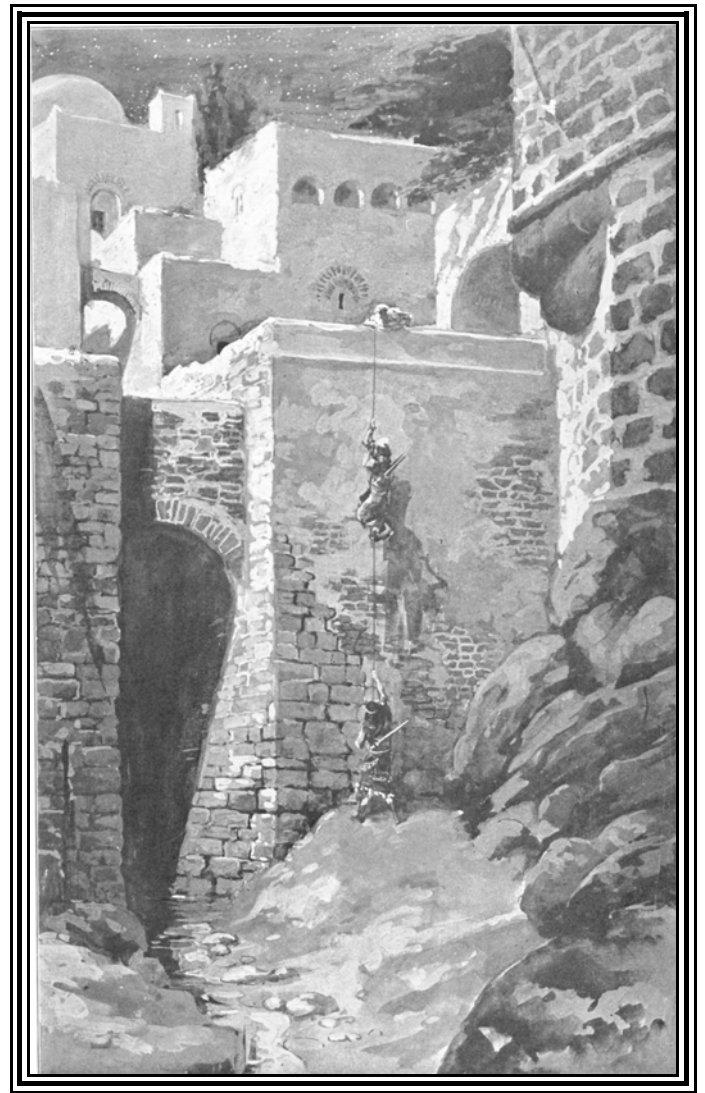


obedient faith achieves its objective because God intervenes for its vindication.” (Lane, p. 378)

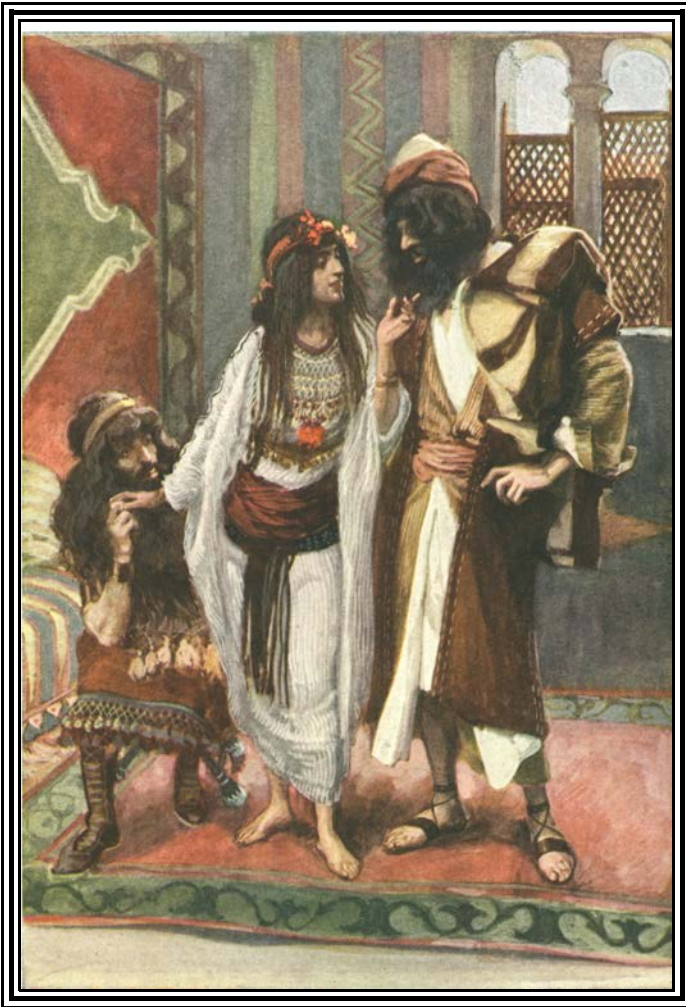
“By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.” - The inclusion of Rahab in the roll of the faithful is most surprising. She is a woman. The only other woman on the list is Sarah who is included as the wife of Abraham. Rahab’s presence here is independent of any male relationship. She acts completely on her own. She is a Gentile, not one of the chosen people, and she is a prostitute. Nonetheless, she played a critical role in the first victory of the conquest of the Promised Land and did so at considerable personal risk. Her presence here clearly signals that faith can be found in the most unexpected people, people whom God has chosen to play a part in His purpose.

In both Judaic and Christian tradition the tendency has been to attempt to play down Rahab’s disreputable profession and depict her instead as an honest innkeeper with no unsavory connection to prostitution. Neither the Hebrew text of Joshua nor the Greek text of Hebrews allows for such tinkering:



“Rahab And The Escape Of The Spies” - Tissot

“The attempt to soften the description of Rahab as ‘the harlot’ probably goes back to pre-Christian times. In the 1st Century A.D. the Jewish author Josephus speaks of her as the ‘keeper of an inn’ where the spies hid themselves. This is also the way in which the rabbinic Targum interprets the term ‘zonah’ explaining it as the equivalent of a female innkeeper or hostess...Nicholas of Lyra in the 14th Century and Cornelius a’Lapide in the 17th Century are Christian scholars who interpret the Hebrew term as meaning a female innkeeper. The first hand of Codex Sinaiticus (4th Century) reads here in 11:31 - ‘the so-called harlot’ which is clearly an attempt at ameliorating the designation ‘harlot.’ But whatever possibility there may be for a more favorable interpretation of the Hebrew term, the Greek word in this verse can only mean one thing. Aquinas comments as follows: ‘She was a



“Rahab With The Spies” - James Tissot

harlot whom the spies visited, not for the purpose sinning, but to find a hiding place. For the houses of such women are open, especially at night time; and it was during the night that they came. Her house also was joined to the wall. Harlots, moreover, always receive their guests without discrimination, and for this reason, it was all the easier for them to be hidden on her premises.’” (Hughes, p. 503)

Rahab expressed her faith in her declaration to the spies - ***“I know that the Lord has given you the land.”*** (Joshua 6:1) She acted upon that faith by sheltering the spies and facilitating their escape over the wall. As a result, both she and her family were spared when Jericho was destroyed. In the preaching of the early church the story of the destruction of Jericho and the salvation of Rahab became an allegory of the rescue of the church from the destruction of the unbelieving world. For example,

Caesarius of Arles (370 A.D.), presented the lesson to be drawn from the episode as follows:

“Jericho, dear brothers, was a type of this world, for just as its walls fell at the sound of the trumpets, so also now, the city of the world, that is, human arrogance with its towers, namely greed, envy, and luxury, together with its population, that is, all evil lusts, must be destroyed, and must perish by the unremitting preaching of priests. For priests must not be silent in the church. They must hear the Lord saying: ‘Cry aloud! Do not cease! Lift up your voice like a trumpet and denounce the sins of My people.’ (Isaiah 58:1) There is no doubt that all these things were done in a figurative manner; for what else could we think that the priestly trumpets of that time prefigured than the priestly preaching of this time, by which preachers do not cease to proclaim with terrible note severe judgement to sinners?...This harlot, dearest brothers, was a figure of the church; which before Christ’s advent used to commit fornication with many idols. But when Christ came, He not only delivered her from fornication, but also, by a great miracle, made her a virgin; for the apostle says, concerning the church; ‘I betrothed you to one husband to



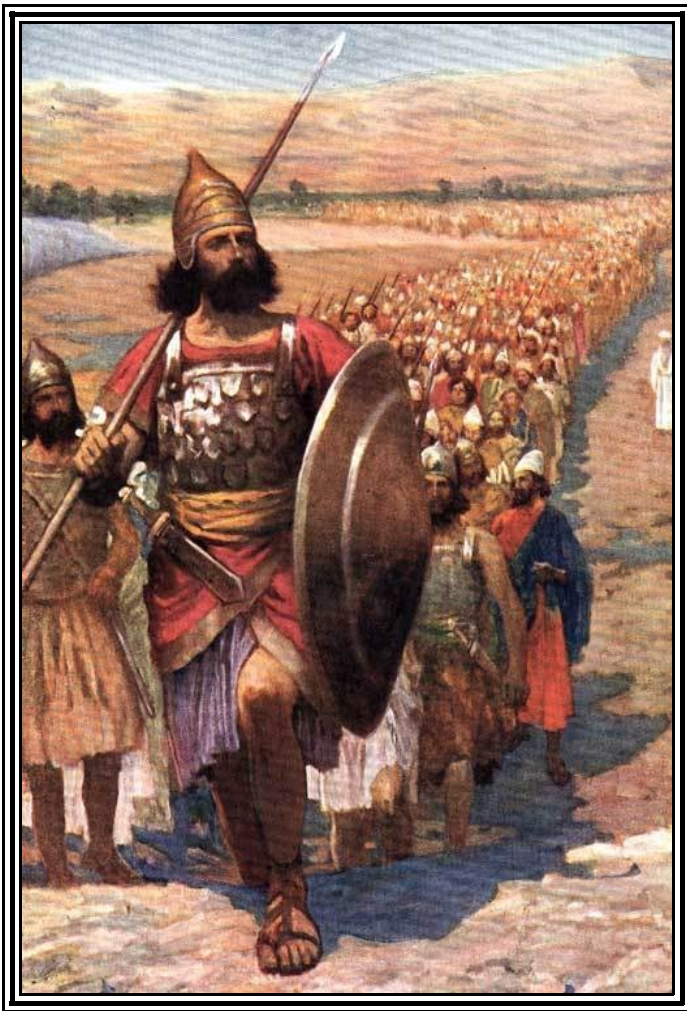
“Sampson And Delilah”

present you as a pure virgin to Christ!’ (2 Corinthians 11:2)”(Hughes, p. 505)

Hebrew 11:32-38

(32) And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel, and the prophets - (33) who through faith conquered kingdom, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, (34) quench the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, and were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (35) Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. (36) Other suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in the skins of sheep and goats, destitute, mistreated, afflicted - (38) Of whom the world was not worthy - wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

“And what more should I say. For time would fail me...” - Having brought his enumeration of heroes of the faith to the conquest of the promised land, the writer recognizes that this listing could go on endlessly. Enough examples have already been provided to make the point. He therefore shifts from specific detailed descriptions to a broad summary statement of the invincible power of faith and that which it has



“Gideon And His Army”

accomplished in the lives of believers across the centuries. *“What more should I say?”* is a rhetorical question intended to indicate that all which needed to be said has already been said and that the writer may now proceed to his conclusion. He has demonstrated the statement with which he began, namely that *“faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* He provides a random sampling of names which span the history of Israel. Four are included from the period of the judges - *“Gideon”* who defeated the host of the Midianites with only three hundred men (Judges 6-8). So that the victory of Gideon would most certainly be one of faith the Lord whittled down his force of 32,000 to that tiny 30, in order to eliminate any doubt that the victory was the work of God. *“Barak”* who with the prophetess Deborah destroyed the great Canaanite king Jabin and his 900 chariots of iron was willing, by faith, to face those invincible chariots with nothing more than

amateur infantry. (Judges 4-5) In the *“Song of Deborah”* the prophetess acknowledges that the victory was God’s gift to His people:

“That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD! Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing. I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel! LORD when You went out from Seir, when You went out from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water, the mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel.” (Judges 5:2-5)

“Sampson” the flawed hero who led Israel resistance against the domination of the Philistines (Judges 13-16) was profoundly aware of his dependence upon the Lord;

“And he told her all his heart and said to her; ‘A razor has never come upon my head for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and

be like any other man...Then Sampson called to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD God, please remember me and strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.’” (Judges 16:17,28)

“Jephthah” conqueror of the Ammonites whose rash vow led to the death of his beloved daughter (Judges 11) was also fully aware of his dependence upon the power of God.

“So then, the LORD, the God of Israel dispossessed the Amorites from before His people, and are you to take possession of them? Will you not possess what Chemosh, your god give you to possess? And all that the LORD our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess...The LORD, the Judge will decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.” (Judges 11:23-24,27)

These men, despite their weaknesses of Israel during the most chaotic period of her history at a time when the presence of the Israelites in Canaan was still being constantly contested. The establishment of the monarchy is noted with the inclusion of **“David and Samuel.”** The prophet Samuel is considered the last of the Judges. He was called from birth to serve the Lord and his leadership of the nation was characterized stern and uncompromising loyalty to the Lord at a time when the nation was floundering in doubt and uncertainty. Samuel was both a judge and a prophet. It is likely that he is mentioned after King David here so that he can serve as the link to the citation of the prophets which will follow. Active groups of prophets within Israel are mentioned for the first time during his life and he was the leader of one of those groups. God instructed him to accede to the people’s desire for a king, following the model of their pagan neighbors. Samuel recognized their demand as a repudiation of the Lord but he reluctantly obeyed God’s command and anointed Saul, and



“The Anointing Of David By Samuel”

subsequently David to be the first two kings of Israel. David is the foremost of Israel's kings. Despite his sins, he consolidated the kingdom and became the royal ancestor of the promised Messiah who was promised to be ***“great David's greater Son.”*** ***“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the Root and the Descendant of David, the bright Morning Star.”*** (Revelation 22:16) The final period of Israel's history is simply designated by ***“the prophets”*** without the inclusion of specific representative examples. This choice deliberately leaves the listing open-ended so that all may recognize that those who have been mentioned by name are not exclusive examples, merely representative figures. In 356 A.D. in the midst of the bitter controversies over the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures in Christ, St. Athanasius demonstrated the manner in which this listing of the heroes of faith was designed to be a source of encouragement and comfort to the faithful in a letter which he addressed to the churches of his diocese in Egypt and Libya:

“The patriarch Abraham, he reminds them, received the crown, not because he suffered death, but because he was faithful to God; and the other saints who are mentioned, Gideon Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel and the rest, were not made perfect by the shedding of their blood but were justified by faith; and to this day, they are the objects of our admiration as men who were

willing even to suffer death because of their devotion to the Lord...Therefore, considering that this struggle is for our all, and that the choice is now before us either to deny or to preserve the faith, let us also make it our earnest care and aim to guard what we have received, taking as our instruction, the confession drawn up at Nicea.” (Hughes, p. 507)



“David, King Of Israel”

“Who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions...: - Verses 34-35 constitute a list of the adversaries which faith has overcome throughout the long history of the people of Israel. Nine statements are clustered in three groups of three. ***“Conquered kingdoms”*** is no doubt a reference to the conquest of the promised land which began under Joshua and continued through the reigns of David and



“The Judgement Of Solomon” - Dalziel

Solomon under whom the kingdom reached its highpoint. ***“Enforced justice”*** is reminiscent of the manner in which David and Solomon reigned during the period of the united kingdom: ***“So David reigned over all Israel and David administered justice and equity to all his people.”*** (2 Samuel 8:15; cf. 1 Chronicles 18:14); ***“Blessed be the LORD your God who has delighted in you and set you upon the throne of Israel. Because the LORD loved Israel forever, He has made you king that you may execute justice and righteousness.”*** (1 Kings 10:9-10) The phrase ***“obtained promises”*** refers to the faithfulness of God in perfectly fulfilling His commitments to His people. The Book of Joshua testifies to this divine faithfulness in similar language:

“Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land He swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as He had sworn to their fathers. None of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the House of Israel had failed; all came to pass.” (Joshua 21:43-45)

The list goes on to ***“stopped the mouths of lions”*** an obviously allusion to the deliverance of the prophet Daniel from the lions’ den and ***“quenched the power of fire”*** in reference to the rescue of Shadrach, Meschach, and Abendego from the flames of the fiery furnace, both during the days of the Babylonian Captivity. The phrase ***“escaped the edge of the sword”*** reflect the confession of faith which young David made before the Philistine giant Goliath as interpreted by David in Psalm 144:



“David And Goliath” - Osmar Schindler

“You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head.” (1 Samuel 17:45);

“I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten stringed harp I will play to You, who gives victory to kings, who rescues David His servant from the cruel sword. Rescue and deliver me from the hand of the foreigners whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.” (Psalm 144:9-11)

Similar terminology is used in reference to the Prophet Elijah who was delivered from the sword of Queen Jezebel after the confrontation on Mount Carmel:

“Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, ‘So may the gods do to me, and more also if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.’ ... ‘I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of Hosts, for the people have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away’...And the LORD

said, ‘Go! Return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus...Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.’ (1 Kings 19:1-3; 14-15;18)

“Were made strong out of weakness” is clearly a reference to Sampson upon whom the Lord bestowed great strength, which ultimately came to be used to the glory of God in the destruction of the Philistine idol Dagon, despite Sampson weakness of character which had allowed him to be brought down by the alluring Delilah and her deceit. Hannah, the mother of Samuel had rejoiced in the ability of God to reverse the realities of this world and bring strength to those who have been scorned as feeble:

“My hearts exalts in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in Your salvation. There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides You, there is no rock like our God; the bows of the mighty are broken, but the weak bind on strength.” (1 Samuel 2:1,4)

“Faith is the response of all those who are conscious of their own weakness and accordingly look to God for strength.” (Hughes, p. 510)

The two final phrases in Verse 34 are linked together - ***“became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.”*** There are numerous examples of such blessings throughout the history of the nation of Israel, beginning with the destruction of the army of Pharaoh at the Red Sea and continuing on throughout Israel’s existence as an independent nation. David rejoiced in the presence of God upon the battlefields of His people, and of the victories which He won for them when there would otherwise have been no hope of success:



“King David And His Mighty Warriors” - James Tissot



“David Victorious At The Battle of Gilboah” - James Tissot

*“He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me,
 For they were too mighty for me.
 They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support;
 He brought me out into a broad place; He rescued me because He delighted in me...
 For by You I can run against a troop; and by my God I can leap over a wall.
 This God, His way is perfect; the Word of the LORD proves true;
 He is a shield for all those who take refuge in Him...
 He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend of bow of bronze...
 I pursued my enemies and overtook them,
 And did not turn back until they were consumed.
 I thrust them through so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet,
 For You equipped me with strength for battle;
 You made those who rise against me sink under me.
 You made my enemies turn their backs to me, and those who hated me I destroyed.
 You delivered me from strife with the people;
 You made me the head of the nations.
 As soon as they heard of me, they obeyed me, foreigners came cringing to me;
 Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses.”*
 (Psalm 18:17-19, 29-30, 37-40, 43-45)

“Women received back their dead by resurrection” - The subject shifts as the next segment of the conclusion begins. The **“women”** to whom their deceased relative were restored are most probably the widow of Zarephath who son was raised from death by the prophet Elijah

(1 Kings 17:17-24) and the Shunammite woman whose son was resurrected by Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37). There is now an abrupt alteration in the tone and direction of the text as the writer moves from the blessings which people of faith receive from the Lord to the sufferings which the faithful are called upon to endure in this sinful world.

“Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were killed with the sword.” - The foremost examples which would have occurred to the recipients of the epistle would probably have been the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah. Jeremiah was tortured repeatedly because of his refusal to cease his predictions of impending doom upon Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Judah. God had promised him that He would strengthen and preserve him through his sufferings if he remained faithful.

“Say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them lest I dismay you before them. And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, and iron pillar and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you.”
(Jeremiah 1:17-19)

Jeremiah was beaten and placed in the stocks outside the Temple, exposing him to the mockery and ridicule of the people (Jeremiah 20:1-2) He was beaten and imprisoned, having been accused of treason as an agent of Babylon (Jeremiah 37:13-16) He was cast into a empty cistern, and left there to die half buried in the mud (Jeremiah 38:4-6). The prophet trusted in the promise of God and his faith sustained him through it all. *“The Lives of the Prophets”* a 1st Century work composed in Palestine, indicates that Jeremiah was stoned to death in Egypt after foretelling the downfall of all of the idols of Egypt with the coming of a child born of a virgin. 2 Chronicles 24:21 reports that the prophet Zechariah as also stoned to death in Jerusalem: ***“Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, the priest and he stood above the people and said to them:***



“Isaiah Depicted With The Instrument Of His Martyrdom”

“Thus says God - ‘Why do you break the commandments of the LORD so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has forsaken you.’ But they conspired against him, and by command of the King they stoned him with stones in the court of the House of the LORD.”

A Judaic Apocryphal book entitled “*The Martyrdom of Isaiah*”, written during the 1st Century A.D., reports that the prophet died heroically during the reign of the wicked King Manasseh.

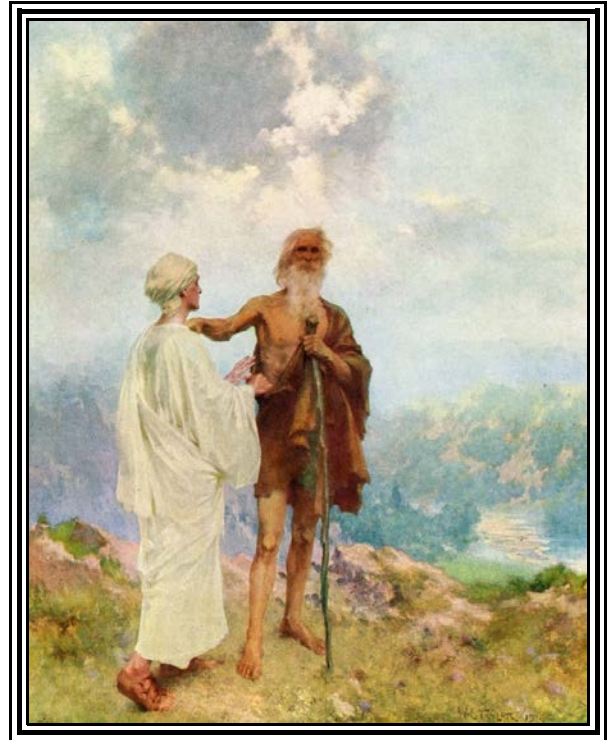


“The Martyrdom Of Isaiah”
Medieval Bible Illustration

“Because of these visions, therefore, Belial was angry with Isaiah, and he dwelt in the heart of Manasseh and he sawed Isaiah in half with a wood saw. And while Isaiah was being sawed in half, his accuser, Belkira, stood by, and all the false prophets stood by, laughing and maliciously joyful because of Isaiah. And Belkira stood before Isaiah laughing and deriding. And Belkira said to Isaiah: ‘Say, ‘I have lied in everything I have spoken; the ways of Manasseh are good and right; and also the ways of Belkira and those who are with him are good.’ And he said this to him when he began to be sawed in half. And Isaiah had a vision of the Lord, but his eyes were open and he saw them. And Belkira spoke thus to Isaiah, ‘Say what I say to you, and I will turn their heart and make Manasseh and the princes of Judah, and the people and all Jerusalem worship you. And Isaiah answered him and said, ‘If it is within my power to say, ‘Condemned and cursed by you and all your hosts and all your house! For there is nothing further that you can take from me except the skin of my body!’ And they seized Isaiah, the son of Amoz, and sawed him in half with a wood saw. And

Manasseh, and Belkira, and the false prophets and the princes and the people and all stood by, looking on. And to the prophets who were with him, he said before he was sawed in half; ‘Go to the district of Tyre and Sidon because for me alone the Lord has mixed the cup.’ And while Isaiah was being sawed in half, he did not cry out or weep, but his mouth spoke with the Holy Spirit until he was sawed in two. Belial did this to Isaiah for he was very angry with Isaiah concerning the things which he had seen concerning the Beloved.”
 (Charlesworth, II, p. 163)

“They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.” - The reference to ***“skins of sheep and goats”*** denotes undressed animal hides retaining their wool or hair. These rough robes became the hallmark of the prophets as men who spurned the comforts and refinements of this world. For example, in 2 Kings 1:8, when Ahaziah, the King of Israel asked his messenger to describe the prophet Elijah, they replied, ***“He wore a garment of hair with a belt of leather around his waist. And the king said, ‘It is Elijah, the Tishbite.’”*** In 1 Kings 19:13,19 that same animal skin robe is used by Elijah to represent the call of Elisha to become his successor as prophet to Israel:



“The Call of Elisha

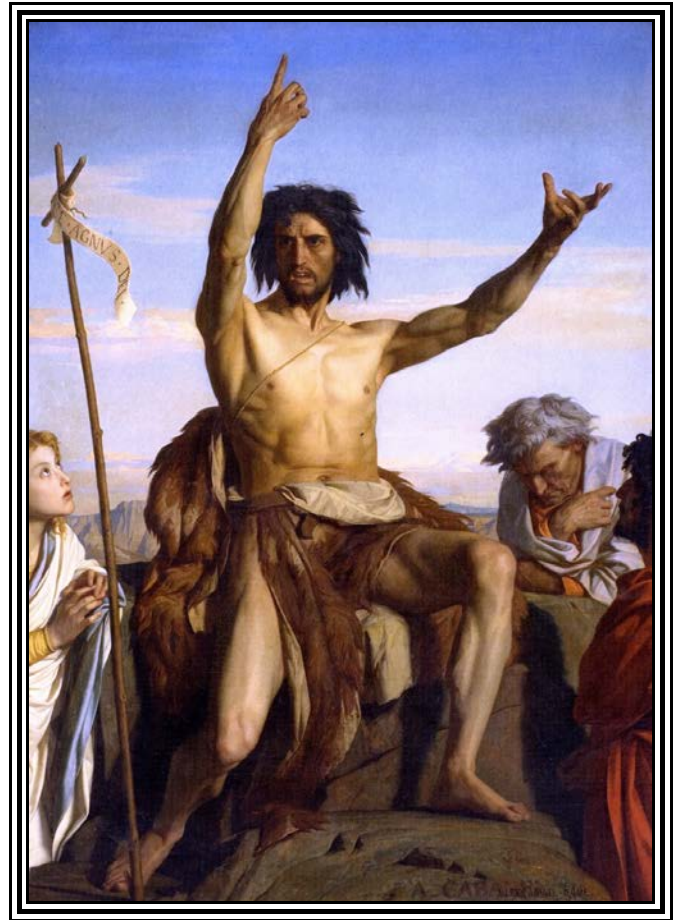
“And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his sheepskin cloak, and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave...And so he departed from there and he found Elisha, the son of Shaphat who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah past by him and cast his sheepskin cloak upon him....And then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.”

That same sheepskin cloak becomes the symbol of Elisha’s assumption of the prophetic office when Elijah is taken up to heaven in the fiery chariot:

“Then Elijah took his sheepskin cloak, and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water part to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground...Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. And he took up the sheepskin cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the sheepskin cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, ‘Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?’ And when he had struck the water, the water was part to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.” (2 Kings 2:8, 13-14)

At the end of the Old Testament era, through His prophet Zechariah, the Lord foretold a time when the land would be cleansed of false prophets with reference to the traditional ***“hairy cloak”*** of the prophetic office. ***“On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision***

when he prophesies. He will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive, but he will say, 'I am no prophet. I am a worker of the soil.' (Zechariah 13:4-5) Writing in the 2nd Century AD, the early church father Clement of Rome urged Christians to emulate the faithfulness of the prophets - *"those who went about in goatskins and sheepskins, heralding the coming of Christ, we mean Elijah and Elisha, and moreover Ezekiel, the prophets."* (1 Clement 17:1. Our first thought is regard to the customary garb of God's prophets is, of course, John the Baptist - *"Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey."* (Matthew 3:4)



"John The Baptist" - Cabanel

"The world was not worthy of them" - The world to which they faithfully proclaimed the Word of God did not deserve them. That for which the prophets lived and died as worth more than all the treasures which worldly men value. The scorn and persecution which they endured was the inevitable consequence of the irreconcilable difference between these two mutually exclusive value systems. They spoke the truth in a world which remains in bondage to the lie and were willing to pay the price for such faithfulness. St. Ambrose of Milan wrote of these faithful saints:

"They were found most strong when thought to be most weak, and they did not shrink from the mockings of men because they looked for heavenly rewards; they, on whom the beauty of eternal light was shining, did not dread the darkness of the dungeon...Fed to the full by fasting, they did not seek to be diverted by pleasure; refreshed by the hope of eternal grace, the burning heat of the summer did not parch them, nor did the cold of icy regions break their spirit, for the warm breath of devotion invigorated them; they did not fear the bonds of men for Jesus had set them free; they did not desire to be rescued from death, for they looked forward to being raised to life by Christ." (Hughes, p. 515)

The entire chapter is designed to lead the Hebrews to recognize that they are part of an ongoing stream of faithful believers which began in the beginning. In this way the

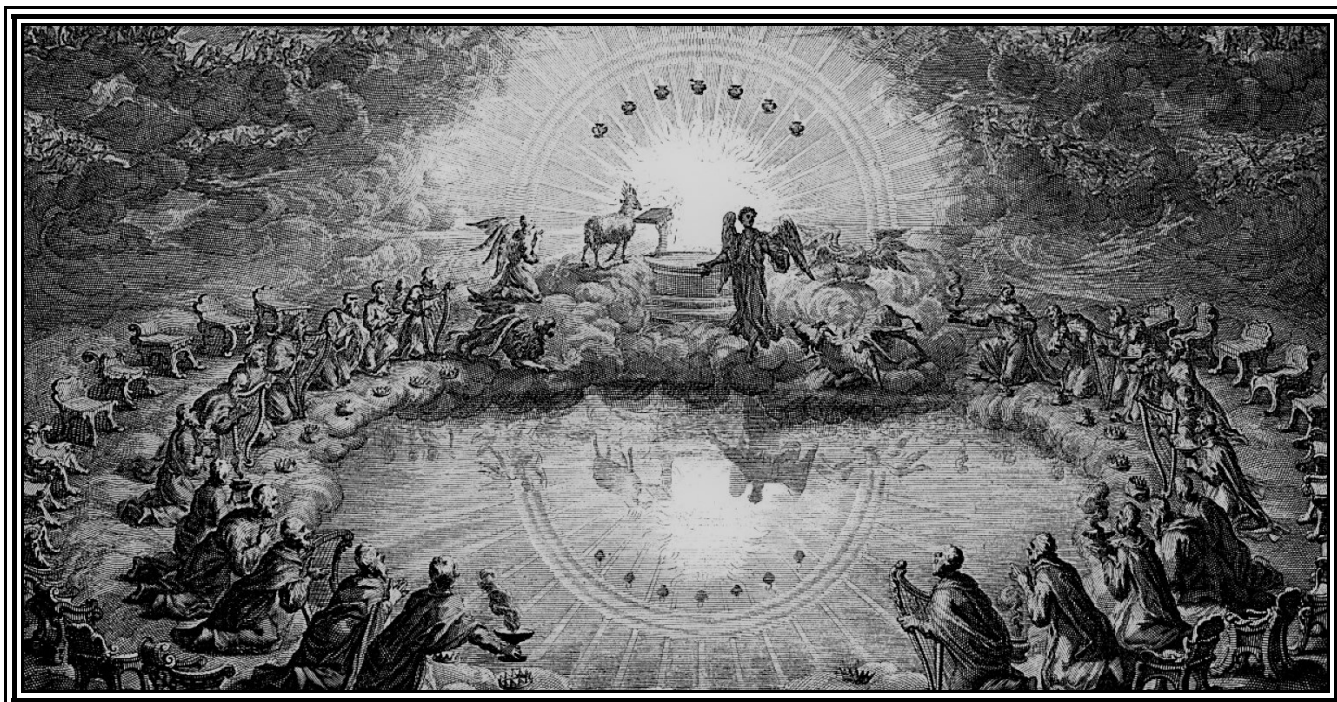
endurance and courage of those believers in days gone by becomes the source of encouragement and hope for us today.

