Hebrews 6:4-5) and who then afterwards lapse, and thus on their own account again crucify the Son of God and then hold him up in contempt (for all these pertain to the description of the subject in*

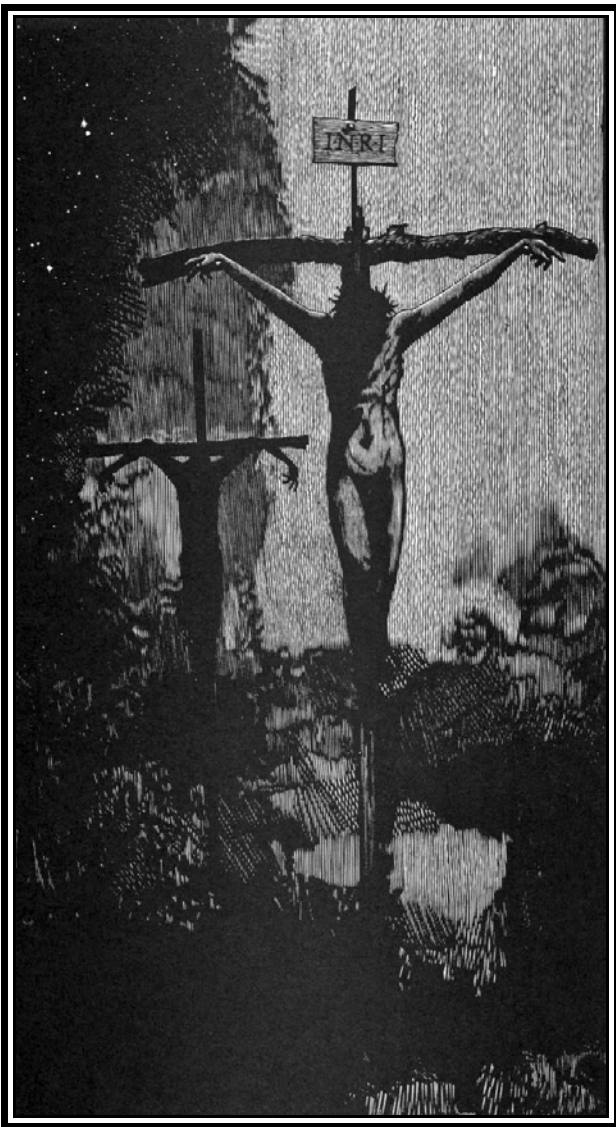
that place) (Hebrews 6:6). Also, they despise the Son of God with their willing apostasy, esteem as unclean the blood of the testament in which they were sanctified, and bring reproach upon the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29) This sin is called the sin against the Holy Spirit (1) not with respect to the Person - for in this way he who sins against the Father and the Son also sins against the Holy Spirit, because there is one divinity, equal glory, and coeternal majesty of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - but with regard to the ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:8), which is the Gospel; and with regard to the office of the Holy Spirit which is to illumine; and with regard to the testimony which the Holy Spirit gives to our spirit (Romans 8:16). In this sense, also blaspheming the Spirit (Matthew 12:31), blasphemy against the Spirit (Mark 3:29), and reproach brought upon the Spirit of Grace (Hebrews 10:29), are called sins against the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they alone commit this sin who with voluntary malice reject the acknowledged truth about which they have been convinced in conscience and attack the truth with blasphemy. From this it is concluded that those who take this sin to mean any voluntary sin, or even any rejection of truth are extending this sin far too broadly, and are providing an occasion for despair. (2) This sin is called “unforgivable.” With too weak an understanding, some take it for that sin which is forgiven with difficulty, for Christ declares very vehemently that it is not forgiven in this age nor in the coming are, that is, eternity (cf. Matthew 12:32) And the Epistle to the Hebrews says that it is completely impossible for such people to be renewed. It is also too weak when some people take ‘unforgivable’ to mean that which has no excuse so far as people are concerned, for Christ is discussing here not the excuse for sin but its forgiveness. The sin is also said to be unforgivable



*“The Pharisees Attacking Christ In The Temple”*



*because it directly assails the very means of salvation, that is, the Holy Spirit, and also because it is conjoined with extreme hardening of the heart and final impenitence. For this reason, some say, not absurdly, that this word denotes 'what happens' rather than 'what is possible' because the tenor of the words of Christ clearly proves this, and thus, while the unforgivable quality of this sin continues to stand (as I say), nonetheless it continues to stand that grace abounds more than sin (Romans 5:20). (3) In the same sense, it is call a sin unto death not only because it is a mortal sin, but also because a person is held bound by it with the bonds of eternal death in such a way that he cannot be freed from it. (4) A fourth reason follows from this, that prayer must not be made for such a sin (1 John 5:16), for mourning should not be made for those who are clearly sinning unforgivably against the Holy Spirit, nor should vain prayers be made to that same Spirit."* (Gerhardt, XII-XIV, pp.216-219)



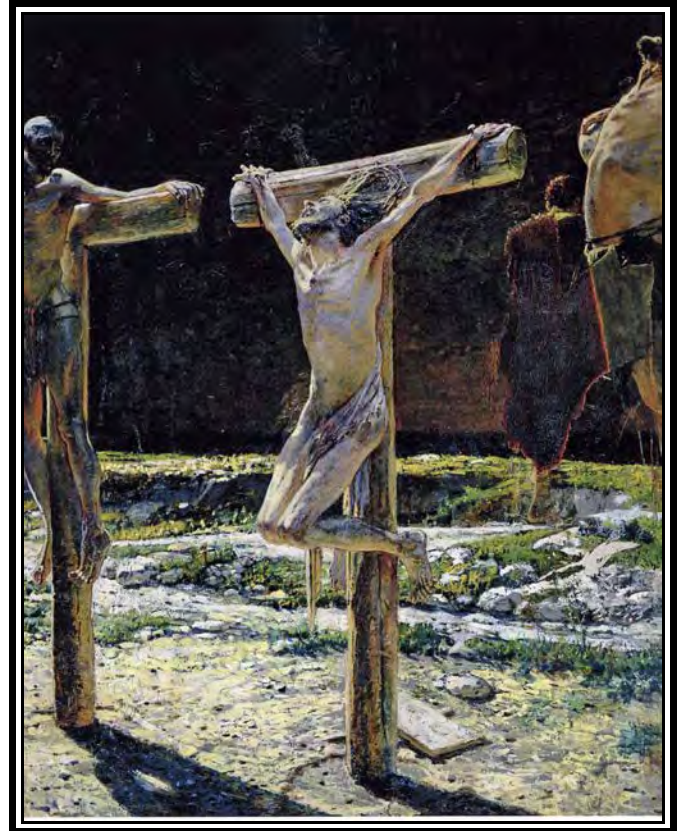
***"Jesus The Hanged One"***

***"To restore them again to repentance"*** - The text finally arrives at the object of the assertion of impossibility with which this lengthy sentence began. In Verse 1 of this Chapter, the writer had identified ***"repentance from dead works and of faith toward God"*** as ***the elementary doctrine of Christ,*** and the ***"foundation"*** upon which the faith of every believer is based. ***"Repentance"*** - turning away from sin and back to God, trusting in the forgiveness which Christ has accomplished for me upon the cross - is indeed the very essence of the Christian faith. It is always a gift of God's grace.

*"In the perspective of Hebrews there is no other repentance than that which is provided by God through Jesus Christ. There is no salvation apart from the purification for sins accomplished by the divine Son in the final period of God's redemptive activity. The 'impossible' which is used absolutely and without qualification in v. 4 expresses an impossibility because the apostate repudiates the only basis upon which repentance can be extended. To repudiate Christ is to embrace that 'impossible.'"* (Lane, 47a, p.142)

Peter, using the same terminology about Jesus having been hanged on a tree, had declared repentance to be to fundamental goal of Christ's mission before the leaders of the Sanhedrin: ***"The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."*** (Acts 5:30-31) Hence, to now declare that one who has ***"fallen away"*** cannot be restored to repentance, is nothing less than to declare that such a person cannot be forgiven and is irretrievably lost to saving faith.

***"Since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm, and holding up to contempt. For the land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop that is useful for those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned."*** - The author proceeds to offer two explanations and an analogy to demonstrate the unique gravity of this particular sin and justify the severity of its punishment in time and in eternity. The full force of the initial phrase - ***since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm*** can only be recognized when it is recalled that this letter is addressed specifically to Hebrew Christians and that the apostates of whom this segment speaks are Jews who have relapsed to Judaism from Christianity.