“In summary, the pastor has carefully crafted this chapter to incorporate his readers into the history of God’s faithful people. He uses the primeval narrative of Genesis 1-11 to show them the fundamental nature of faith; faith is living as if God’s future promises are certain and His present power is real. Only those who pursue this life of faith are pleasing to God. Like Abel, those who live by faith may suffer, but like Enoch, they will be delivered from death and like Noah, they will escape the Judgement. From Abraham and those associated with him, the hearers come to realize that God’s promises refer to a heavenly city and to a people who would live by faith, and thus enter that City as their true home. Since, like Abraham, God’s people pursue the promised eternal city, they, like him, are aliens in this world who must patiently await God’s fulfillment. However, the birth and sacrifice of Isaac show them that the God who calls and sustains His people has power even over death. They can trust Him and His power although they cannot see Him. Furthermore, alienation from the world begets persecution by the world. Thus, they are encouraged to emulate Moses, thus maintaining their identity with the people of God by practicing courage and perseverance in the face of persecution without turning their eyes away from the eternal reward. The hearers are given further assurance of God’s unseen but real sustaining power in the present, and His ultimate authority over death by His mighty deliverance in the lives of Moses and those who succeeded him, and the great hosts of the faithful described. Thus, those who live by faith are ready to obey God, and identify with His people, even if that means the alienation, persecution, and banishment from society here described. They refuse to surrender their faith in God’s promise and power, forfeit the resurrection, and lose their place in the eternal City.” (Cockerill, p. 596)

Hebrews 11:39-40

(39) And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40) since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

“And all these, though commended through their faith....” - “All these” includes not only the specific individuals mentioned in this grand roll call but all of the faithful throughout the history of mankind since the dawn of creation to that long awaited moment when the fulness of time would finally come, every believer, everywhere who lived and died in ***“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*** Their identity and their future is ***“commended through their faith.”*** Most appropriately the Greek verb here



"The Saint Around The Heavenly Throne" - 17th Century Engraving

translated as ***"commended"*** is *"marturethentes"* from which the English word *"martyred"* is derived, given the fact that a great many of these faithful ones were called upon to witness to the powerful reality of their faith by giving up their lives. They lived and died in hope, trusting in the promises of God, waiting for the coming of the Messiah and the arrival of the new heavens and earth which He would accomplish. The Christians to whom this Epistle is addressed have an advantage over these former believers who remained steadfast in the faith although they did not see the coming of the Savior. ***"These...did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us."*** Theirs was the era of anticipation. Ours is the era of fulfillment. In His sovereign grace God deferred the full disclosure of salvation's fulfillment until the advent of Christ and the establishment of the new covenant in His blood. The point being made to the Hebrews is obvious. Having established the continuity between the saints of the past and those of the present, their example of steadfast courage become applicable. If these saints were able to remain faithful and to endure all of this world's opposition and persecution, how much more should we, who have seen the coming of the Christ and are fully aware of His perfect life, substitutionary death, and triumphant resurrection, be able to remain steadfast. In effect, the author is asking, how can you be wavering if they did not. John Calvin writes"

"If those on whom the great light of grace had not yet shown, showed such surpassing constancy in bearing their ills, what effect ought the full glory of the Gospel have upon us? A tiny spark of light led them to heaven, but now that the Sun of Righteousness shines on us, what excuse shall we offer if we still cling to the earth?" (Hughes, p. 516)

“A Great Cloud Of Witnesses”

L. White

*1. A great cloud of witnesses on every side
Let us run our race with the strength God provides.
These heroes of faith all have run their race thru,
They trusted His promise and proved His Word true.*

*2. Our faith is the evidence of things unseen;
Faith founded in hope faces hardship serene;
Tho' worlds all be shaken, faith yet shall endure;
Upheld by God's promise still safe and secure.*

*3. By faith Abel offered a God-pleasing gift,
Though Cain's bitter vengeance was brutal and swift.
By faith righteous Abel speaks on from his grave,
Still praising our God and His power to save.*

*4. They lived here as strangers; as pilgrims did roam;
They longed for a country, their heavenly home.
And therefore God claimed them, He gave them His Name,
He freed them from sin, from its guilt and its blame.*

*5. A roll call of heroes, remember, rejoice!
Give thanks to our God! Now sound forth your glad voice!
And with perseverance run on through your race,
Eyes fixed upon Jesus, saved through faith by grace.*



“The Saint And Angels In Heaven” - Botticini



“Israel Before Mount Sinai”

Hebrews 12

(1) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (2) looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of God. (3) Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (4) In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (5) And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. (6) For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.’ (7) It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that His father does not discipline? (8) If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (9) Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (10) For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. (11) For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

(12) Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, (13) and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. (14) Strive for peace with everyone, and for holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (15) See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; (16) that no one

is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. (17) For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

(18) For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest (19) and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. (20) For they could not endure the order that was given. 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.' (21) Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear!' (22) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, (23) and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, (24) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

(25) See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject Him who warns from heaven. (26) At that time, His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' (27) This phrase, 'Yet once more' indicates the removal of things that are shaken - that remain. (28) Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus, let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, (29) for our God is a consuming fire.

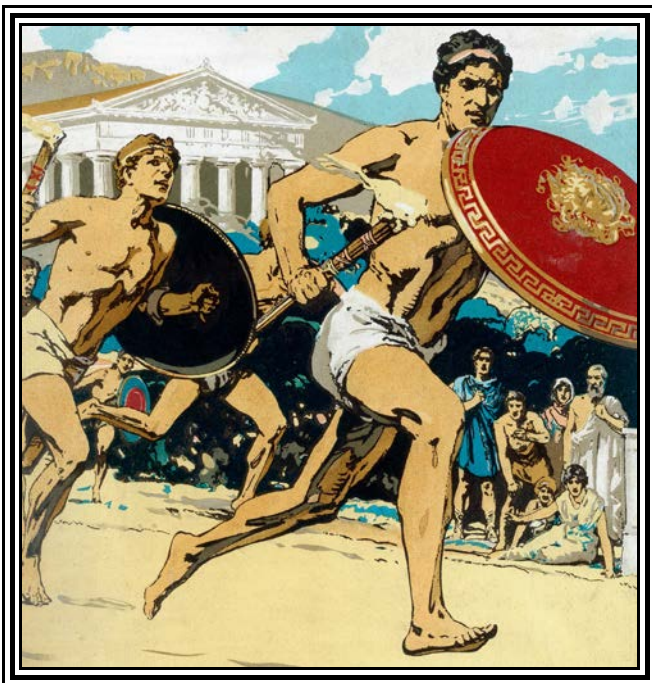


"Israel Before Mount Sinai"

Hebrews 12:1-2

(1) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us throw aside every weight, and sin which clings to us so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (2) looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses....” - The form of the text shifts from the expository narrative of Chapter 11, a description of people and events, to hortatory, an encouragement to action based upon the information which has been provided. The connection between the two, and the indication that that which now follows is based upon that which came before, is provided by the forceful conjunction *“therefore.”* This term not only connects the two segments but indicates that the call to action is the natural and inescapable conclusion of the people and events which have been set before them. In the original text Verses 1 and 2 form a single sentence. The main verb of the sentence is *“let us run.”* The main verb is defined by three participial phrases which define the manner in which and the circumstances under which the running of the race is to occur. Literally those three phrases are - *“having a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us”* - *“laying aside every weight and the easily ensnaring sin”* - and *“looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of the faith.”* The *“great cloud of witnesses”* are the faithful of the Old Testament who have been listed and summarized in Chapter 11. They are depicted here as spectators at a great race, an Olympic competition. The metaphor suggests that these champions of the past, by means of their own examples, are cheering us on and encouraging us to the victory which they have already received by grace through faith. The imagery of the *“great cloud”* suggests the magnitude of that host of witnesses.



“The gratitude and loyalty of his readers should be all the greater since God has given them a special place in the fulfillment of His promise to all the people of faith. However, their responsibility is likewise greater. Will they, at the very end of that relay race, drop the baton that has been passed to them in plain sight of the many who have already run the race so honorably and so well?” (Allen, p. 568)

“Nor can the readers confine these witnesses to the dead past. They are even now ‘surrounding us.’ The pastor would have his hearers feel that they can reach out and



“Olympic Runners In Ancient Greece”

touch these heroes who lived by faith. It is these heroes from the past whose approval is worth courting despite the sneer of the unbelieving world. The pastor has chosen the term ‘witnesses’ because it enables him to affirm that the heroes of old are both witnesses both to and of God’s contemporary people.” (Cockerill, p. 602)

The successful running of the race of faith requires intense concentration. The runners are therefore urged to **“lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.”** The point of the admonition is to cast off any and all distractions. The language of the phrase speaks first of the runner in the image who must set aside any excess weight or encumbrance which might slow his pace or sap his endurance in the race. While Greek athletes typically performed nude, some of the races took place in full armor to simulate battlefield conditions. But having made the point in the racing image he immediately defines the spiritual reality which the image signifies - **“and sin which clings so closely.”** **“Sin”** is comprehensive in this phrase. It describes both the personal transgressions of God’s will which reveal our sinful nature and the ever-present temptation to concede to the opposition and persecution of the world or yield to the allure of the world’s rewards, thereby abandoning the race and conforming to the standards and values of sinful society. If we are to achieve the finish line in this race **“the race that is set before us”** must be **“run with endurance.”** **“Endurance”** is the key. *“Endurance is the important thing. It is an exhausting race...Such endurance is a life of obedience through reliance, upon God’s promises and power, and this despite stiff opposition.”* (Cockerill, p. 604) **“The race that is set before us”** is a life defined and governed by the Word of God. It is a life which discerns the lies of the Adversary and recognizes that all the things of this world are temporary and worthless. It is the life of a stranger and a pilgrim on his way to the heavenly homeland where he will dwell forever in



Christ Leading The Way Through This Vale Of Tears” - Dore

the presence of Christ.

The runner can only persevere and achieve his goal if his eyes are firmly fixed upon the finish line. Thus the writer urges us to look ***“to Jesus the Founder and Perfecter of our faith.”*** Everything that pertains to Christian faith and life focuses upon Christ, who He is and what He has done. Everything is the result of His perfect life, innocent death, and triumphant resurrection. There would be no race to run had Christ not set out this course, run the race Himself, and thereby accomplished for us what we could never have done for ourselves. He is both the source of faith and the model of faith. He is the foundation upon which faith must be built and He has perfectly accomplished everything that had to be done by His innocent blood shed for us upon the cross.

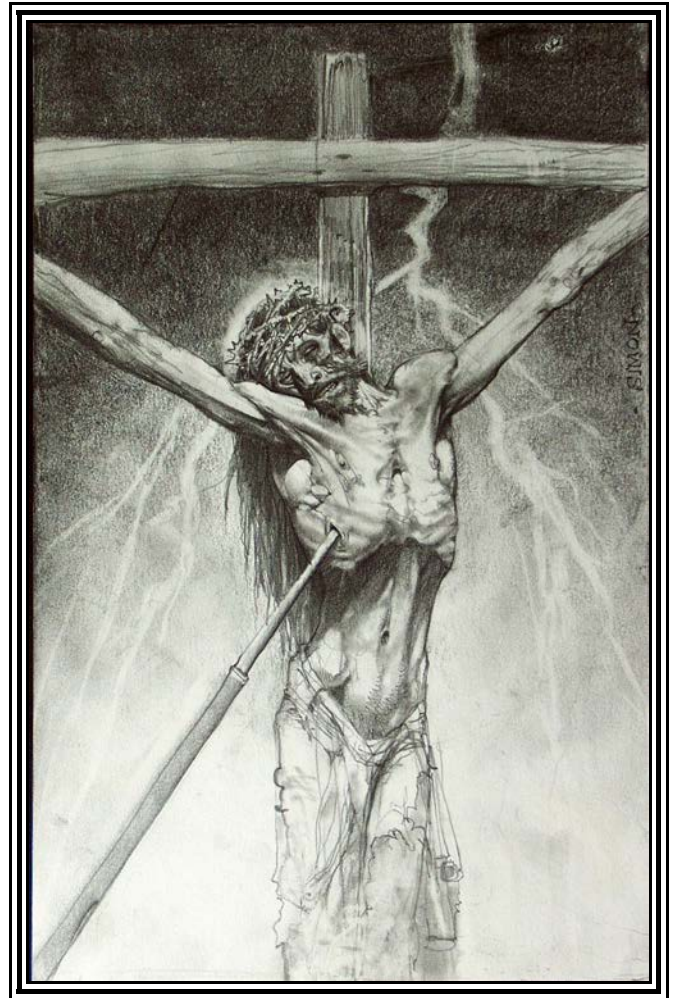
“Who, for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” - ***“The Founder and Perfecter”*** upon whom our gaze is to be firmly fixed is the perfect example of the ***“endurance”*** with which our race must be run. ***“The joy that was set before Him”*** is the liberation of mankind from the curse of sin and death. Jesus prayed that His disciples would have His joy within them: ***“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”*** (John 15:11) He promised his disciples that despite the fierce opposition of the world their sorrow would be transformed into joy:

“Truly, truly I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. When a

woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you...Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:20-24)

The *“joy that was before Him”* was to win joy for us. Nothing could stand in the way of achieving that goal. Our salvation was worth any price to Him. He *“endured the cross, despising the shame.”* The world confronted Him with the worst it had to offer and yet He endured.

“To die by crucifixion was to plumb the lowest depths of disgrace; it was a horrendous punishment reserved for those who were deemed most unfit to live, a punishment for those who were subhuman. From so degrading a death Roman citizens were exempt by ancient statute; the dignity of the Roman name would be besmirched by being brought into association with anything as vile as a cross. For slaves and criminals of low degree, it was regarded as a suitable means of execution and a grim deterrent to others. But this disgrace Jesus disregarded, as something not worthy to be taken into account, when it was a question of His obedience to the will of God.” (Bruce, p. 338)



“It Is Finished”

His endurance of this ultimate disgrace serves as our example and inspiration as we struggle in our imperfect attempts to run the race and finish the course which has been set before us. Charles Wesley said it well in his hymn *“Captain Of Israel’s Host And Guide,”* based upon the text from Hebrews 12:

*“Captain of Israel’s host and guide of all who seek the land above,
Beneath Thy shadow we abide, the cloud of Thy protecting love;
Our strength Thy grace, our rule Thy Word; our end the glory of our Lord.*

*By Thine unerring Spirit led, we shall not in the desert stray;
We shall not more direction need, nor miss our providential way;
As far from danger as from fear, while love, almighty love is near.*

*We've no abiding city here, but seek a city out of sight,
Thither our steady course we steer, aspiring to the plains of light.
Jerusalem, the saints' abode, whose Founder is the living God.*

*Patient, the appointed race to run, this weary world we cast behind;
From strength to strength we travel on, the new Jerusalem to find;
Our labor this, our only aim to find the Jerusalem.*

*Through Thee who all our sins hast borne, freely and graciously forgiven,
With songs to Zion we return, contending for our native heaven;
That palace of our glorious King, We find it nearer while we sing.*

*Raised by the breath of love divine, we urge our way with strength renewed;
The church of the first-born to join, we travel to the mount of God,
With joy upon our heads to rise, to meet our Captain in the skies.*

Hebrews 12:3-11

(3) Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (4) In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (5) And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. (6) For the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives.' (7) It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (8) If you are left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (9) Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them. Shall we not, much more, be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (10) For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. (11) For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

“Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself” - In comparison to the suffering of Christ, the suffering of every Christian pales into insignificance. Nonetheless, He did endure, motivated by His love for us and His obedience to the will of the Father. Those who opposed Christ are described as ***“sinners.”*** *“The personal nature of His sufferings is confirmed by the words ‘against Himself.’ But they were not only against Him but they were in rebellion against God.”* (Cockerill, p. 610) The language



“Mankind Finding Shelter At The Cross” - Maertens

reflects the fact that our Lord was not merely an individual human being, but the God/Man implementing the divine plan for the salvation of the world. The writer’s concern is that the discouraged, weary Jewish Christians to the Epistle is addressed are going to give up, abandon Christianity, and return to the comfortable familiarity of Judaism.

“The writer is well aware of the disheartened condition of his audience and was genuinely concerned that they might abandon their faith in the face of the struggles confronting them. He invites the congregation to compare their experience with that of Jesus...That Jesus endured from sinners such hostility had pointed relevance for the members of the house church. In the past they had experienced hostile opposition and it was reasonable to expect that they would encounter opposition again...The emphasis is placed upon the exemplary conduct of Jesus. He did not allow weariness, discouragement or despair to deter Him from obedience. His endurance of opposition has exemplary value for the congregation.” (Lane, p. 415)

“In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” - The writer continues the athletic metaphor with a shift in focus from running a race to fighting in a boxing match. ***“In your struggle against sin”*** depicts the Christian as a contestant in a boxing competition with ***“sin”*** as his opponent. This struggle has not yet come to the point ***“of shedding your blood.”*** This is confirmed in Hebrew 10:32-34 which describes the persecutions which the Hebrews have endured without reference to physical violence:

“But remember the former days when 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.



“Luther’s Theology Of The Cross” - Rudolf Schäfer

The comparison serves two purposes. First of all, it leads them to compare their suffering with that of Jesus and recognize that they have not experienced anything remotely comparable to the physical torment imposed upon their Lord culminating in brutal death by crucifixion. To be sure, they have endured opposition and mockery. They have suffered for the faith. But in comparison to the suffering endured by their Lord their experience pales into insignificance. At the same time, however, the writer offers no promise that their struggle will grow easier or disappear. Instead, he clearly indicates that their struggle may well

grow more intense and that while bloodshed has not yet been involved it may well come to that in the future. The struggle with sin is an inescapable part of the reality of life in this sinful world for the faithful disciple. Suffering is the cost of discipleship.

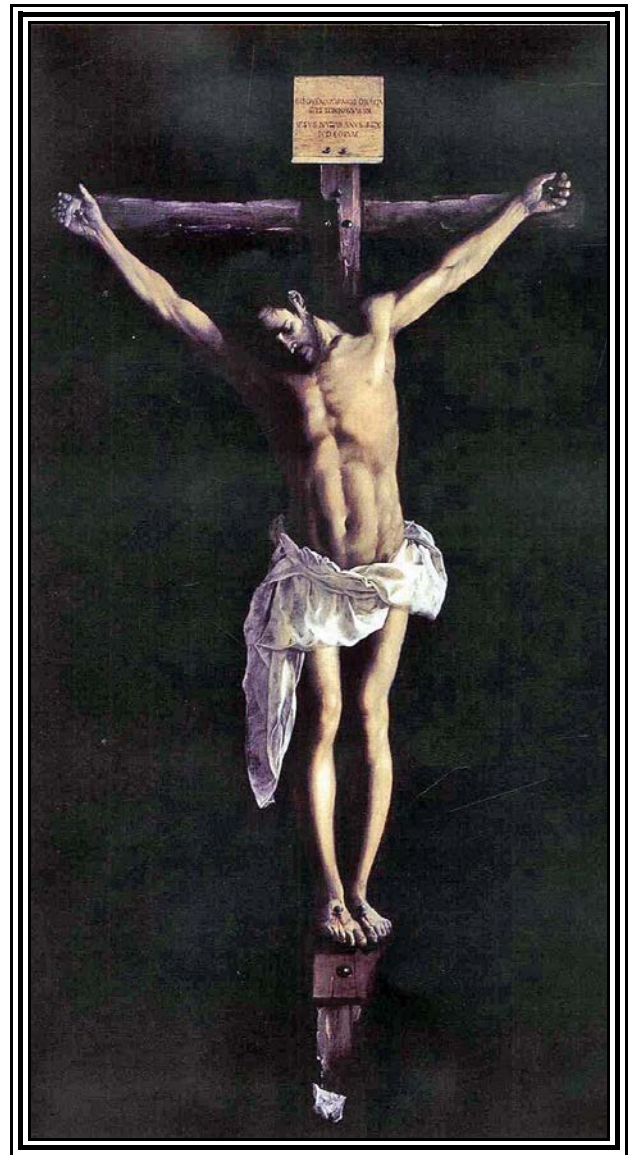
“And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?” - After the sober observation that their struggle has not been nearly as difficult as that of Jesus and it could grow much more severe in the future, the Hebrews are admonished to keep in mind the manner in which God uses suffering for good in the lives of His children. The question *“Have you forgotten?”* is, in fact, a rebuke which suggests that they have forgotten or they would not be having such a difficult time coping with the struggle. They have been graciously blessed to become the *“sons”* of God. That sonship means that God will discipline them in the same way that an earthly father disciplines his children. The writer then quotes Proverbs 3:11-12, a text with which these students of the Old Testament would have already been familiar: *“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the LORD, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the LORD disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.”* The believer should trust the promises of God and learn to view suffering and adversity as God’s education of their lives, training them for

righteous living. In fact, the believer should discern that discipline in the life of every Christian is comforting evidence that one is in the family of God. *“Discipline is an essential element in a father-son relationship; as in human families, so also within the family of God.”* (Allen, p. 580) It is evident that the writer considers his readers to be genuine sons of God. It is on the basis of that relationship that he urges them to reconsider their perception of the discipline which they have been called upon to endure.

“Trials and sufferings demonstrate one’s sonship in the family of God...The author’s point is to show his readers that they ought not be surprised when they experience discipline. Their sonship makes such discipline a necessity. To expect anything else is to betray an appalling ignorance of the implications of their sonship. To wish for anything else is tantamount to forfeiting one’s status as a son and heir...if you were without discipline then you would not be genuine sons.” (Allen, p. 581)

The absence of such loving discipline in the form of suffering would actually indicate that they were not the sons of God: ***“If you were left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.”*** ***“Illegitimate children”*** in the ancient world received no parental instruction or watchful discipline from their biological fathers. They were an embarrassment to be ignored and were not considered to be part of the family or legal heirs within the family. The fact that the Hebrew Christians who received the letter ***“all have participated”*** in the discipline of suffering is proof positive of their sonship with Christ in the family of God.

Throughout the Epistle Jesus has been set forth as the perfect example of patient endurance of suffering in submission to the will of the heavenly Father. ***“Consider Him who for sinners endured such hostility against Himself.”*** (Hebrews 12:3) As the only-begotten Son of God, the father/son model of submission to discipline thru suffering applied to Him more fully than it could to anyone else. Our sonship is the result of our relationship to Jesus, the Son of the Father. ***“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect He became the source of salvation to all who obey***



“The Crucified Christ”

Him.” (Hebrews 5:8,9)

“Thus, the word of encouragement is to be understood Christologically. As God’s Son, Jesus became the perfect human student of God. He learned true wisdom from God in His human life and death, so as to share His instruction, His perfect filial upbringing with His brothers as students of God.” (Kleinig, p. 620)

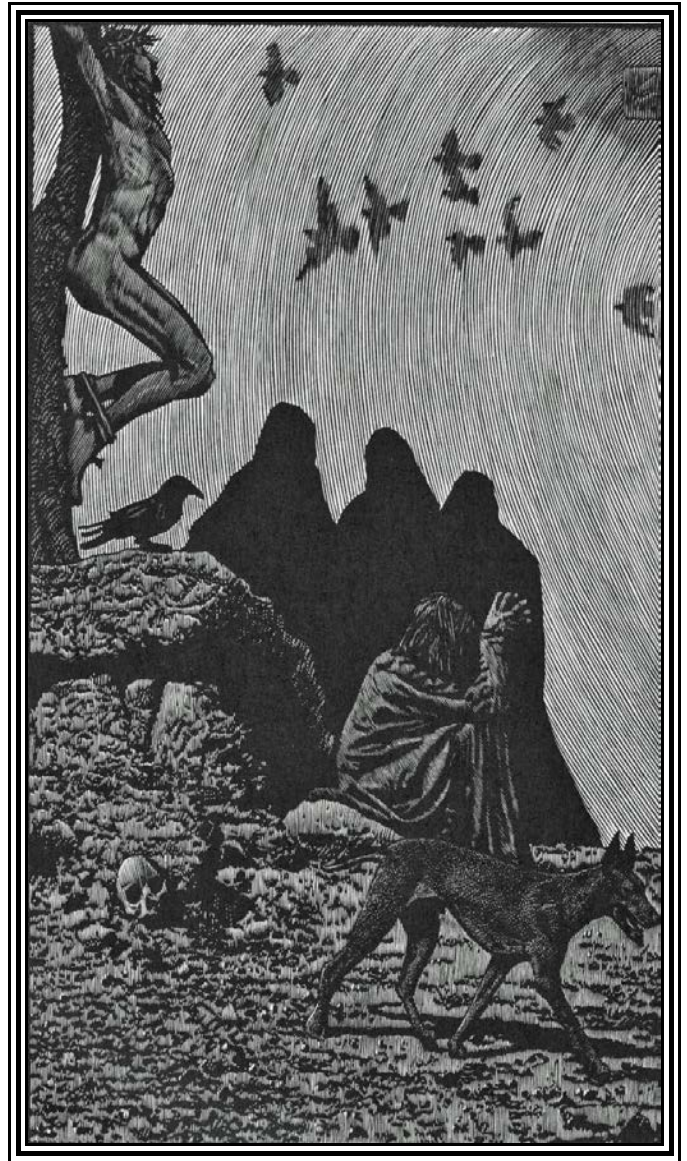
The comparison between the suffering of Christ and that of His people is drawn out more fully in Chapter 2:

“For it was 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. For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source...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 the fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery...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.” (Hebrews 2:10-17)



“Father, Into Your Hands I Commend My Spirit”

“Besides we have earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them.” - The writer reverts to the first person plural pronoun *“we”* to include himself with his readers. If the necessity of paternal discipline is universally recognized for training in the things of this world (*“they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them”*), how much more important it must be to acknowledge and submit to the paternal discipline of our heavenly Father. Learning the temporary, superficial things of this life, pale into insignificance in comparison to the eternal truths of *“the Father of spirits”* whose discipline is intended *“for our good, that we may share His holiness.”* That same comparison of the greater to the lesser applies to the sufferings which the sons of God are called upon to endure. While those sufferings are painful, to be sure, they are only *“for the moment”* while the blessings which will result from patient endurance during that brief suffering *“will yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”* in the gift of eternal life with Christ in heaven.



“Stricken, Smitten, And Afflicted”

Hebrews 12:12-17

(12) Therefore, lift up drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, (13) and make straight paths so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. (14) Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (15) See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.; (16) that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. (17) For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

“Therefore, lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees...” - Having carefully defined the purpose of divine discipline in the form of suffering, the writer urges his runners to get back in the race. Once again the logical conjunction *“therefore”* links the prolonged and detail exhortation to the exposition on the father’s discipline of his son which

has preceded. ***“Therefore”*** identifies what follows as the completely rational conclusion which could be drawn from the preceding. He uses a paraphrase of the familiar words of Isaiah 35 calling God’s people home from exile to make his point:

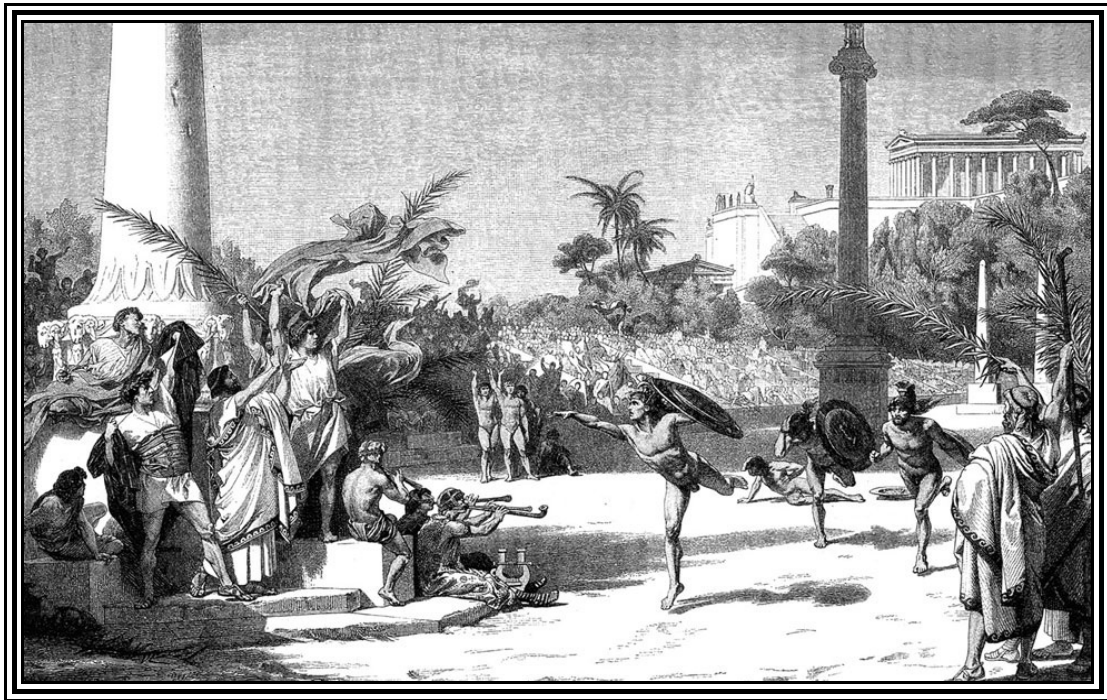
***“Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees;
Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong! Fear not!’
Behold, your God will come with vengeance; He will come and save you!
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
Then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For the waters break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunts of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.
And a highway shall be there, it shall be called the ‘Way of Holiness;’
The unclean shall not pass over it, it shall belong to those who wish to walk in the
way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.
No lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast come upon it;
They shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing;
Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”***

“Drooping hands” and ***“weak knees”*** are frequently used as the physical manifestation of total exhaustion which causes one to give up and abandon whatever it is they have been attempting, particularly in the context of athletics. Eliphaz sought to encourage Job by reminding him of how often he had encouraged others in the past: ***“Behold, you have instructed many and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it has come to you and you are impatient!”*** (Job 4:3-5) In a similar fashion, Ecclesiasticus, uses this terminology to characterize the demoralizing effect of having an evil wife: ***“An evil wife means a dejected heart, a gloomy face, and a wounded heart. A wife who does not call her husband blessed means drooping hands and weak knees.”*** (Ecclesiasticus 25:23) Philo of Alexandria compares the Israelites who grew weary of the struggle in the wilderness and wished to return to Egypt to wrestlers in the arena - ***“Many men are very speedily fatigued and fall away, thinking labour a terrible adversary and they let their hands droop out of weakness like tired wrestlers, determining to return to Egypt to the indulgence of their passions.”*** (Philo, p. 319)

“And make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint.” - Isaiah 53 has promised a highway in the desert upon which the rough places would be made smooth - ***“the Way of Holiness.”*** Proverbs uses similar imagery to describe following the straight path of righteousness in contrast to turning your feet onto the twisted ways of evil. ***“Let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the***

path of your feet, then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.” (Proverbs 4:25-27)

“As runner in a race they need to avoid diversions from the strait road that leads to their goal, and stay away from the rough ground that slows, hampers, injures, or exhausts them. They set a straight course with their feet by heeding the Lord’s instructions and following His guidance. By that word of instruction, God not only leads them forward on the correct route; He also heals their injuries and keeps them fit and healthy...Isaiah 35:6 had promised - ‘then shall the lame man leap like a deer’ - By following His directives what is sprained will not be put out of joint as they keep running but instead be healed. The longer and harder they run, the fitter and healthier they will become.” (Kleinig, p. 623)



“The Crown of Victory”

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness...” Our God is the God of peace-
“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ...”
(Hebrews 13:20) Though our perfect High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek, ***“the King of Peace*** (Hebrews 7:2) He has rescued us from the discord and alienation of this world to reconciliation with God and enabled us to live in harmony with one another. ***“For in Him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.”***(Colossians 1:19-20) ***“All this has come from God who through Christ reconciled us to Himself, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) Therefore we as

the people of God in Christ are to strive for reconciliation with all men and to live in peace and harmony with one another. ***“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”*** (Romans 12:18) That peace is a reflection of the Gospel and its impact upon us and the manner in which we live. In his 1st letter Peter makes a similar admonition, quoting from Psalm 34:

“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary bless, for to this you were called. For ‘whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.’” (1 Peter 3:8-12)

All of this is, of course, the echo of the teaching of Christ Himself: ***“Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.”*** (Mark 9:50) ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called ‘sons of God.’”*** (Matthew 5:9)

“And for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” - This admonition to peace is combined with an encouragement to ***“strive...for holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”*** Holiness is the source and foundation of peace.