***"Christ The Hanged One"***

In this way they have in fact repeated the action of their fathers in Jerusalem who scornfully repudiated Jesus as the Messiah and deviously arranged for his crucifixion by their Roman overlords. This most agonizing and humiliating means of execution was not characteristically used within Israel. Even for the most heinous crimes the death penalty was typically implemented by means of stoning. However, in some rare instances where the crime was particularly detestable or in the case of any offense which directly offended the majesty of God in a most blasphemous manner, after the offender had been stoned to death his body was nailed to a tree to be displayed and thereby disgraced in the ultimate way. ***"Hanging alive was not a Jewish mode of execution but stoning, and then hung up, in some cases as a mark of divine malediction."*** (*"Jewish Encyclopedia", XX*) This was the case in the apostasy of Israel at Baal-Peor when Israel was seduced by the daughters of Moab into the most perverse sexual sin and thereby engaged in the worship of Baal, the Canaanite god of sexual potency. The leaders of the



***“The Apostasy Of Israel At Baal-Peor”  
16<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Bible Engraving - Hoet***

people who indulged in this most flagrant apostasy were not merely executed, but their bodies were impaled and hung upon trees in the sight of the nation to indicate the immensity of the perversion which they had brought down upon the nation. The text of Numbers 25 describes the sequence of events in grim detail.

***“While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor and the anger of the Lord was kindled and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them in the sun before the Lord, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel. And Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Each of you take those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor.’”*** (Numbers 22:1-5)

The commentary in the Study Bible notes on this sad text notes the special significance of the punishment meted out to those whose battered bodies were impaled following their execution so that by this drastic action Israel might be restored to faithfulness before the imminent entry into the Promised Land:

***“Drastic action was the only way to obliterate the perversion of Baal worship and the accompanying prostitution with the daughters of Moab, and so, to assuage the Lord’s fierce anger Moses was commanded **“to hang their bodies in the sun.”** This most likely refers to the ancient Near Eastern practice of impaling dead bodies upon a pole, after execution for heinous crimes, as a form of disgrace rather than burying the bodies, and as a form of warning to all who would be tempted to engage in such perversion themselves.”*** (ESV, p. 302)

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul alluded to this practice as he emphasized the disgrace which Christ was willing to endure to accomplish our salvation: ***“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us - for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’”*** (Galatians 3:13) The reference here is to Deuteronomy 21:22-23



***“And if a man has committed a crime that is punishable by death, and he is put to death, and you hang his body on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you.”***

The somber truth which the writer intends here to convey is that those who have chosen to reject and fall away from the God/man who took upon Himself the curse of sin for humanity have called down that curse upon themselves and forfeited the salvation which had been the Savior’s gracious gift to them. The purpose of his warning is to prevent others among the Hebrews from falling into the same damnable trap and bringing down that curse upon themselves.

The bitterness of Judaism’s rejection of Jesus is emphatically reflected in the traditional terminology used in reference to Him in the Talmud. Rather than utter His name, which would have acknowledged His existence and recognized His identity, the most common way to refer to Jesus among the rabbis was with the title *“the Hanged One.”* The use of this most ancient designation indicated, as previously noted, that He had been executed for the crime of blasphemy. The biting sarcasm of yet another Talmud passage indicates the intensity of this hatred for Christ: *“How old was Mary when she gave birth to the Hanged One....Why did they hang that man? Because of the foolish arrogance of the one who came and said that he was God and thus was mocked by being raised up to heaven on a cross.”* But the contempt heaped upon God’s Messiah did not end there. There has always been one most powerful curse in the Hebrew language. That malediction is reserved for the most despised of men, men who have been guilty of the grossest blasphemy, and those enemies of the nation who have caused more harm to the Jewish people than any other. The Hebrew words of the malediction are *“yimakh shemo ve sikhro”* which means *“may his name be obliterated and his memory wiped out.”* The rabbis would reshuffle the letters in the Hebrew name Yeshua, by removing the last letter. In this way, they would reshape the personal name of Jesus to resemble the opening word of this most powerful curse. The effect of this malicious sleight of hand was to call down the wrath of God upon Christ and those who followed Him and pray that He and His Gospel would be completely wiped from the minds of men forever. It is tragically ironic that the cross, the very instrument upon which our Savior died to win forgiveness for the sins of humanity, became the way that God’s chosen people expressed their bitter repudiation of Jesus as the true Messiah.

***“Since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm, and holding Him up to contempt.”*** - In this context, the identification of apostasy from Christianity to Judaism can readily be recognized as a re-crucifixion of Jesus. The words of the text are well chosen. These are Jews who have come to know Jesus as the Messiah of the world and yet they have chosen to abandon that saving faith to return to the religion which specifically repudiates the Savior as a demonic fraud. Their rejection is not merely a personal decision,



***“Raising the Cross” - James Halperin***

it is a public attack upon the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. Their defiant disobedience serves to confirm Israel’s harsh repudiation of Jesus while, at the same time, it discredits the Gospel before the world. The blasphemy of their action is expressed in the identification of Jesus as ***“the Son of God.”*** Their apostasy will most certainly have a damning personal effect - ***“to their own harm”*** but the significance of what they have done reaches far beyond themselves. The second verb ***“holding Him up”*** deliberately calls to mind the raising of the cross on the crest of Golgotha with the naked, battered, bloody body of the Savior of the world twisting in agony and shame upon it. The humiliation of this horrible moment for the Son of God is unimaginable to us, particularly in the unique context of Judaism just described. And yet, this is precisely the significance of this apostasy, every bit as blasphemous and cruel as the mockery of the High Priest and his cronies as Jesus suffered on the cross:

***“And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads, and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and restore it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God come down from the cross. So also the chief priests with the scribes and the elders mocked him, saying, ‘He saved others! He cannot save himself! He is the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if He desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”*** (Matthew 27:39-43)

The vile blasphemy of the foremost religious leaders of Judaism is placed in stark contrast with the testimony of the awestruck centurion and his legionnaires at the moment of Christ’s death - ***“When the centurion and those who were with him keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake that took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God.’”*** (Matthew 27:54) That which the chosen people - who should have known - refused to see, was clear to the Gentile warriors of pagan Rome.

***“For the land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those who whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.”*** - An agricultural

illustration is introduced to further clarify the author's meaning. The usage is similar to the parables of Christ as one of the Master's most effective teaching techniques. Such imagery is also used by the prophets of the Old Testament. The foremost example of this technique is the presentation of the nation of Israel as the vineyard of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah and the warning that the vineyard will (Isaiah 5:1-7; cf. Ezekiel 19:10-14)

***“Let me sing for my beloved my song concerning his vineyard; My beloved has a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it, and cleared it of stones, and planted it with very choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes; but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste and it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up. I will also command the clouds that they rain not upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant planting; and He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry.”***



***“A Lush Vineyard In The Land Of Israel”***

In Hebrews 6, the links between the direct statement of the problem in Verses 4-6 and the parable of Verses 7-8 are clear. The abundant rain from heaven which waters the earth is parallel to the spiritual blessings previously listed which God had showered upon these believers. The text emphasizes both the abundance and the reliable consistency of the rain,



falling from heaven in a way that enables the fertile ground to absorb its every life-giving drop - ***“the land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it.”*** *“The rain is here said to have come upon the land with the purpose of refreshing it and making it fruitful, and that,*



***“The Abundance of the Good Soil Within the Vineyard”***

*frequently, not once or twice only, or in short and sudden showers, where the water would soon run off and be lost, but so that the thirsty soil could drink it in.”* (Delitsch, I, p. 295) The language of the text is most effective - *“The pastor enables his hearers to see the judgement of the apostates by drawing a picture. They could almost feel the timely rain falling gently on the fertile ground. Such was the abundance of grace received from the Lord.”* (Cockeril, p. 276) The expected result and purpose of the blessing from above and the labor expended upon the vineyard by those who have worked the soil and cared for it is that it ***“produces a crop useful for those for whose sake it is cultivated.”*** *“It was only natural for those who farmed such land to expect a ‘useful harvest.’ How right it is for God to expect faithful obedience in response to His grace!”* (Cockeril, p. 277) The soil which fulfills that rightful expectation ***“receives a blessing from God.”*** Within the context of the parable, the nature of that blessing may be more and more abundant harvests, or perhaps the promise that the tender plants which have been placed within the fertile soil will thrive and grow to full maturity and produce an abundant harvest. As Jesus notes in explaining His parables to the disciples: ***“For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”*** (Matthew 13:12);

***“I am the true Vine and My Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes that it may bear more fruit... I am the Vine you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart***