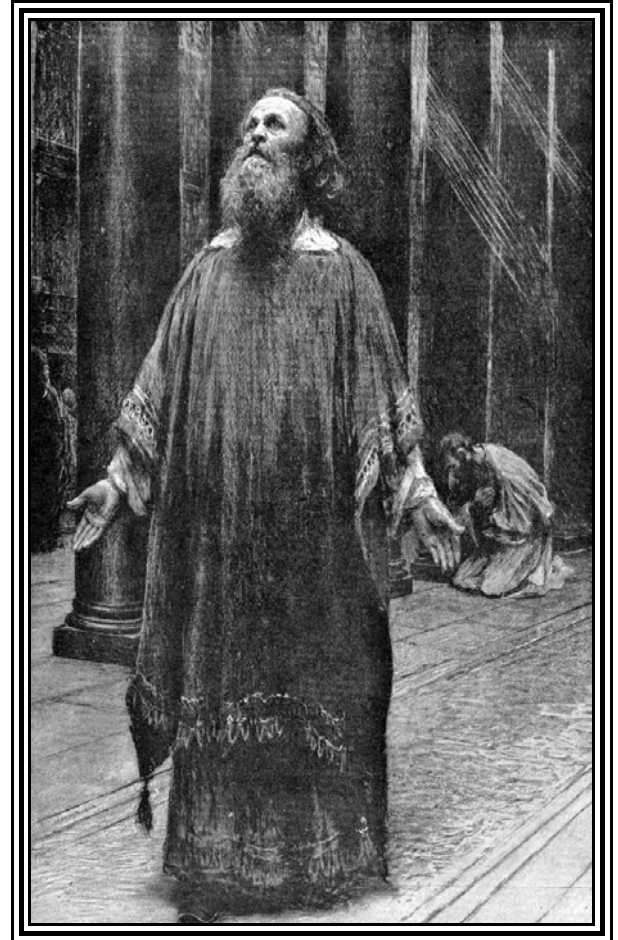
“The peace of the community must be maintained by the diligent pursuit of the God-given, Christ-provided holiness which is its source. Defilement through rebellion ruptures this wholeness and harmony...Holiness in Hebrews is always the gift of God through the work of Christ...The holiness in question here is a continual living in the cleansing from sin and resultant access to God provided by Christ in the community of the faithful.” (Cockerill, p. 634)



“The Parable of the Pharisee And The Publican”

“All of the previous instructions now culminate in this final summative directive. The hearers of this sermon are told to ‘pursue peace’ and ‘sanctification,’ as they run together in their common race. They do not pursue what they do not have, but what already belongs to them. Through Jesus they have ongoing access to the peace and sanctification that God provides for them. These gifts come from Him and are not possessed apart from Him. The congregation pursues them by their faithful participation in the gatherings of Word and Sacrament and their avoidance of everything that desecrates their holiness.” (Kleinig, p. 624)

This striving for holiness is not merely, or even primarily and individual activity. It is, rather something which occurs withing the community of believers gathered around Word and sacrament to edify and encourage one another in the love of Christ. ***“For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, ‘I will tell of Your Name to My brothers in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.’”*** (Hebrews 2:11-12) This holiness a gift which is received at one particular point in the life of the believer. It is rather an ongoing, gradual process in their journey through life as they participate in the family of believers and become more consistent in their own obedience to the will of God and a life which lived in ever great conformity to the Word of God. That process of growth is nourished and strengthened by the Word and by the reception of the Lord’s body and blood in the Holy Sacrament. This goal of sanctification is of critical importance because without it ***“no one will see God.”*** This specification suggests that there are other things perceived by men as holiness where are not authentic in the sight of God.



“The Pharisee And The Publican”

“That it is possible, and indeed, all too common, for men to pursue a spurious kind of holiness is plain from Christ’s condemnation of the ‘holiness’ of those religious hypocrites whose sanctimonious piety is a public display of self-esteem, manifested in the calculated ostentation of their devotional exercises and almsgiving, ‘that they may be praised by men.’ True holiness, however,

is inward and private, between a man and his God, and the good deeds which are its fruit are performed as secretly as possible as an expression of loving concern, with an aversion for all fanfare and publicity. (Matthew 6:1-18) This kind of holiness, which reflects the pure goodness of God, springs from the single-minded love of God, not from the love of human applause, and is consistent with a longing to see God who is all holy, not with a lust to be seen by men.” (Hughes, p. 536)

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God...” - The Hebrews are instructed to guard against three situations in which the peace of the congregation can be violated and the holiness violated. This is critically important because the church is the end times outpost of heaven, and should therefore be a living reflect of that peace which is the mark of God’s presence. First of all, a watchful vigilance must be maintained for all of the members of the congregation so that **“no one fails to obtain the grace of God.”** The danger of falling behind in the race or dropping out of it all together is always present. Those who grow weary or begin to stumble must receive the assistance which they need to continue on the straight path which leads toward the goal. That assistance is provided in Word and Sacrament within the gathering of believers. In Hebrews 4:11-16 the same thought had been expressed as positive encouragement rather than warning, based upon the vital power of God’s Word and Christ’s ability to identify with our need as one who had lived upon this earth as a man and provide grace in time of need:

“Let us therefore strive to enter the haven of 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...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.”

“If it is the grace of God which sets peoples’ feet at the entrance of the pathway of faith, it is equally the grace of God that enables them to continue and complete that pathway.” (Bruce, p. 349) Similar admonitions against failing to obtain the grace of God are reiterated throughout the New Testament. Thus, Paul pleads with the Corinthians:

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain...We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry. But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, by purity knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, by truthful speech and the

power of God.” (2 Corinthians 6:1-7)

He warned those in Galatia who sought righteousness in the observance of the Law: ***“You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the Law; you have fallen from grace...You were running well! Who hindered you from obeying the Truth? This persuasion is not from Him who calls you.”*** (Galatians 5:4,7) Peter reminded his readers to keep their minds firmly set upon the grace which they would receive at the coming of Christ and assured them that that focus would provide them with the strength to trust and obey the will of God:

“In this you rejoice, though now, for a little while, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more precious than gold which perishes though it is tested in fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ...Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6-7, 13)

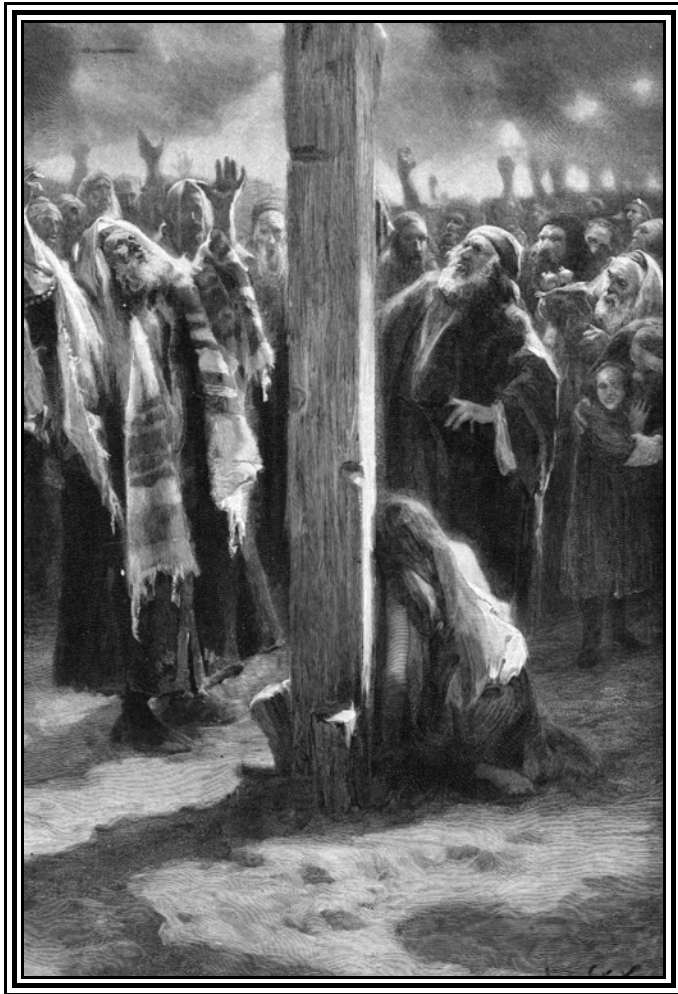


“Moses’ Farewell Address To Israel” - Tissot

“That no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.” If sin springs up among members of the congregation and is not eradicated, it will spread and contaminate others, destroying both the harmony and the holiness to which God’s people have been called. The language of the text here recalls the warning against falling away which Moses issued to the children of Israel in during his farewell address in Deuteronomy 29 which uses the same term for a plant which is poisonous and bitter. It

grows throughout the Middle East and North Africa:

“You know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed. And you have seen their detestable things, their idols of wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them. 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 the moist and the dry alike.’” (Deuteronomy 29:16-19)



The Hebrew term is often translated in reference to “wormwood” or “gall” plants notorious for their awful bitterness. ***“You who turn justice into wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth.”*** (Amos 5:7); ***“He has filled me with bitterness, He has sated me with wormwood...Remember my afflictions and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall.”*** (Lamentations 3:15,19); Peter characterized Simon the heathen magician as consumed by such bitterness ***“Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord, that if possible the intent of your heart may be forgiven. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”*** (Acts 8:22-23); the wine offered to Jesus was poisoned with gall and He refused to accept it because of the herb’s narcotic effect - ***“And when they came to the place called Golgotha, which means place of the skull, they offered Him wine to drink***

mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, He would not drink it.” (Matthew 27:33-34) Revelation tells of a blazing fallen star named “Wormwood” which poisoned the waters of the earth and made them bitter (Revelation 8: 10-11) -

“The third angel blew his trumpet and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.

The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water because it had been made bitter. (Revelation 8:10-11)



“The Name of the Star Is Called Wormwood” - 16th Century Woodcut

The bitterness in this instance is the defilement of the congregation by the evil which has been allowed to go unchecked. ***“The root of bitterness springs up.”*** The consequence is division and corruption which spreads among the people.

“That no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau...” - The tragic example of Esau, Jacob’s older brother, who forfeited the blessing of the firstborn for the momentary pleasure of a meal, provides an excellent example of the peril into which those who are defiled by sin place themselves. Esau is described as ***“one who is sexually immoral and unholy.”*** The sexual immorality is most likely a reference to his marriage to two Hittite women over the objections of his parents. ***“When Esau was forty years old he took Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.”*** (Genesis 26:34-35) The Apocryphal book of Jubilees expands the story to explain why Esau’s action would have been considered to be sexual immorality:

“Rebekah called Jacob her son and spoke to him, saying, ‘My son, do not take for yourself a wife from the daughters of Canaan, as did Esau, your brother, who took for himself two wives from the daughters of Canaan. And they have embittered my soul with all their impure deeds, because all of their deeds are fornication and lust. And there is not any righteousness with them because their deeds are evil...Do not take for yourself a wife from the daughters of this

land, but from my father's house and my father's kin. You will take for yourself a wife from my father's house. And the Most High God will bless you, and your children will be a righteous generation and a holy seed.' Then Jacob spoke with Rebekah his mother and said to her...I have guarded myself in my soul lest I sin or be corrupted in any of my ways all the days of my life, because my father Abraham gave me many commands, regarding lust and fornication. In spite of everything which he commanded, for these twenty-two years has contended with me, and frequently spoke with me and said, 'My brother, take as a wife one of the sisters of my two wives. But I did not desire to do as he had done.'" (Jubilees 25:1-9)



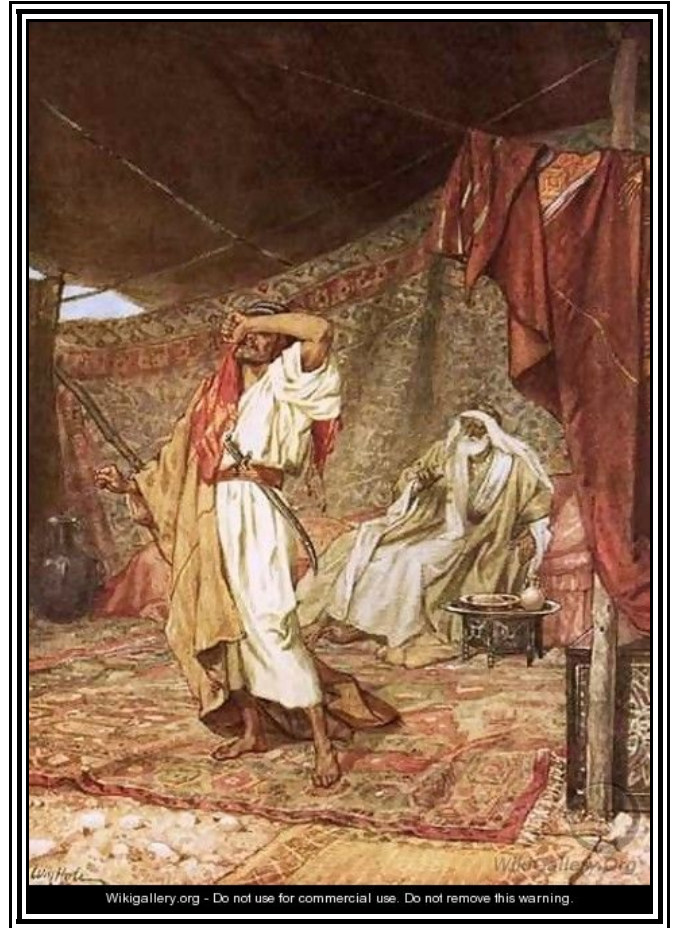
"Esau Sells His Birthright"

"Esau was also 'irreligious' that is to say, a man who contemptuously and profanely tramples under foot that which is sacred, as the recipients of our epistle were in danger of doing (10:29) He squandered for a single meal, for something as fleeting and unprofitable as the gratification of his carnal appetite of the moment, the precious privilege of his birthright, thus despising what he should have treasured as a holy trust. These Hebrew Christians will be guilty of a much greater act of profanity, if, disheartened by the difficulties of the contest, they barter not an earthly but a heavenly birthright for a short period of worldly ease and prosperity." (Hughes, p. 541)

For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing..." - Esau's example of the cost of defilement is all the more poignant in the bitter remorse which he felt afterward when he realized that his blessing had been lost. *"The moment of contempt for his birthright had consequences which could not be reversed. He lost, irretrievably, the*

blessing of the firstborn in an earthly lineage; but those whom our author is addressing are in danger of forfeiting their place in 'the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (cf. Vs 23). " (Hughes, p. 541)

Genesis describes the remorse of Esau in considerable detail. Sadly, that remorse was merely the pain of that which had been lost. It did not result in godly repentance nor a recognition of the sinful attitudes and actions which had led to the loss of the blessing. Instead it produced a bitter anger against his brother Jacob and a desire to obtain vengeance against him by murdering him. Unfortunately such remorse over the consequences of sin is often mistaken for repentance. *"I am not sorry that I sinned. I am only sorry that I got caught in my sin or that someone got hurt because of my sin."* Genuine repentance involves (1) recognition of my sin as a violation of the word and command of God and a willingness to acknowledge that sin without evasion or excuse; (2) remorse over the fact that I have disobeyed and dishonored God; (3) genuine resolve not to repeat the sin in the future; and (4) a willingness, wherever possible, to undo the damage caused by my sin. None of these hallmarks of genuine repentance are evident in the case of Esau.



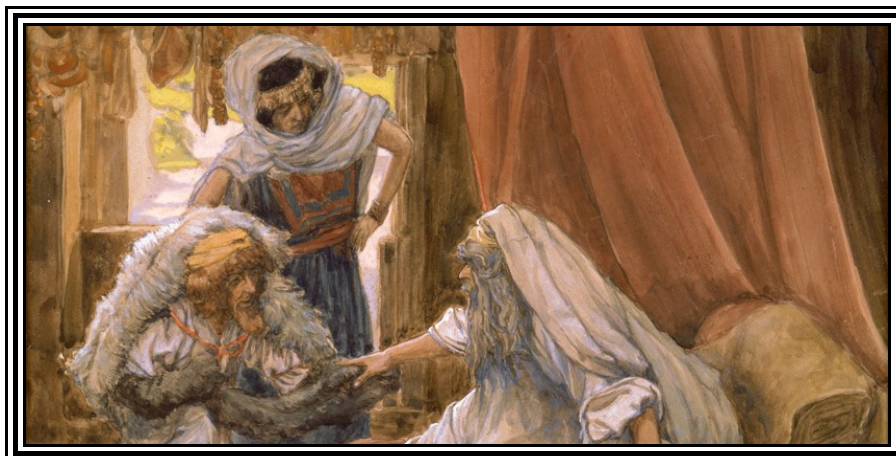
"The Lament Of Esau" - William Hole

"As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father: 'Bless me, even me also, O my father!' But he said, 'Your brother came deceitfully and he has taken away your blessing.' Esau said, 'Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright and behold how he has taken away my blessing!' Then he said, 'Have you not reserved a blessing for me?' Isaac answered and said to Esau, 'Behold, I have made him lord over you, and his brothers I have given to him as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?' Esau said to his father, 'Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.' And Esau lifted up his voice and wept...Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed

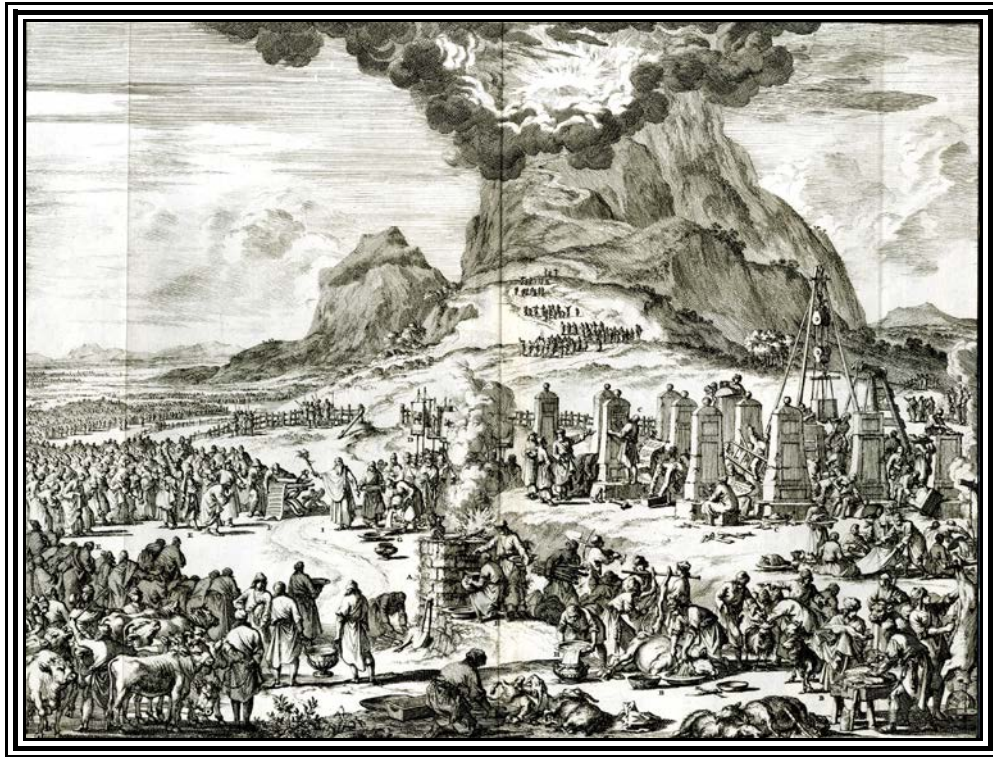
him. And Esau said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are approaching, then I will kill my brother Jacob. But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called for Jacob, her younger son and said to him. ‘Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you. Now, therefore, my son obey my voice. Arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran. Stay with him awhile until your brother’s fury turns away, until your brother’s anger turns away from you and he forgets what you have done to him.’” (Genesis 27:34-45)

As previously noted, these admonitions are modeled after the words of Moses to Israel in his farewell address in Deuteronomy 29. In that text, the admonitions culminate with one who flaunts the covenant of God and is cut off from among the covenant people. Esau becomes the counterpart of that warning here in Hebrews.

“In the same way, this warning in Hebrews climaxes with ‘lest there be anyone immoral or godless like Esau.’ With the double description ‘immoral and godless’ Esau becomes the epitome of apostasy, surpassing even the wilderness generation. There is little disagreement over the meaning of ‘godless.’ Godlessness is the opposite of holiness. God’s people are to pursue the life of faith. It is living without the ‘godly fear’ of the faithful. The godless person is one who has received the promise of God but lives as if God’s power were not real and His promises of reward were invalid. This is exactly what Esau did when ‘he sold his own birthright for a single meal’ His birthright as the firstborn was the promise given Abraham of a people and of an eternal heavenly city (Heb. 19:9-10,13-16). He surrendered this promise for the merest pittance of the world’s goods - one little meal. Thus, he treated God’s power as insufficient to meet his need and God’s promise of future blessing as worthless. If the people who lived by faith in Chapter 11 were heroes, Esau is their antithesis. To abandon Christ would be to spurn the One who fulfilled the promise which Esau disregarded.” (Cockerill, p. 638)



“The Trickery Of Rebekah And Jacob” - Tissot



"Israel Before Mount Sinai" - Hoet Bible Engraving

Hebrews 12:18-24

(18) For you have not come to what can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness and gloom or a tempest (19) and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. (20) For they could not endure the order that was given "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." (21) Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear!" (22) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, (23) and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, (24) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

"For you have not come to what may be touched..." - The author now returns to the basic theme of the epistle, the contrast between the former covenant and the new covenant in Christ demonstrating the absolute superiority of Christ as the fulfillment of everything promised and foreshadowed in the old. That theme has been put forward thus far as the difference between the imperfect and the perfect, the temporary and the permanent, and the law and the gospel. With the superiority of the new covenant comes a greater sense of responsibility for those who have witnessed the unmistakable revelation of the undeserved love of God in Christ, the fulfillment of all God's prophetic promises. That critically important point is made here using a contrast between Mount Sinai where God appeared to Israel and established a national covenant and Mount Zion upon which God has revealed

the wonder of salvation by grace through faith in the shed blood of Christ. The dreadful terror of the Israelites in the face of the thunder, lighting, and earthquakes which manifested the presence of God upon Mount Sinai is vividly described in Exodus:

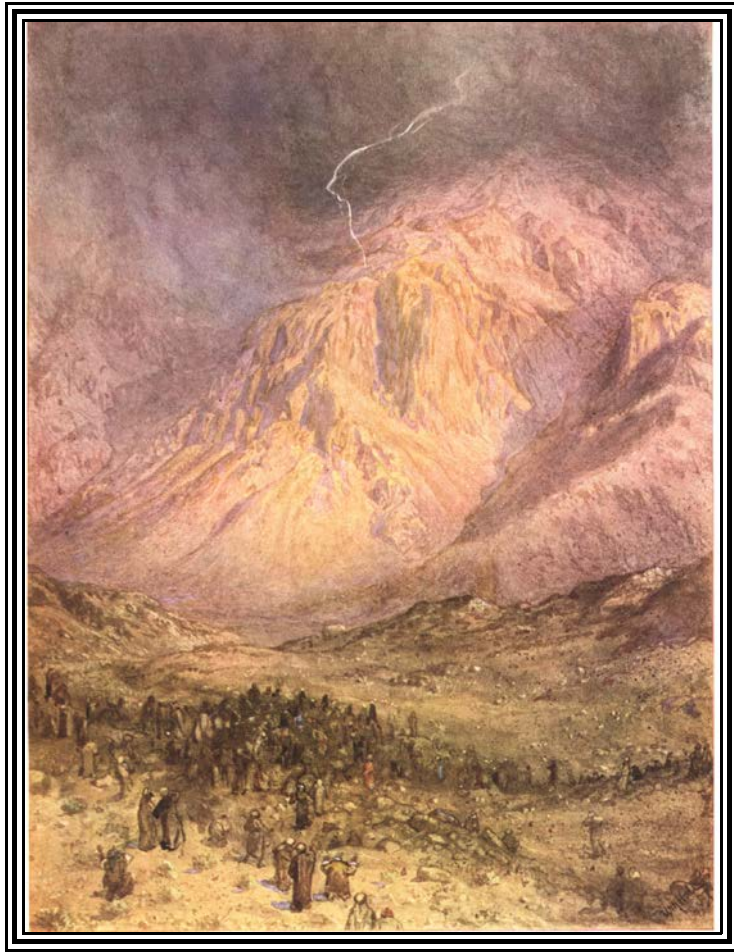
“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. So then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD God had descended upon it in fire. The smoke of it went up like a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in the thunder. The LORD came down upon Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people lest they break through to the LORD to look, and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.’” (Exodus 19:16-22)

“Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet, and all the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled. And they stood far off and trembled and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us lest we die.’ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear for God has come to test you, that the fear of Him may be before you, that you may not sin.’ The people stood far off, and Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.” (Exodus 20:18-22)



“Make them known to your children and to your children’s children, how on the day when you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said, ‘Gather the people to Me that I

may let them hear My words, so that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they live on the earth and that they may teach their children so. And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain when the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud and gloom. Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words but there was no form. There was only the sound of a voice. And He declared to you His covenant which He demanded that you perform.” (Deuteronomy 4:9-13)



“Israel Before The Lord At Mount Sinai” - Hole

Using the example of Esau in the preceding paragraph, the author had warned Christians against repeating the mistake of Isaac’s oldest son and forfeiting the blessing which God has promised. This segment begins with the conjunction **“for”** which links the two paragraphs together and indicates that addition basis for the previous warning will now be provided. The Christian experience is far superior to that of the ancient Israelites at Sinai - **“You have not come.”** Mount Sinai is not specifically named but the terminology here in verses 18-21, follows the language of Exodus 19 & 20 very closely.

For example, the opening phrase of the paragraph **“To what may be touched”** mirrors the stern commands set before the Israelites in Exodus 19 - **“Take care not to go up upon the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches**

the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, he shall be stoned or shot, whether beast or man, he shall not live.” (Exodus 19:12,13)

“A blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given. ‘If even a beast touches the mountain it shall be stoned.” -

These phrases here in Hebrews also reflect the language of Exodus virtually word for word. The final phrase **“For they could not endure the order that was given”** (vs. 20) has elicited considerable discussion. In both Exodus and Deuteronomy the terror of the people, who

plead with Moses to represent them ***“Lest we die”*** is provoked by the majesty and the power of God’s voice and the supernatural wonders which accompanied it. The emphasis here seems to be on the content of the message rather than the manner in which it was presented. Delitsch suggests that for the sake of consistency the intent of the Greek text here is to be understood in the same way here as in the preceding phrases - *“It was not so much the thing commanded as the manner in which it was spoken, from which Israel shrank back in terror.”* (Delitsch, II, 341) At the same time, the thought that even an animal, inadvertently coming into contact with the sacred ground of the mountain would have to be executed is a most intimidating expression of the radical holiness of this place and would certainly have intensified the fearful of awe of the people at the foot of the mountain.

“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled...Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD had descended it upon it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly...Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off, and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us lest we die.’” (Exodus 19:16,18-89; 20:18-19)

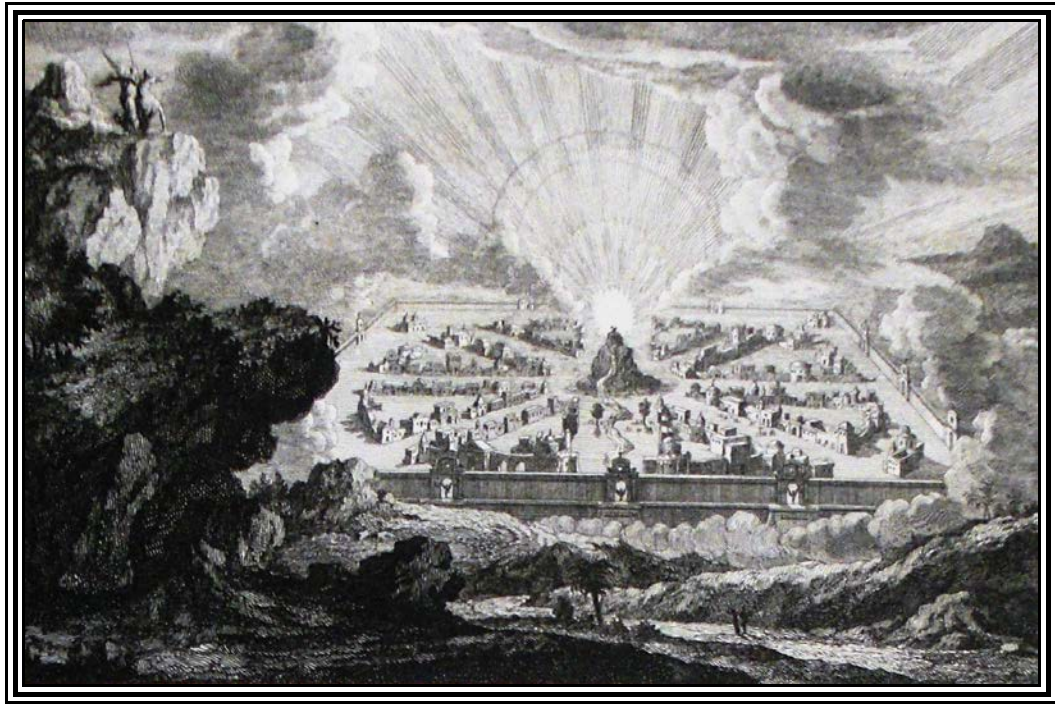
“Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’” - This quotation is from Deuteronomy 9:19 where Moses confessed to Israel that he was terrified

that God would destroy the entire nation because of the Golden Calf. Its placement here in the context of the first appearance of Israel before the mountain reflects the wording of the historic *“Haggadah”* - the commentary for the Passover meal which conflates the two episodes together. *“I was afraid that the angels would consume me with the breath of their mouths.”* (Lane,II, p. 464) Stephen makes a similar reference to Moses in regard to his fear over the presence of God at the burning bush: ***“And Moses trembled and did not dare to look.”*** (Acts 7:32)