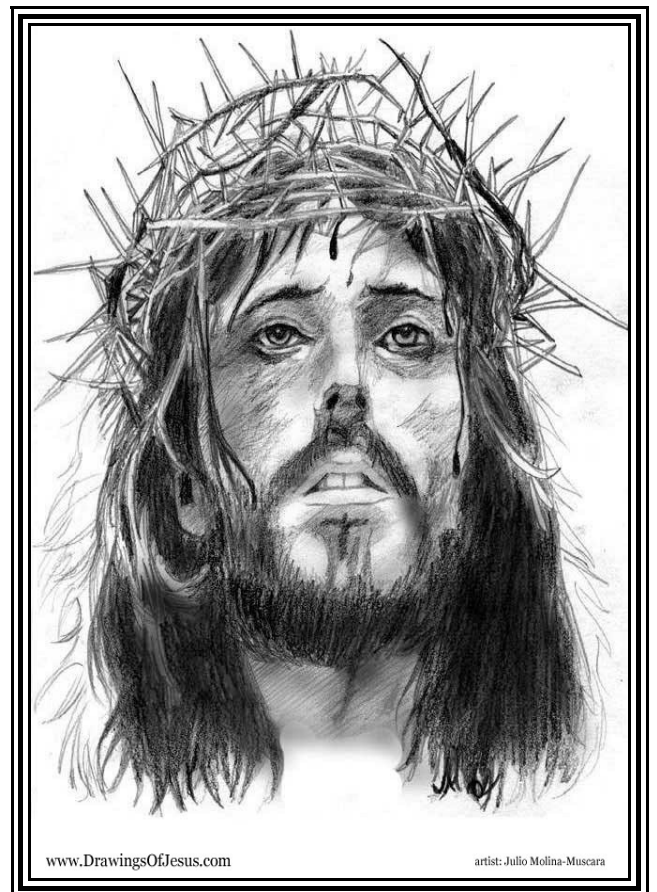
*from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (John 15: 2,5-6)*

*“But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless, and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.”* - The negative side of the parable is that instead of producing an abundant harvest from fruitful vines the land *“bears thorns and thistles.”* Jesus had used the same terminology on a number of occasions:

*“You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Then you will recognize them by their fruits.”* (Matthew 7:16-20)

*“Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold...and other are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”* (Mark 4:7-8,18)

In the context of re-crucifying Christ which precedes this segment, it is interesting to note that the word *“thorns”* which occurs here is the same term which describes the crown of thorns which was pressed down upon the brow of Christ at His crucifixion (cf. Matthew 27:29; John 19:2) God had warned Adam in the aftermath of the Fall into sin *“thorns and thistles”* would now spring up from the ground which had been cursed: *“Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field.”* (Genesis 3:18) The prophet Hosea used the same combination to describe the



*“Christ Wearing A Crown Of Thorns”  
Julio Muscata*



devastation of Israel by the brutal hordes of Assyria: ***“Samaria’s king shall perish like a twig on the face of the waters. The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, ‘Cover us!’ and to the hills, ‘Fall on us!’”*** (Hosea 10:7-8) Thus, the language used here is laden with ominous significance, which the Hebrew recipients of the epistle would not have failed to note.

The word ***“worthless”*** which serves as the contrast to the usefulness of the productive soil, carries a judgement connotation, one who fails to meet the standard of judgement. It is typically used in reference to those who have fallen away from God’s grace. Paul used the same word in his description of the ***“debased”*** minds of sinners who deliberately choose disobedience to God: ***“Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind, to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all man of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice.”*** (Romans 1:28) In 1 Corinthians 9:27, in the context of an athletic context, the word is used of one who is ***“disqualified.”***

***“But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.”*** In the closing admonitions of 2 Corinthians, the apostle uses this term four times as he warns his readers not to ***“fail to meet the standard.”***

***“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless you fail to meet the test. I hope that you will not find out that we have failed to meet the test. But we pray to God that you will not do wrong - not that you may appear to have failed to meet the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed.”*** (2 Corinthians 13:5-7)

Jannes and Jambres, the evil magicians of Pharaoh, are identified as men who were ***“disqualified regarding the faith”*** because of their disobedience and opposition to Moses before the king. (2 Timothy 3:8) Hypocrites are rejected with the same word in Paul’s warning to Titus to avoid those of



***Jannes And Jambres Before Pharaoh***



the circumcision party: ***“They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.”*** (Titus 1:16)

***“Worthless”*** is followed by ***“near to being cursed and its end is to be burned.”*** The soil



***“Moses Defeating the Magicians of Pharaoh” - Tissot***

producing thorns and thistles, that is believers who have repudiated faith in Christ are faced with imminent judgement and nothing less than the burning fires of Hell. The image of the impending curse and the land itself being consumed by fire resonates with the grim warning which Moses had pronounced to the Children of Israel before they entered the Promised Land:

***“Beware lest there be among you a man, or woman, or clan, or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, ‘I shall be safe though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart. This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The Lord will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and His jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord will single him out from among all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in the Book of the Law. And the next generation, your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land will say, when they see the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing***

*growing, where no plant can sprout, and overthrow like that of Sodom and Gommorah, Admah and Zeboiim, - which the Lord overthrew in His anger and wrath - all the nations will say, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this land? What has caused the heat of His great anger?’ Then the people will say, ‘It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt, and went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom He had not allotted to them. Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, and the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land as they are to this day.’” (Deuteronomy 29:18-28)*



*“The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah By Fire From Heaven”*

It is critically important to keep in mind that these grim words addressed to the Hebrews are not a proclamation of inevitable doom but an urgent warning intended to enable them to avoid this tragic fate. The parable of the field clearly suggested that the potential of blessing upon the productive soil was still a very real possibility although the threat of judgement was very real. Delitsch offers this helpful summary of the parable and its context:

*“The field which the author has in view is the Christian Church; those who cultivate the field are the preachers of the Word and ministers of its mysteries; they for whom these cultivators labor are God the Father (1 Corinthians 3:9)*



and the Son who is His Heir (1 Corinthians 3:6); the rain from heaven stands for the manifold manifestations of divine grace mention in Verse 4 and following, and the useful crop symbolizes the inward reception and apprehension of them; the rain often visiting this field is meant to indicate that divine grace is constantly being communicated to the Church in all its members. If the Church, then, gives signs of life in proportion to the grace of God, and the labor of His servants, it continues to be blessed, and will be blessed more and more; in the opposite case, it is ripe for the judgement which its unworthiness has incurred. What has hitherto been said is sufficient to alarm the readers. It is now time for the author to say something to prevent the despairing impression which his communications are fitted to produce. The change of tone is already indicated in the plain and awful prose of Verses 4-6 being followed by parabolic language, which in a certain measure mitigates the impression. The 'near' of Verse 8 implies that the state of the readers is not quite hopeless, that it is not yet too late for them to repent, though it may soon be so. It is possible that the apostolic writer may have floating in prophetic vision before his eyes the fiery judgement then impending on Jerusalem, which, along with those unbelieving Jews who had once raised the cry "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" would sweep away the apostates who had relapsed to Judaism. There is still time, he warns his friends to escape the coming wrath. How gladly would he pluck them from it as brands from the burning!" (Delitsch, I, p. 297)



**"The Roman Destruction Of Jerusalem - A.D. 70"**



## **Hebrews 6:9-12**

***“Though we speak in this way, yet, in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things - things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust, so as to overlook the love that you have shown for His Name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promise.”***

***“Though we speak in this way, yet, in your case...”*** - The comfort implicit in the parable is now explicitly and emphatically expressed. What follows is in no way intended to mitigate or minimize the fearful end of apostasy and ultimate malediction which preceded it. The stern warning was certainly necessary for the peril was very real, and yet the writer assures the Hebrews that ***“in your case”*** - based upon his own experience with them and observation of them that ***“we feel sure of other things - better things that belong to salvation.”*** The affection and intimacy of his reassurance is stressed by the use of the especially forceful title ***“beloved.”*** This is the only instance in which this word is used throughout the Epistle. It serves here to balance the firm sternness of the warning which had preceded it. ***“And certainly, if the Epistle was to contain the term only once, no other place could be found in which it would be more needed, or more impressive, than here.”*** (Deliltsch, I, p. 297) Dr. Cockerill that this intense word provides a most significant insight into the nature of the pastoral office: ***“This expression is not only a term of endearment, but an affirmation of their unity with the pastor as part of God’s people.”*** (Cockerill, p. 280) At the same time, this strong emphasis upon his love for the recipients of his letter is also a reminder of the fact that



***“Caiaphas and Annas Plotting to Destroy Jesus” - Gustav Dore***

his warning and concern were also motivated by his loving concern for their spiritual well-being. The verb ***“we feel sure”*** does not merely express hopeful desire. Rather, it characterizes a solid conviction which is the result of close acquaintance and careful

observation. The nature of that observed evidence will be presented in the next Verse. St. Paul had used similar language to describe apostolic confidence in his audience in the conclusion of his letter to the Romans: ***“I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.”*** (Romans 15:14)

***“We feel sure of better things, things that belong to salvation.”*** - Hebrews consistently uses the term ***“better”*** to express the superiority of the eternal destiny which God has graciously prepared for His people and the effectiveness of the means of grace which He has provided to convey that destiny to His people in contrast to the temporary, inferior things of this world. That is the sense in which the word is used here. The clarification of the parallel phrase ***“things that belong to salvation”*** makes that point particularly clear. The wonder of this gift is seen in glaring contrast to the hellish fate of those who fall away from the Christ and cause others to fall by their blasphemous repudiation the Lord whom they know within their hearts to be the Savior of the world.