“The Glory Of The LORD Upon Mount Sinai”
E.M. Lillien

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the

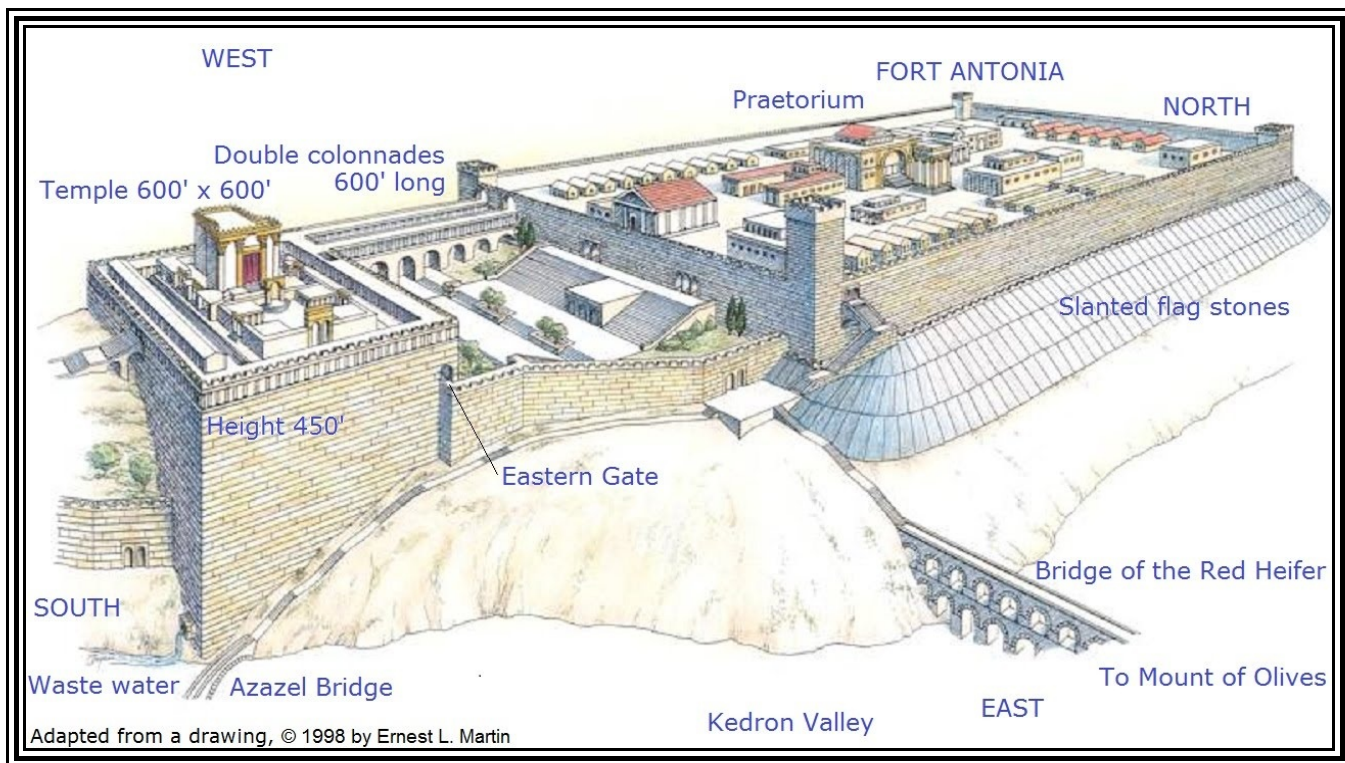


“Mount Zion In the Midst Of The Heavenly Jerusalem” - Bible Engraving

heavenly Jerusalem...” - The adversative conjunction **“but”** indicates the contrast which will now be presented between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. **“You have come”** refers to the readers’ conversion to Christianity and their coming to faith in Christ by which one is blessed with access to the heavenly Mount Zion. The Greek verb in this sentence is the basis for the English word *“proselyte”* is derived. Based upon that derivation, Philo of Alexandria uses this term to refer to all those who, like Moses, have come to the pure truth of God:

“When Moses heard this, he did not cease from his desire but still burned with a longing for the understanding of invisible things. And he receives all persons of a similar character and disposition, whether they were originally born so, or whether they have become so through any change of conduct, having become better people and as such entitled to be ranked in a superior class, approving of the one body because they have not defaced their nobility of birth, and the other because they have sought fit to alter their lives so as to come over to nobleness of conduct. And these last he calls ‘proselytes’ from their nobility of having come over to a new and God-fearing constitution, learning to disregard the fabulous inventions of other nations, and clinging to the pure truth.” (Philo, p. 538)

Historically, Mount Zion was the Jebusite stronghold at the crest of the ridge overlooking the ancient city of Jerusalem. King David seized the fortress and made it his royal residence in the seventh year of his reign. He made it the religious focal point of his kingdom by bringing the sacred Ark of the Covenant there - ***“the Ark of God which is called by the***



Name of Yahweh of Hosts, who sits enthroned upon the cherubim.” (2 Samuel 6:2) When Solomon built the temple just to the north of the ancient fortress, the designation Mount Zion was expanded to include the temple site and Zion became synonymous with Jerusalem. ***“Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers’ houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem to bring up the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD out of the city of David which is Zion.”*** (1 Kings 8:1) Thus the psalmists rejoice: ***“He chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loves. He built His sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth which He founded forever.”*** (Psalm 78:68ff.) ***“Jerusalem built as a city which is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of Yahweh, as was decreed for Israel to give thanks to Yahweh.”*** (Psalm 122:3f.) ***“He who sits in the heavens laughs. The LORD holds them in derision. Then He will speak to them in His wrath and terrify them in His fury, saying, ‘As for Me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.’*** (Psalm 2:4-6)

Seven features of the Mount Sinai experience of Israel had been cited to characterize that event: (1) something that may be touched - the tangible mountain; (2) a blazing fire; (3) darkness; (4) supernatural gloom; (5) tempest; (6) the sound of a trumpet; and (7) the terrifying voice of God. The writer proceeds to duplicate that structure with a list of seven characteristics of the heavenly Mount Zion which document the fundamental difference between the two. For Mount Zion the list of seven includes: (1) Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; (2) countless hosts of angels; (3) the assembly of the firstborn sons of God enrolled in heaven; (4) God the Judge of all; (5) the spirits of the righteous made perfect; (6) Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant; and (7) the sprinkled

blood which speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. In both instances these function of these seven characteristics is to provide access to God the heavenly Judge. As the earthly Zion was the focal point of God's relationship with the Children of Israel, so the heavenly Zion is the focal point of God's relationship for the New Israel, that is, the people of God in Christ. Both the temple upon Mount Zion and its heavenly counterpart are designed according to the plan of God. 1 Chronicles 28:11-19 indicates that the plans for the temple which David passed on to Solomon were drawn by *"hand of the LORD."*

"Then David gave Solomon his son the plan for the vestibule of the Temple, and of its houses, its treasuries, its upper rooms, and its inner chambers, and of the room for the Mercy Seat, and the plan of all that he had in mind for the courts of the House of the LORD...All this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the LORD, all the work to be done according to the plan."

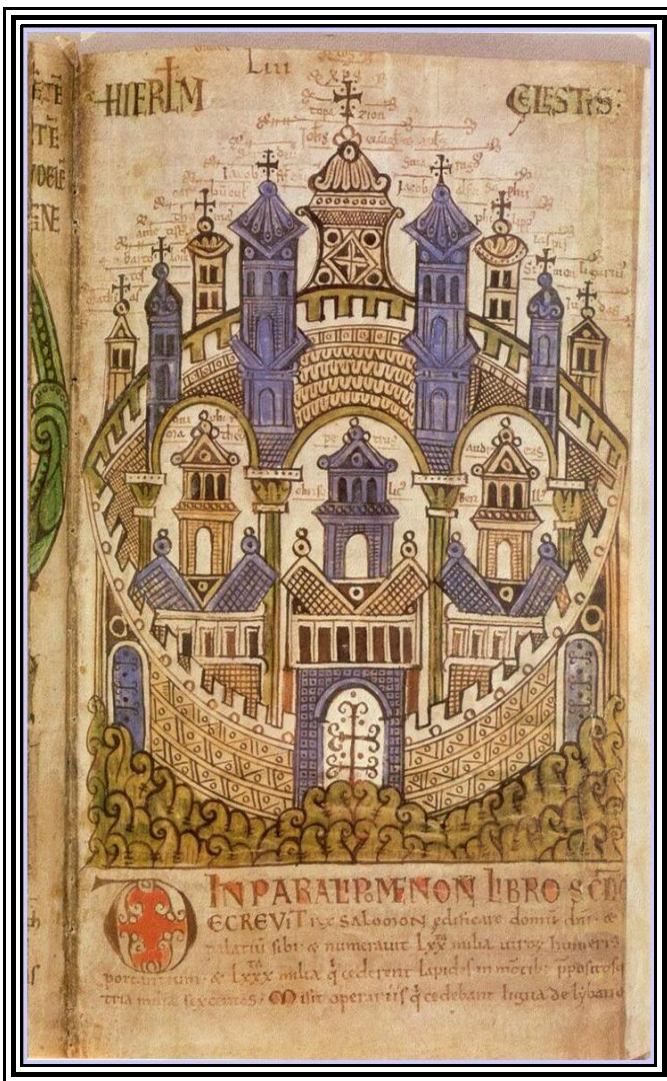
The earthly sanctuary were copies, prototypes, as it were of their eternal counterparts in heaven. As the rabbinic text of Psalm 122 declares: *"As Jerusalem, a city which which is built like the city which is its fellow, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of Yahweh.* The New Testament expressed the same concept in the words of St. Paul to the Galatians: *"Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia. She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother."* (Galatians 4:25-26) The Hebrew Apocalypse of Baruch, written around A.D. 70, reflects the same view, foretelling the downfall of Jerusalem but assuring its readers that the heavenly Jerusalem and its temple were created in the beginning and will endure forever:



"Roman Destruction Of Jerusalem - A.D. 70"

“The Lord said to me: ‘The city will be delivered up for a time, and the city will be chastened for a time, and the world will not be forgotten. Or do you think that this is the city of which I said, ‘On the palms of My hands I have carved you?’ It is not this building which is in your midst now. It is that which will be revealed, with Me, which was already prepared from the moment that I decided to create Paradise. And I showed it to Adam before he sinned. But when he transgressed the commandment, it was taken away from him - as also Paradise. After these things, I showed it to My servant Abraham in the night between the portions of the victims. And again, I showed it to Moses on Mount Sinai, when I showed him the likeness of the Tabernacle and all its vessels. Behold, now it is preserved with Me, and also Paradise. Now go away and do as I command you.” (Apocalypse of Baruch 4)

Revelation 21 uses the same imagery of the New Jerusalem to depict the dwelling of the people of God in His presence for eternity:



“The Heavenly Jerusalem” - 14th Century Bible Illumination

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God...And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance...And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need for the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the



“The Lamb Upon the Heavenly Throne”

Lamb’s Book of Life.” (Revelation 21:2-3;10-11;22-27)

“And to innumerable angels in festal gathering” - In the opening chapter of the Epistle, the writer identified angels as *“ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.”* (1:14) Their presence, singing songs of adoration and praise in honor of God’s glory and His love have accompanied all of the mighty acts of God on behalf of His people. Thus when the saints triumphant entrance into *“Mount Zion, the City of the Living God”* occurs they will be greeted by *“innumerable angels in festal gathering.”* The *“festal gathering”* indicates the grand celebration of the victory which Christ has won and the rescue of His people from their bondage to sin death and the power of the devil. Their worship and praise marks the ultimate realization of that victory as the risen saints are welcomed en masse to their eternal home and the original purpose of the God of love for His creation is finally realized. The Greek word used here is typically applied to pilgrim feasts of Israel and the intense emotion and joy which the devout experienced and expressed as they drew closer to the Temple in Jerusalem.

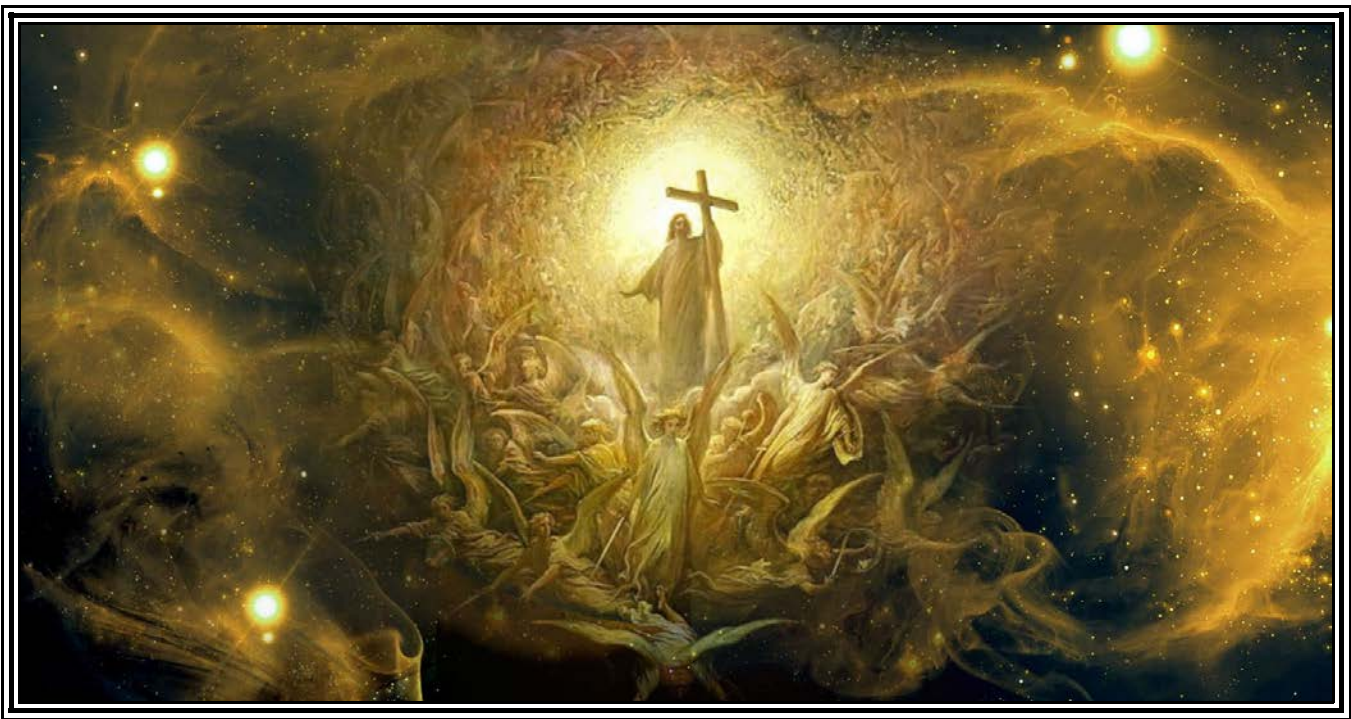
Moses informs us that the presentation of the Law upon Sinai was also attended by hosts of angels.