***“The High Priest Caiaphas”***

***“For God is not so unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown in His name in serving the saints as you still do.”*** - The writer explains the basis for his confidence by combining two themes which are consistent throughout the epistle - the faithfulness of God and the faithfulness of God’s people in reflecting His love throughout their lives. The balance of Chapter 6 will document God’s faithfulness to His promises in the perfect fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Verse 10 uses a double negative - ***“God is not so unjust”*** - to stress the righteousness of God in contrast to the characteristic unrighteousness of men. The righteous justice of God is beyond dispute. St. Paul had previously declared this to the Romans:

***“The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written: ‘That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged.’ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict His wrath on us? (I speak in a human way!) By no means!”*** (Romans 3:2-6)

The Greek word which appears here is “*adikia*” which literally means “*unrighteous.*” Thus, the justice of God is the expression of His perfect righteousness. So, too, His gracious mercy and gift of salvation flow from His righteousness. The Psalmist rejoices: ***“Then I called upon the name of the Lord; ‘O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!’ Gracious is the Lord and righteous. Our God is merciful.”*** (Psalm 116:4-5) The perfect righteousness of God makes it impossible for Him ***“to overlook your work.”*** The verb “*overlook*” is characteristically



***“Abraham Entertaining His Angel Guests” - Rembrandt***

used with reference to men. It specifically means “*to forget.*” It appears twice in Hebrews 13 in verses 2 and 16: ***“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby, some have entertained angels unaware...Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”*** The ascription of a human characteristic or activity to God is technically called “*anthropomorphism*” - speaking of God as if He were a man because human language is inadequate to express the realities of the divine. Such language is common throughout Scripture. Here a few examples must suffice. ***“Sing praises to the Lord, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples His deeds. For He who avenges blood is mindful of them, He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.”*** (Psalm 9:7-8); ***“I say to God, my Rock, ‘Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of my enemy?’”*** (Psalm 42:9);

***“But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.’ Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands, your walls are continually before Me.”*** (Isaiah 49:14-17)

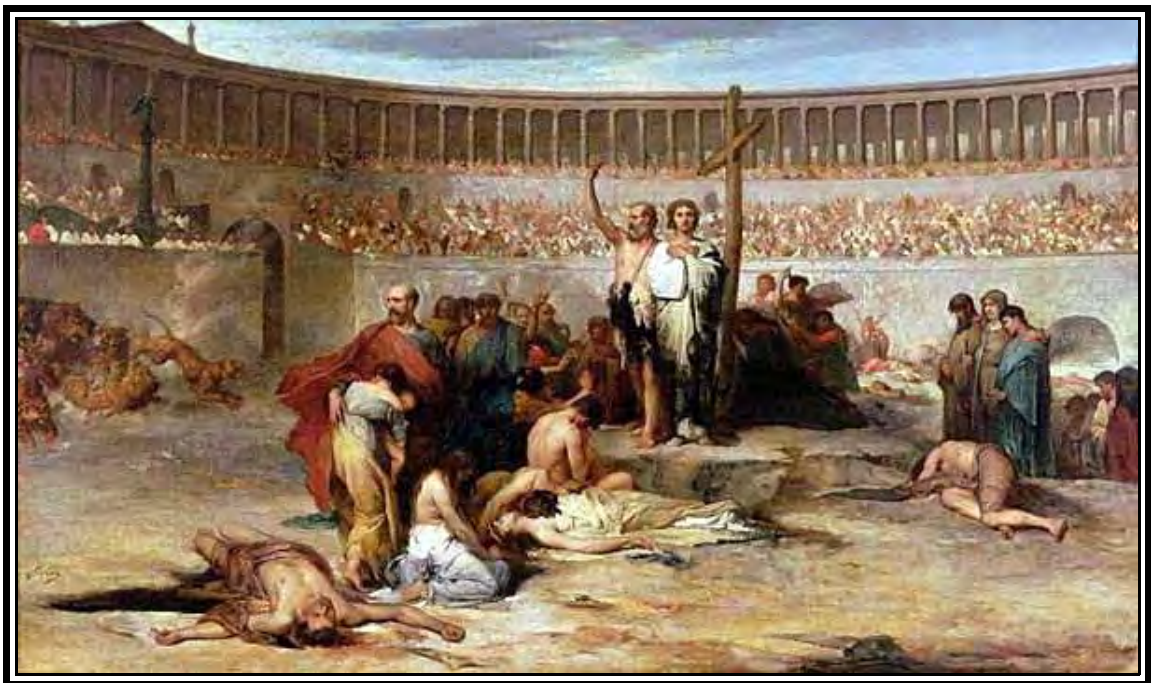


***son of her womb? Even these may forget, and yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have you engraved on the palms of my hands, your walls are continually before Me.” (Isaiah 49:14-17)***

That which God could not possibly be overlooked by our just and righteous God is ***“your work and the love that you have shown for His Name in serving the saints, as you still do.”*** Once again, the close familiarity which the writer enjoys with the recipients of his letter is clearly evident. He knows them well. Later, in Chapter 10:32-34, he will describe the circumstances in which their faithfulness was demonstrated in more specific detail:

***“But recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publically exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession, and an abiding one.”***

These were not easy times for those who confessed the Lord Jesus. No only could they expect the scorn and ridicule of their society and families, but the policy of the Roman government was constantly fluctuating between benign indifference and brutal persecution, depending on the whim of a particular emperor, or the political needs of local Roman officials for whom Christians often proved to be convenient scapegoats. In these times of persecution, these Hebrews, whomever they may have been, stood steadfast. They did not ***“shrink back”*** (10:39) but faithfully put their commitment to Christ into practice no matter what the personal cost to themselves may have been.



***“The Fearless Death of Christian Martyrs In the Arena” - Gustav Schmalz***

*“At that time, the members of the congregation had identified themselves with the stigma attached to the Name of Jesus and had publically demonstrated their love for Him and for one another in their boldness before their persecutors, their practical concern for those abused or imprisoned, and their cheerful acceptance of the seizure of their property. Their loyalty to Christ and to one another on that occasion was an expression of firm faith and compelling hope as much as love.” (Lane, 47A, p. 144)*



*“Nero’s Torches” by Smierdinski*

*“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end...”* - It is the apostle’s *“desire”* that *“the same earnestness”* which characterized their bold faith in the past may continue indefinitely into the future *“until the end.”* *“The end”* points not only to the individual end or each believer in their own death when they would be taken home to heave to reign with Jesus, but also carries the eschatological connotation of the end of time brought about by the triumphant return of Christ on the Last Day. In the meantime, past success does not guarantee constant continuation in the future. The Christian cannot rest of his laurels but must constantly be renewing and strengthening his faith to meet the challenges still to come. This is the basic reality of faith as an ever changing dynamic, never static but always changing as the individual is either growing stronger in his trust and obedience thru the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, or growing weaker and more vulnerable to the temptations and distractions of the world. If faith is to persevere, particularly in such times of persecution, it is absolutely essential that the believer be blessed with *“a firm grasp on the reality of God’s promises for the future and His provision for their attainment.”* (Cockerill, p. 282) *“Desire”* is an intense term which expresses the writer’s yearning for the personal salvation of *“each one*

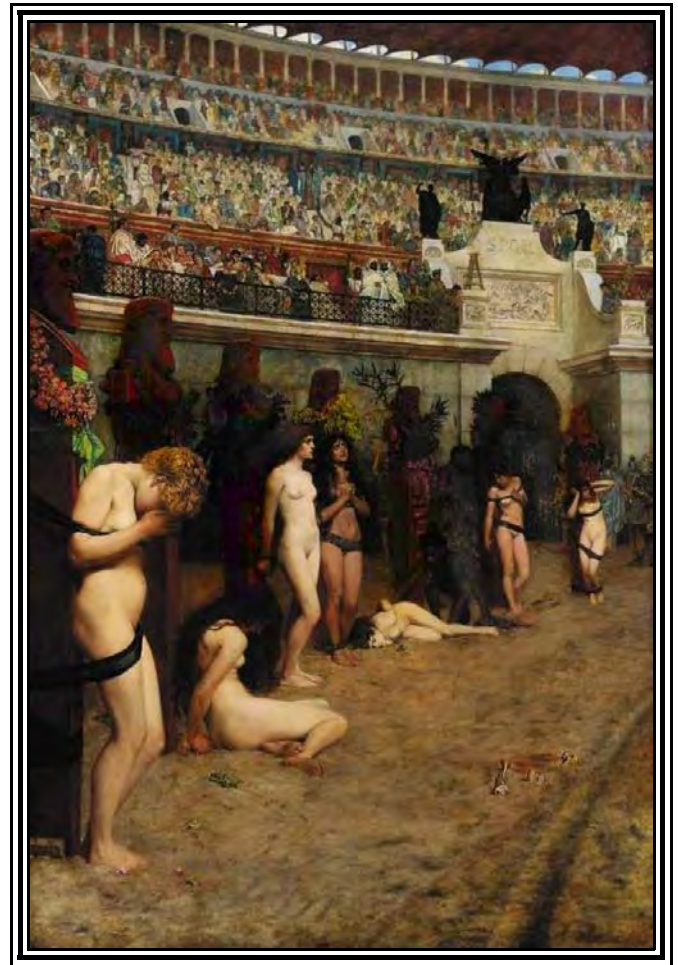


*of you” and it is from that longing that both the severity of the warning have come. “Earnestness” refers to an burning zeal, a particularly strong desire which has, in the past manifested itself in faithful and consistent action. A key component of the faith is always “the full assurance of hope.” The same connection between faith and hope is expressed in Chapter 11:1 as the roll call of the heroes of faith is introduced: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” St. Paul frequently makes the same connection between faith and hope in his epistles: “Loves bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things...So now, faith, hope and love abide; these three, but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:7.13);*

*“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into His grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:1-5)*

*“For the creation was subjected to futility not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption to obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God...And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:20-25)*

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He caused us to be born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who*



*“Christian Bound For Burning In the Arena”  
Gustav Schmalz*



***by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time...Therefore, preparing your hearts for action, being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:1-5,13)***

This hope, the anchor of faith, is most fundamentally a confidence and trust in the promises of God, the assurance that God will keep His Word as will be defined in the following paragraphs. *“The pastor would have them live with complete confidence that these eternal blessings are as certain as the unchanging promises of God.”* (Cockerill, p. 282)

***“So that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”*** - The contrast to the burning zeal and steadfast hope of faith which manifests itself in consistent discipleship is presented in Verse 12. The opposite to everything which has previously been described is summed up here in one word - ***“sluggish.”*** This segment of admonition has begun in Chapter 5:11 with the same Greek word, which in that instance the ESV had translated as ***“dull of hearing”***: ***“About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing.”*** The

ESV's rendering here catches the sense of the text precisely. It means lazy, indifferent, careless, to point of using any excuse to avoid action or effort. In Proverbs, King Solomon heaps scorn upon ***“the sluggard”*** again and again, using the Hebrew equivalent for the Greek word which appears here. The particular attention paid to this sin reveals the unique danger it poses to the believer.



***“The Sluggard” by Rikaert***

***“Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber; save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter; like a bird from the hand of the fowler. Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you***

*like a robber, and want like an armed man.”* (Proverbs 6:4-11)



*“A Contemporary Sluggard Eating Spaghetti While Playing Video Games”*

*“I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense; and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.”* (Proverbs 24:30-34)

*“Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him.”* (Proverbs 10:26) *“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.”* (Proverbs 13:4) *“The way of the sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a smooth highway.”* (Proverbs 15:19) *“The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing.”* (Proverbs 20:4) *“The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!’”* (Proverbs 22:13) *“The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor, but the righteous gives and does not hold back.”* (Proverbs 21:26) With biting sarcasm, Solomon described *“the sluggard”* as one so averse to effort that he will claim that there is a lion in the street outside his house that he can remain in his bed. He is fastened as tightly to that bed than a door is to its hinges. Rather than lift his bowl from the table *“the sluggard”* allows his face to flop down into the food therein so that he can slurp it up with minimum effort. And yet, in a most ironic fashion, such a man often considers himself to be the wisest of the wise. The combination of sloth and arrogance paves the way for his utter and complete downfall.



***“Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!’ As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer sensibly.” (Proverbs 26:12-16)***



***“‘SLOTH’ From Pieter Bruegel’s Series On The Seven Deadly Sins”***

Classic 16<sup>th</sup> Century Puritan commentator John Owen offers this insightful definition of the sin of sloth and the particular threat which it poses to the believer in his nine volume commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews:

*“The apostle gives a warning against an evil or vice which is directly the opposite of the duty which he had been pressing upon them. If they were to yield to this evil, it would prevent them from carrying out that duty...We are slothful in hearing when we do not learn the truths of the gospel with diligence and industry; when we do not make diligent use of the means which God has provided for us to learn and understand them. And we are slothful in practice when we fail to make the effort to put those gracious blessings to use or carry out those duties, which the truth which we have learned requires of us...Sloth is a vicious attitude, one of the worst of which afflict the mind of man. No good principle or habit can remain in a mind where sloth prevails. The*



*heathen, who built their religions upon nothing more nature and the observation of the ways of men in the world, warn against this vice more than any other. Indeed, is very easy to observe that sloth increases the degeneracy of mankind as the point of entry for the most sordid vices, and, at the same time, is the most effective obstacle to any attempt to practice anything virtuous or praiseworthy. But what more can we say, in light of what has already been said by the King. Solomon has so graphically described this vice with its vile nature and ruinous effects in so many passages in the Proverbs, that there is nothing more that must or could be added. Spiritual sloth is a habitual disinterest in or indifference to the things of the Spirit, which is the consequence of unbelief and a love for worldly things. It causes one to neglect responsibility and ignore danger. The man afflicted with spiritual sloth becomes careless and remiss. He fails to carry out his responsibilities. Spiritual sloth begins with negligence and ends with the destruction of any security in the faith.” (Owen, Vol.5, p. 205)*



*“A Sloth At Rest”*

The example which the writer holds before the Hebrews which they are to emulate if they avoid the profound perils of sluggishness is ***“those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”*** The concept of inspiration and empowerment from the examples of the former saints runs throughout the epistle. The example of these triumphant saints should be imitated to achieve the same victorious result. This theme will culminate in the *“Roll Call Of The Heroes of Faith”* in Chapter 11 which runs the gamut of the foremost examples of the triumphant believers throughout the Old Testament. The introduction of the idea here sets the stage for the transition to Abraham in the paragraphs to come. The combination of ***“faith and patience”*** in these saints, along with the description of salvation as an inheritance of the promises carries on the theme of ***“hope until the end”*** from the preceding sentence. The apostle’s fundamental concern is that these Hebrews will be able to go the

distance, so to speak, enduring the difficulties still to come as a result of their unshakable confidence in the promises of God. Those difficulties are suggested by the use of the Greek noun “*macrothumia*” (“**patience**”) which literally means “*great suffering*.”

*“Their present situation has not yet revealed the reality of the rich and glorious blessings contained in the promise. It is easy, then, to grow faint and slothful. Their endeavor then should be to hold fast the full assurance of this hope until the end and not let it slip from their grasp. Instead, let them be ‘imitators’ of those who through faith which embraces the unseen as though it were visible, and the future as if present, and through long suffering, which without dejection or despondency, awaits with good courage the long delayed future, obtain, at last, possession of the promises. Faith here is faith in what is promised, and patient endurance is the result and reward of this faith, through which they will come into the full enjoyment of the promised blessings themselves.”* (Delitsch, I, p. 304)



*“Abraham Called By God From Ur of the Chaldees” by Szyk*

### **Hebrews 6:13-20**

*“For when God made a promise to Abraham, since He had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’ And thus Abraham, having waited patiently, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes, an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*

*“For when God made a promise to Abraham...”*- What better example to prove



his point than Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation! The specific incident which is here referred to is God's promise to Abraham on Mount Moriah after the offering of Isaac.

***“And the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said: “By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of the heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed My voice.” (Genesis 22:15-19)***

This episode serves both to illustrate how the faith and patience of the believer will surely find their reward on the basis of the promise of God and to remind the Hebrew Christians that their faith has a firm historical foundation in the ancient promise which God made to Abraham. Later, in the Roll Call of the heroes of faith, the writer will refer to this event once again as the supreme demonstration of Abraham's supreme confidence of the faithfulness of God. All of the previous promises which God had made hinged on Isaac, the promised son through whom the descendants of Abraham would come. Then God tests Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac. Hebrews suggests that Abraham's trust in God went so far as to believe that if he killed his only son as a sacrifice that God would raise him up from the dead in order to keep his original promises:

***“By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises, was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” (Hebrews 11:17-19)***

This is the first instance in Scripture where God takes a formal oath. The solemnity and certainty of that oath is indicated by the fact that His oath is guaranteed by the highest and most sacred authority, that of God Himself. The text places significant emphasis upon the fact that God swore by Himself in order to use the unique circumstances of God's



***God's Promise To Abraham  
16<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Bible Woodcut***



commitment to Abraham upon Mount Moriah as a unique and ultimate demonstration of the reliability of God and His word.

***“Since He had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself...For people swear by something greater than themselves and in all their disputes, an oath is final for confirmation.”*** - This fact is precisely reflected in the original text of Genesis 22:15 - ***“By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord...”*** That which had initiated this most solemn commitment was the faith and obedience of the patriarch in response to God’s command that he offer up his only son Isaac as a sacrifice. The oath is taken after Isaac has been spared and a substitute sacrifice provided by God in the form of a ram whose horns are entangled in a nearby bush.

***“So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise, the unchangeable character of His purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie...”*** - God’s promise is, in and of itself, inviolable. God cannot lie. Untruthfulness is a contradiction of the essence of His nature. ***“The interesting thing about this is God’s promise itself is inviolable...God could as soon cease to exist as to fail to fulfill what He has vowed.”*** (Allen, p. 397) The oath does not actually bolster the reliability of that which the Lord has said. It was already completely and absolutely reliable because it was God who said it. The oath serves only to reassure

Abraham and his descendants after him. In that sense, God was condescending to utilize a human custom by means of which unreliable men sought to strengthen their commitments to one another. This is indicated by the fact that God had nothing by which to take His oath that was greater than He Himself. Philo of Alexandria, the early church father notes the delightful irony of this: ***“Well confirming His promise by an oath, and that an oath which was worthy of God, thou seest that God swearest not by another, for there is nothing better than He, but by Himself, for He is the best of all!”*** (Delitsch, I, p. 306)



God makes Himself the Guarantor of the promise which is the strongest and most reliable, unbreakable guarantee which could ever have been provided. Hebrews will return to this theme in Chapters 8 and 9 where Christ is identified as the guarantor of the new covenant sealed in His own blood by His once

for all sacrifice of Himself upon the cross. The Jewish recipients of this letter could not have failed to recall the divine oath by which Christ is declared the High Priest of the New Covenant throughout eternity: ***“The Lord has sworn, and He will not change His mind. You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*** (Psalm 110:4) That connection will be reinforced as the text transitions to a detailed description of Christ as a high priest of the order of Melchizedek.

***“We who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to trust in the hope set before us.”*** - In the Hebrews 6 context of reassurance to unsteady believers of God’s absolute reliability in terms of future promises, all this serves perfectly to make the author’s point. Father Abraham, the founder of both nation and church, trusted the promise under the most extreme testing, patiently waited, and thereby received the perfect fulfillment of the promise in Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world who was his ultimate descendant.

***“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place beyond the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*** - The previous sentence ended with an appeal to ***“the hope set before us.”*** In order that his readers might fully grasp the nature and certainty of that hope, the text

now provides three illustrations. First, this hope ***“is a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.”*** The anchor was a familiar metaphor in the maritime culture of the Mediterranean world.



***“Abraham Blessed By Melchizedek***

*“In Greek literature the image was used constantly to illustrate the stability provided by adherence to virtue, and especially to hope. The basis for the comparison was the security which firm anchorage provided for a ship. Thus the philosopher Epictetus - ‘we ought not fasten a ship to one small anchor, nor our life to one single hope.’ “ (Lane, p. 153)*

*“As to the nature and use of an anchor, it is to hold fast the ship to which it belongs and keep it steady. It is principally of use in two situations: 1. In storms and tempests when the art and skill of the mariners are overcome by the*



*fierceness of the wind and sea so that they cannot steer the ship on its proper course nor preserve it from rocks and reefs, then is an anchor cast out, which, if it has the properties here mentioned, will hold fast and retain the ship in safety against all outward violence. 2. When ships are in their harbor, that they may not be tossed up and down uncertainly, that the sailors may attend to their business and not be driven to and fro with every wind (which the apostle alludes to in Ephesians 4:13-14), an anchor is cast to keep the vessel steady in its position.” (Owen, V, p. 282)*

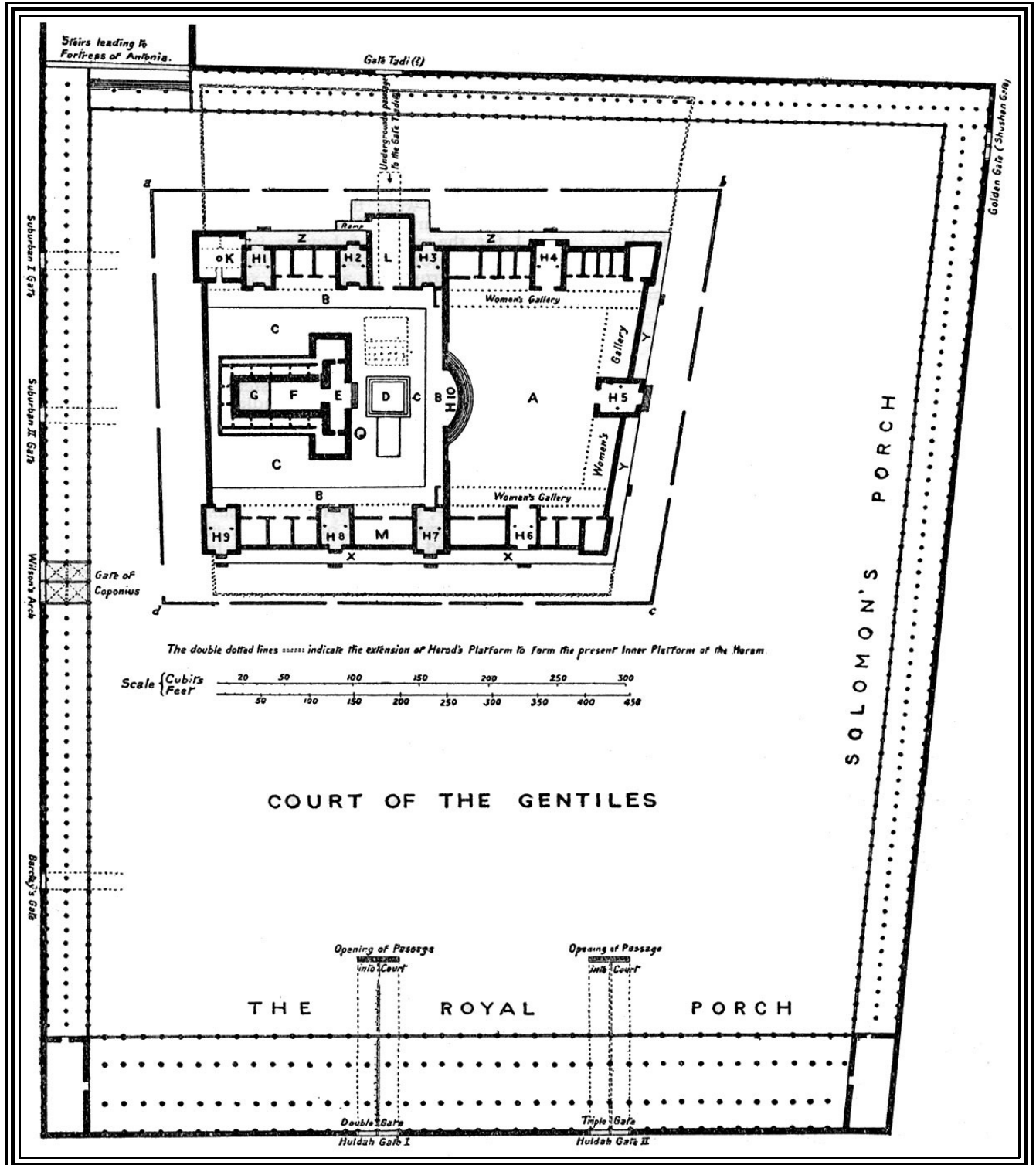


A well-placed anchor holds a ship safe and secure so that it cannot drift into the treacherous, ever changing currents which seek to drive it off course or cast it up upon the rocks which would destroy it. Two emphatic adjectives - **“sure and steadfast”** characterize this anchor as an image of the Christian’s hope. These are commonly combined, both in Scripture and Greek literature generally to convey a sense of reliability, certainty and firmness. This anchor will hold. There need be no doubt of that. Early Church father St. John Chrysostom contends that the image of an anchor was the perfect analogy to convey a message of reassurance to the storm tossed believers of the Hebrew congregations.

*“Paul shows that while we are still in the world and not yet departed from this life, we are already living amid God’s promises. For through hope we are already in heaven...As the anchor, dropped from the vessel, does not allow the ship to be tossed about, even if ten thousand winds agitate it but, being depended upon, makes it steady, so also does hope. Note what a fitting image he has chosen. He did not speak of a foundation, which would not be suitable, but of an anchor. For that which is on the tossing sea and seems not to be very firmly fixed stands on the water as upon the land, and is shaken, and yet is not moved. For in regard to those who are very firm, and who love the truth, Christ, with good reason spoke of one who ‘has built his house on a rock.’ But in respect to those who are giving way and who ought to be carried through by hope, Paul has more suitably set down this metaphor. For the surge and the great storm toss the boat, but hope does not permit it to be carried back and forth, although winds innumerable agitate it, so that unless we had this*



hope, we would long ago have been sunk. Nor is this only in things spiritual, but also in the affairs of life, that one may find the power of hope great. Whatever it may be, in merchandise, in farming, in a military expedition, unless one sets this before him, he would not even make the effort. But the writer does not merely say 'anchor' but 'sure and steadfast,' that is unshakeable." (Heen, p. 94)



***“A hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf”*** - From the everyday illustration of the role of Christian hope as the anchor of the soul, the author returns to the history of God’s covenant with the Children of Israel to provide yet another image to reinforce the reliability of the Christian hope for Hebrew Christians struggling with the challenges which confronted them as they struggled to come to terms with the transition from Judaism to Christianity. The most powerful and poignant ritual of the Sinai covenant was the entrance in the Holy of Holies by the High Priest once a year on “*Yom Kippur*” the Day of Atonement. The Tabernacle, and later the Temples constructed in Jerusalem had all been designed by God to express the concept of increasing exclusivity as one approached the sacred Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies. The nearer one came to the Ark which was the tangible representation of the fulfillment of God’s promise to dwell in the midst of His chosen people, the more limited access became. The Temple Sanctuary was surrounded by a series of courtyards. The outermost was the Court of the Gentiles, which was open to all. Next came the Court of Israel to which only Jews could be admitted. Inside the Court of Israel was the Court of the Men of Israel which was restricted to Israelite men. Beyond the Court of the Men of Israel was the Court of the Priests to which only priests and Levites had access. The great Altar of Burnt Offerings stood in the front of the Court of the Priests. At the heart of the Temple complex was the imposing Sanctuary itself. The first chamber in the Sanctuary was the Holy Place which could be entered only by priests who had been assigned responsibility to conduct the daily services and rituals for that day. The interior of the Sanctuary was separated into two sections by a massive curtain, actually two curtains. Each was eighty-two feet high, twenty-four feet wide, and four inches thick woven of priceless blue, purple and scarlet materials, embroidered with golden cherubim. Each curtain stopped just short of the



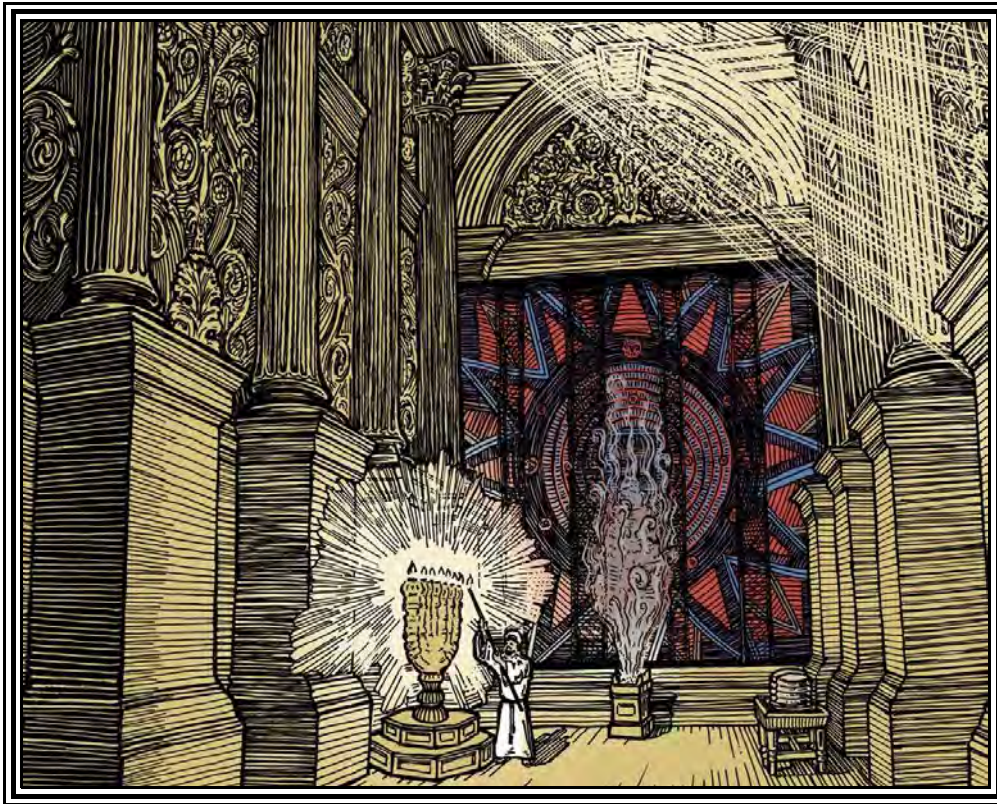
***“The Rending Of The Temple Curtain” - William Bell Scott***

wall on one side of the chamber. The Holy of Holies was behind this huge curtain. No one was ever permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, with one single exception. In the Torah God had established the festival of “*Yom Kippur*” as the day when the anointed High Priest, as the representative of the Twelve Tribes of Israel - signified by the twelve gleaming gem stones on his golden breastplate - would come into the presence of the Lord within the Holy of Holies. He would come bearing the blood of the propitiatory sacrifice which would cover over sin in the eyes of God. The ritual specified that he was to bring the blood offering into God’s presence twice. The first time, the blood he would sprinkle upon the golden cover of the Ark, the Mercy Seat, would be for his own sins. He would then return, passing between the curtains and obtain another offering of blood from the same sacrificial animal. The second blood offering was to cover over the sins of the people before God. The Gospel of Matthew, the earliest and most Hebrew oriented of the four Gospels, reports that at the moment of Christ’s death upon the cross, the Temple Veil was torn apart, signaling that the barrier wall of sin which had divided fallen mankind from God. ***“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, and the earth shook and the rocks were split.”*** (Matthew 27:51)



***“Reconstruction of the Temple Veil Based Upon Ancient Sources”***





*“Reconstruction of the Holy Place In Herod’s Temple Showing The Veil  
Which Divides It From the Holy Of Holies”*

The reference here to *“a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain”* is unmistakably and allusion to the ancient Hebrew ritual of *“Yom Kippur”* particularly in light of the rending of that great barrier at the moment of Christ’s death. For Jewish Christians this would have been the most effective and powerful way to convey the meaning of that which Christ had conclusively, once for all, accomplished on their behalf. That perfect redemption had been foreshadowed for more than a thousand years by the ceremonies of *“Yom Kippur.”* In the forthcoming chapters, the Epistle will expand and detail this concept at considerable length. That which the Aaronic High Priests had done for countless generations, first in the Tabernacle and then in a series of Temples built in Jerusalem had now been fulfilled and completed, but not merely in an earthly building and an anticipatory ritual, with imperfect High Priests who had to expiate for their own sins before they could present the cleansing blood of the sacrifice on behalf of the people. Christ, the great High Priest, had offered His own holy blood as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind, past, present and future in the actual heavenly dwelling place of God to which believers now have access through Him.

The fundamental difference between that which Aaron and his descendants had done and that which has been accomplished by Christ is expressed by the identification of Christ as *“a forerunner on our behalf.”* The term *“forerunner”* occurs only here in the New Testament. In classical Greek it is used in a variety of ways to refer to messengers, athletes winning a race, advance military scouts, and the ship at the head of a formation. In the latter

context it would fit with the anchor imagery of the preceding phrase. Here, the emphasis is upon the assurance that the path which Christ has forged makes it possible for His people to follow in His steps, and that was the very purpose for which He did all that He has done. Thus Christ is not merely *“a forerunner.”* The title alone implies the sense of the text. But so that there be no ambiguity whatsoever here the qualifying phrase *“on our behalf”* is added. *“The enthroned Christ in the heavenly sanctuary as our forerunner is the guarantee that we shall one day enter heaven as well. As our anchor of hope, He secures our entrance...Jesus leads His people and goes before them.”* (Lane, p. 403) The assurance of the text could not be more clearly stated. Christ, as the perfect fulfillment of the High Priestly office, which had been designed by God in His eternal wisdom to foreshadow the work of the Messiah, has gone before us into the divine Presence in heaven, thereby to demonstrate the accomplishment of the perfect sacrifice of His own blood as the ransom price for our sins. His access proves God’s acceptance of the His sacrifice and the Father’s unconditional approval of all that which His Son has done. The prophet had foretold this unconditional approval many centuries before in the vivid language of the Old Testament:

*“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul, He shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the Righteous One, My Servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide Him a portion with the many, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.”* (Isaiah 53:10-12)



*“Rending Of The Temple Veil*

St. Paul described the same divine approbation in his emphasis upon the state of exaltation which God would bestow upon His Servant, following His willing acceptance of humiliation and death:

*“Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, although He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing*



*to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of a man. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by being obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the Name that is above every name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!”* (Philippians 2:5-12)



And yet there is still more to be learned from this amazing language. To say that Christ has gone beyond the Veil into the heavenly Most Holy Place ***“having become a High Priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek”*** indicates that His rending of the veil was more than a demonstration of victory over sin and death; more than an affirmation of God’s acceptance of the sacrifice of His Son for the sin/guilt of humanity. His entrance is that of a priest. Accordingly, the God/man returns to the presence as a Mediator, as one who will conduct the priestly office ***“forever”*** on our behalf. Chapter 7 will continue and expand this concept as it defines ***“the order of Melchizedek”*** and its unique priestly function.

In the context of assurance to struggling saints, sorely tried by the temptations and opposition of this sinful world, the reality that Christ lived in this world as do we, and that He endured and overcame all of the obstacles which often seem so overwhelming to us, becomes a powerful word of encouragement - ***“sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.”***

*“Now the Lord Jesus, being entered into heaven as our Forerunner, also gives us manifold security of our entrance therein at the appointed time. He gives us this assurance in John 14:3,19 - ***“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also...Yet a little while, and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live.”*** For He has passed through all the storms of trials, persecutions and temptations, and death itself, that we are exposed to, and yet has safely landed in eternal glory. His anchor was trust and hope in all His storms. Hebrew 2:13-18: ***“I will put my trust in Him...He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has power over death, that is, the devil...Therefore, He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become****



*a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.” And His trust was tried to the utmost: Psalm 22:6-10) “But I am a worm, and not a man. Scorned by the Lord and despised by the people. All who see Me, mock Me; they make their mouths at Me and they wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord deliver Him; let Him rescue Him for He delights in Him. Yet You are He who took Me from the womb, You made Me trust in You at My mother’s breasts. On You I was cast from My birth, and from My mother’s womb you have been My God.” His trust preserved Him in all of His trials and will be no less reliable for His entire church. In this way, He has gone before us. He is able to provide for our needs, and has given us in Himself a pledge of success.” (Owen, V, p. 290)*



*“Abraham Greeting Melchizedek” Jan van Luyken*

## ***Hebrews Chapter 7***

*(1) For this Melchizedek, King of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him, (2) and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth of everything. He is first, by translation of his name king of righteousness, and then he is also King of Salem, that is, king of peace. (3) He is without*

*father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he continues a priest forever. (4) See how great this man was, to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! (5) And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office, have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. (6) But this man, who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. (7) It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. (8) In the one case, tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. (9) One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes, through Abraham, (10) for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. (11) Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the Law), what need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? (12) For when there is a change in the priesthood, there*



*"Abraham Receiving The Blessing Of Melchizedek"  
Jan van Eyck*

*is necessarily a change in the law as well. (13) For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe from which no one has ever served at the altar. (14) For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe, Moses said nothing about priests. (15) This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, (16) who has become a priest, not on the basis of legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. (17) For it is witnessed of him, 'You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.' (18) For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness, (19) (for the Law made*

*nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. (20) And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly were made priests, were made such without an oath, (21) but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to Him; 'The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, You are a priest forever.' (22) This makes Jesus the Guarantor of a better covenant. (23) The former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office. (24) But He holds His priesthood permanently, because He continues forever. (25) Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw*



*near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (26) For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a great high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinner, and exalted above the heavens. (27) For He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people, since He did this once for all when He offered up Himself. (28) For the Law appointed men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the Law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.*

### **Verses 1-3**

*“This Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the five kings and blessed him, and to him, Abraham apportioned a tenth of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he continues a priest forever.”*

*“This Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God....”* - This shadowy figure of Melchizedek now reappears, having been mentioned previously in Hebrews 5:11-6:8. In this instance he will be a key character in the description of the perfect High Priesthood of Christ which occupies the longest segment of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 7:1-10:18. Melchizedek has always been the subject of intense fascination among scholars of both Old and New Testaments. The flashpoints which have stimulated this fascination across the centuries are the facts (1) that this man is the ruler/priest of **“Salem”** which was to become Jerusalem, the most important metropolis in Scripture: (2) that he was not only a royal monarch of Salem, but also **“priest of the Most High God,”** accordingly, not only a believer in the true God, but the chief prelate, the High Priest, if you will, of the worship of the true God in that place: and, (3) the patriarch Abraham acknowledges the authenticity of both his faith and his priesthood by accepting his blessing and presenting him with the customary tithes and offerings in return. The implications of all this are mind-boggling. Rabbinic tradition identifies Melchizedek as Shem, the oldest and most devout son of Noah. Other legends link him thru Shem to a unique



*“Melchizedek’s Blessing Of Abraham”*



blessing from Adam at the time of his death (cf. Notes, p. 184) Ginzberg's comprehensive seven volume collection of the Legends of the Jews reports that Shem, as Melchizedek made an error in the blessing of Abraham, placing his own name before that of God, and was therefore deprived of the honor which would have been his to be designated as the father of the chosen people. Because of his mistake, the honor passed to Abraham instead.

The early Christian Church fathers were equally eager to attempt to identify Melchizedek. Four major schools of thought flourished in the early centuries of Christian history: (1) that he was a divine being of some sort, either a pre-incarnate form of Christ, the Holy Spirit, or, as a third century heretical group called the Melchizedekians, claimed another form of divine being superior to Christ: (2) that Melchizedek was an angel, perhaps a unique manifestation of the Archangel Michael: (3) That he was Shem the eldest son of Noah: (4) that Melchizedek was an actual Canaanite Priest King and a believer in the true God, who ruled the tribal group which came to be known as the Jebusites from their capital of Salem which would later be known as Jerusalem. As intriguing (and heretical in many instances) as all of this speculation may be, it is not relevant to the appearance of Melchizedek in this discussion of Jesus as the perfect fulfillment of the Old Testament office of the High Priest.

The crucial point of this entire discussion is to demonstrate the inherent and absolute superiority of the high priesthood of Jesus with that of the Aaronic high priests and the Levitical priesthood which are the heart of Judaism. The key Bible passage used in the argument here is Psalm 110 - which was recognized throughout Judaism in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century as a prophecy of the Messiah. The first three verses of the Chapter re-introduce



*"The Blessing Of Abraham By Melchizedek" - Peter Paul Rubens*



*“Melchizedek’s Blessing of Abraham” - Franz Francken*

Melchizedek and point out six salient facts about him, drawn basically from Genesis 14:17-20, the historical introduction of the King: (1) He was King of Salem; (2) He was a priest of God Most High. (3) His personal name means “*King of Righteousness*.” (4) His official title was King of Salem which means “*King of Peace*.” Both “*righteousness*” and “*peace*” are blessings characteristically associated with the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament. Their citation here, even without specific mention of the fact, identifies the High Priest Melchizedek as a messianic figure, a prototype of the Messiah High Priest, which is, of course, the theme of this entire segment. (5) Nothing is known of his origin or background - “***He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days.***” (6) Nothing is known of the duration or end of his life - “***having neither...end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.***” The author assumes the reliability of the Genesis account and furthermore assumes that “***Salem***” is identical with Jerusalem and that “***God Most High***” or “***the Most High God***” (both are viable translations of the Hebrew title is an authentic designation for Yahweh, the true God (cf. Mark 5:7; Acts 7:48; 16:17). For those of us who continue to believe that both the Genesis and the Hebrews texts are the inspired word of God the understanding of the Genesis event presented here is conclusive, no matter how colorful its various interpretations have been.

***“Resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.”*** - These crucial words serve to make the point intended by the author of Hebrews. In effect, he is saying, the Gentile Priest/King Melchizedek, about whom we know so little, is infinitely superior to the entire Levitical priesthood with all of its imperfect high priests, about whom we know so much. Nonetheless, the perfect, everlasting, high priesthood of the Son of God is infinitely superior





*“Early Christian Mosaic Depicting The Three Acceptable Sacrifices Of Abel, Melchizedek, And Abraham With the Hand Of God Reaching Out to Receive Them” - From The Cathedral of Ravenna*

even to that of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was but a man, a fascinating man to be sure, but nothing more. His timelessness, expressed in the preceding phrases, is simply a matter of lack of historical documentation. He had parents and genealogy. He had a date of birth and a date of death. His royal priesthood began and ended. We simply do not know when. Jesus, on the other hand, is truly *“the Son of God.”* This most critically important description of the identity of Christ appears three times in the Epistle, used in each instance as a way to express the substantive superiority of Christ over another lesser being (cf. Hebrews 6:6; 7:3; 10:29) It would appear that the author reserves this most solemn designation for critical moments in his argument when the inherent superiority of the Savior must be made in a manner that is absolutely irrefutable. In this instance, as *“the Son of God”* Jesus actually does exist beyond time and space. He is without beginning and without end. That is to say, the divine Christ is eternal and His perfect priesthood is therefore also eternal. Melchizedek is nothing more than an imperfect prototype of Christ, but even Melchizedek is infinitely superior to the high priests of Israel. In this way, Hebrews makes the point that the High Priesthood of Christ is beyond comparison with the pathetic, corrupt, and failed high priesthood of the descendants of Aaron, which is, nonetheless, the heart of Judaism. Those who nostalgically yearned to return to Judaism could not contest these realities and these realities revealed their nostalgia as nothing more than empty self-delusion.

### *Verses 4-10*

*See how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the spoils! And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the*