“The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; He shown upon us from Mount Paran, He came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at His right hand. Yes, He loved His people, all His holy ones were at His hand; so they followed in your step receiving direction from

you, when Moses commanded us a Law as a possession for the assembly of Jacob.” (Deuteronomy 33:1-4)

The prophet Daniel’s magnificent vision of the Ancient of Days upon His heavenly throne likewise includes massive hosts of angels surrounding the divine presence:

“As I looked, thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His clothing was as white as snow, and His hair like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out before Him; a thousand thousands served Him; and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him; the court sat in judgement and the books were opened.” (Daniel 7:6-10)



“The Myriads of Angels In Heaven”

The visions of Revelation are replete with similar scenes of angelic hosts and victorious saints. In Revelation 5, for example, when the Lamb of God is presented as worthy to open the scroll which contains the future which God has planned the setting is described in this way:

“And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp and a golden bowl full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals; for You were slain and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe, and language, and people, and nation and You have made them a

kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on earth. Then I looked and I heard around the throne the living creatures and the elders and the voice of many angels, numbering myriads or myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’” (Revelation 5:8-12)



“Hosts Of Angels Around the Christ” - Vasilikov

“The angels are exalted spiritual beings, ‘mighty ones’ who in perpetual service of God perform His will, ‘hearkening unto the voice of His word’ (Psalm 103:20), and, as we have been reminded in the early part of the epistle, ‘ministering spirits sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation’ (1:14). The eternal Son, who, to procure our salvation ‘for a little while was made lower than the angels,’ is now ‘crowned with glory and honor high above all angels’ (2:9). Before Him in the heavenly city ‘myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands’, that is to say an innumerable company of angels adore Him by singing ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing’ (Revelation 5:11ff.). This scene of joyful praise in the heavenly Jerusalem is what is meant by their being ‘in festal gathering’ an expression which ‘describes the angelic host thronging with glad worship round the living God.’ To their worship, the adoration and praise of the countless multitude of those whom Christ has redeemed is added (Revelation 7:9ff.). A contrast may well be implied between ‘the ten thousands of holy ones’ who were in attendance at the awesome event of Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 33:2) and the ten thousands of angels now described as united ‘in festal gathering’ to celebrate the glorious triumph of Mount Zion.” (Hughes, p 547)

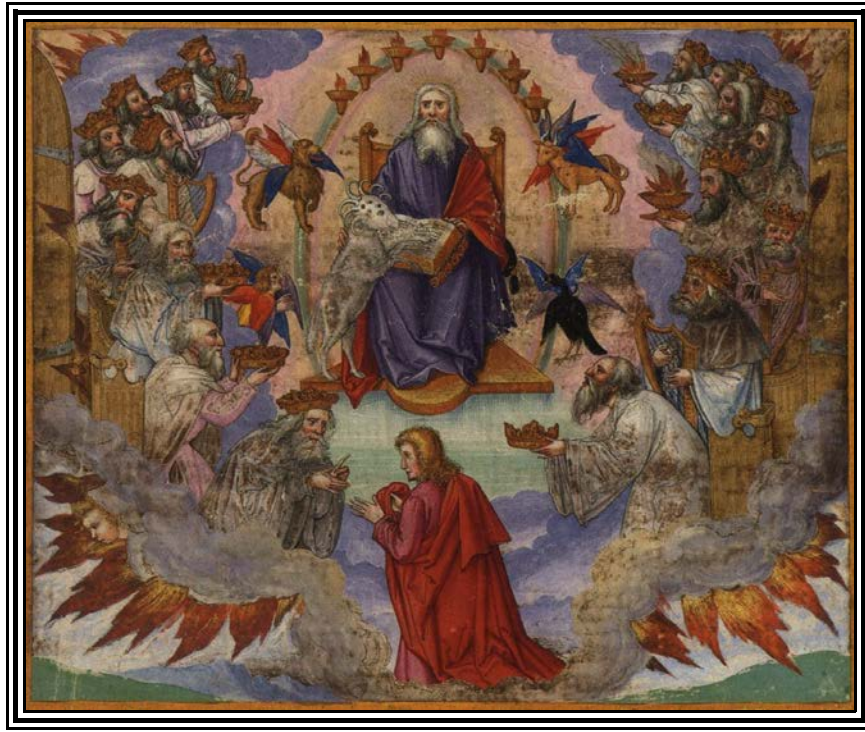
“And to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” - In Hebrews 2:12, the writer had described the people of God as those whose names He would declare “in the midst of the assembly:” “I will declare your names to My brothers, in the midst of the

assembly I will sing praises to you.” The Greek noun in both the previous reference and here in Chapter 13 is “*ecclesia*” - the church, the gathering around Word and sacrament of those whom God has called out of the world to be His people. The use of this word here maintains the theme of joyful worship in heaven which has characterized the preceding phrases about Mount Zion. At the same time it reinforces the parallel between Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion. The appearance of the Lord to Israel at Sinai is repeatedly identified with the same word (“*ecclesia*”) in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament completed during the inter-testamental period. *“How on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to Me so that I may let them hear My words, so that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.’”* (Deuteronomy 4:10); *“And the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words that the LORD had spoken with you out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly.”* (Deuteronomy 9:10); *“Just as you desired of the LORD your God on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God.’”* Deuteronomy 19:16)

That connection is further reinforced by the identification of the people of God as *“the assembly of the firstborn of those who are enrolled in heaven.”* Both of these designations are also drawn directly from the Old Testament’s identifications of the Children of Israel. God referred to Israel as *“My firstborn son”* in the message which he instructed Moses to bring to Pharaoh: *“Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, ‘Israel is My firstborn son, and I say to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’”* (Exodus 4:22-23) The prophet Jeremiah made use of this same terminology to promise the return of Israel and Judah from exile: *“I*



“The Lamb’s Book Of Life”



"The Lamb's Book Of Life"

will make them walk by brooks of water in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a Father to Israel and Ephraim is My firstborn." (Jeremiah 31:9) The *"firstborn"* also serves to reinforce the reference to Esau in the preceding paragraph who forfeited his birthright as the firstborn in favor of the pleasures of this world, thereby facilitating the promotion of Jacob through the trickery of their mother Rebekah. In this instance the *"firstborn"* are those who were not deceived by the allure of the temporary, insignificant things of this world by lived their lives as strangers and pilgrims who will live in the presence of God forever in heaven.

The imagery of an enrollment book in which are recorded all the names of God's people is also drawn from the Old Testament. Moses pleaded with the Lord after the Golden Calf for God not to blot out the names of the idolaters out of His book: *"But now if you will forgive their sin - but if not, please blot me out of Your book that You have written. But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot out of My book."* (Exodus 32:32-33) The same terminology appears in Psalm 69 as the psalmist calls for righteous judgment upon the enemies of God: *"Let them be blotted out from the Book of the Living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous."* (Psalm 69:29) The prophet Isaiah also refers to a Book of Life in which are recorded the names of those whom God has chosen as His own people and whom He will deliver from the judgements impending over the city of Jerusalem:

"And he who remains in Zion and is left in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem when the LORD shall

have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion...Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night, for over all the glory there will be a canopy.” (Isaiah 4:3-5)

The Old Testament metaphor continues into the New Testament. Jesus tells His disciples:

“Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the Enemy and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:19-20)

Paul writes to the Philippians to put an end to the conflicts among them because they are believers ***“whose names are in the Book of Life.”*** (Philippians 4:3) John refers to this most precious book repeatedly throughout the visions of Revelation. He concludes with this word of encouragement to his readers: ***“Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”*** (Revelation 21:27)

The Book of Life imagery is designed to convey the security of salvation for the believer as one chosen by God for salvation. The same point is made by the use of the perfect tense in the verb ***“you have come”*** which denotes action which has been fully accomplished and is final. *“The perfect tense of the verb ‘you have come’ indicates that the readers have now come to this place of permanent relationship with God in Zion and to the fact that their names have been permanently enrolled in heaven.”* (Allen, p. 593)

Hence the terminology used here in Hebrews to describe the people of God rejoicing in the presence of God upon Mount Zion is all drawn directly from the Old Testament and



“God The Judge of All”

remained prominent in the apostolic preaching of the New Testament and would therefore have been completely familiar to the recipients of the letter.

“And to God, the Judge of all” - Hebrew’s list of the realities of the Kingdom of the Saints now comes to the central and essential figure in the heavenly Zion - ***“God, the Judge of all.”*** His central importance is reflected by the fact that He is number four on a list of seven. *“This fourth item is the pivot in the list of seven. And that is what we would expect in light of the Old Testament, for theophany involves the appearance of God as the cosmic Judge.”* (Kleinig, p. 652) This is no ordinary judge but ***“the Judge of all.”*** His jurisdiction is universal because He is the Sovereign Creator of the universe. To identify God as ***“the Judge of all”*** asserts both His holiness and His righteousness. This sets the stage for what to follow with ***“the spirits of the righteous made perfect”*** and ***“Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant”*** and ***“the sprinkled blood.”***

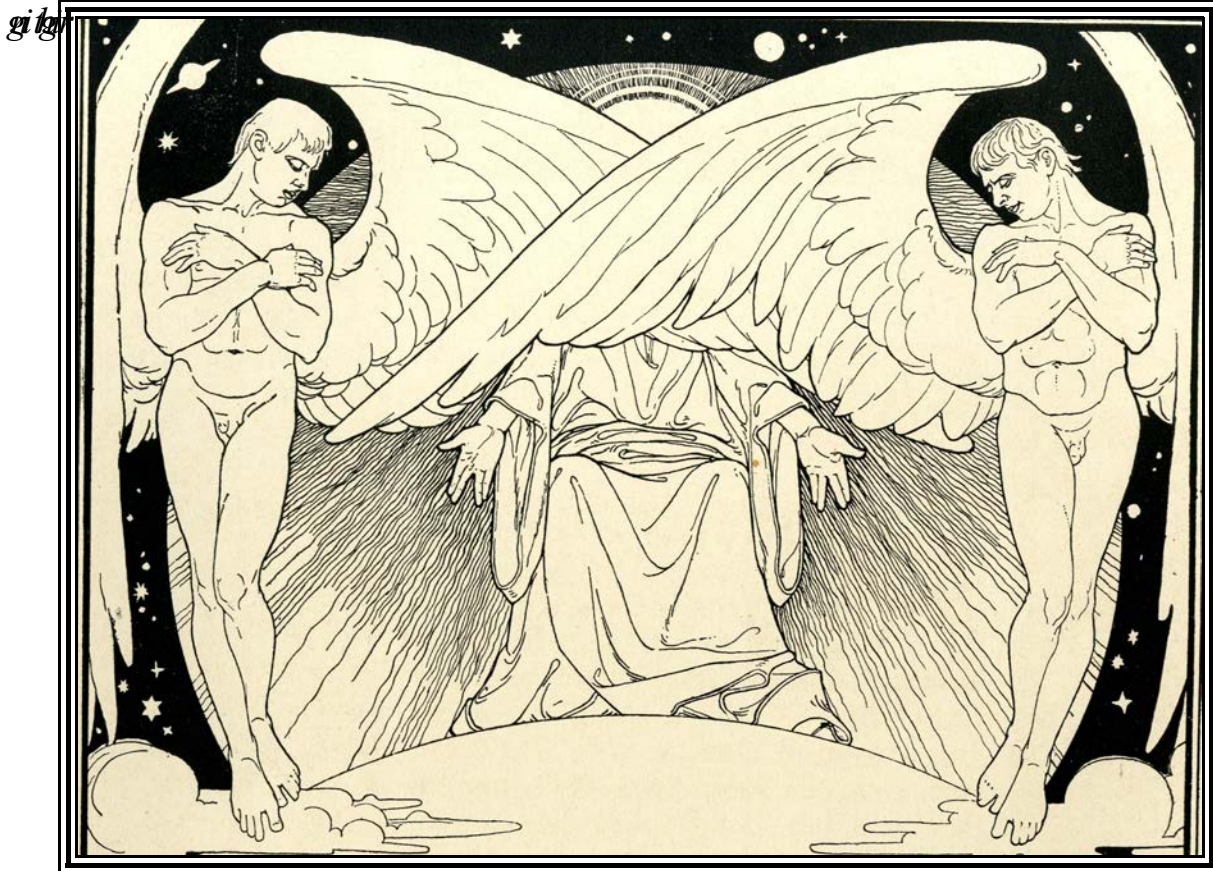


“God The Righteous Judge” - DÜRER

“By reminding his hearers that they have come to the ultimate and sovereign Judge he establishes the proper context for understanding the rest of this description of Mount Zion, especially the work of the Mediator and of His blood. This joyful fellowship of men and angels is not to be taken lightly. God has not relented in His holiness. This wonderful scene of blessing is possible only through the salvation He has provided in His Son. Secondly, by reminding his hearers that God is still the holy God of Sinai and binds the two mountains of his comparison more closely together.” (Cockerill, p. 656)

Given the fact that this reference to ***“God the Judge of all”*** is in the midst of the epistle’s description of ***“Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”*** it is safe to assume that the focus is not upon the Judge’s role in condemnation, which is often the case throughout Scripture, but upon the positive side of judgement in the vindication of the defendant.

“The confession of God as Judge is much more positive than it sounds to us with our one-sided understanding of judgement as condemnation, an understanding that is distorted by an uneasy or a guilty conscience. In the Old Testament God’s judgement was mainly understood in a positive way, as



“God The Judge Of All” - E.M. Lillien

something that was wrong. Hence, when the people who prayed the psalms came to the temple, they asked God to judge them, they prayed for vindication and acquittal, justice and justification; they wanted to obtain a favorable verdict from Him (Pss. 7:8; 26:1; 35:24; 43:1) And that is the primary sense here. For those who are in Christ, God is a Judge who scrutinizes and exposes them with His Word (4:12-13); a Judge who pardons and acquits them (because of Him who pleads for them (4:14-16); a Judge who vindicates and justifies them (10:30). By His judgement He exposes their sin so that they own up to it and seek release from it. So, through Christ, (4:16; 7:25; 10:1,22; 11:6) they approach God the Judge as the Savior and Helper of all, the One who rescues them from their enemies and vindicates them when they turn to Him for help...They need not fear the unfavorable judgements of the pagan society that treats them with contempt for their faith in Christ, because they have the approval of the divine Judge.” (Kleinig, p. 653)

“And to the spirits of the righteous made perfect...” - These are believers who died in the faith and whose souls now dwell in the heavenly Jerusalem awaiting the great day of resurrection. *“The word ‘spirit’ here probably describes the spirit apart from the body waiting for the final resurrection.” (Allen, p. 592)* The identification of the dead as **“spirits”** is the characteristic terminology of Judaism at this point in time. *“The Book of*

Jubilees,” “1 Enoch” and “2 Baruch” all written within Judaism during the inter-testamental period anticipate God’s vindication of the faithful in this way:

“And then the Lord will heal His servants and they will rise up and see great peace. And they will drive out their enemies and the righteous ones will see and give great praise, and rejoice forever and ever with joy; and they will see all of their judgements and all of their curses among their enemies. And their bones will rest in the earth, and their spirits will increase joy and they will know that the Lord is an executer of judgement; and He will show mercy to hundreds and thousands, to all who love Him.” (Charlesworth, p. 102; Jubilees 20:30-31)

“For all good things are prepared for and written down for the souls of those who died in righteousness. Many and good things shall be given to you, the offshoot of your labors. Your lot exceeds even that of the living ones. The spirits of those who died in righteousness shall live and rejoice; their spirits shall not perish, nor their memorial from the face of the Great One unto all generations of the world. Therefore, do not worry about their humiliation.” (Charlesworth, I, p. 84; 1 Enoch 103:3-4)

“And it will happen after these things when the time of the appearance of the Anointed One has been fulfilled and He returns with glory, that then all who



“The Justification Of The Sinner Before God” - 17th Century Woodcut

sleep in hope of Him will rise. And it will happen at that time that those treasures will be opened in which the number of the souls of the righteous were kept, and they will go out and the multitude of the souls will appear together in one assemblage, of one mind. And the first ones will enjoy themselves, and the last ones will not be sad. For they will know that the time has come of which it is said that it is the end of times. But the souls of the wicked will more waste away when they shall see all these things, for they will know that their torment has come and that their perditions have arrived.” (Charlesworth, I, p. 631; 2 Baruch 30)



“Law And Gospel” - Lucas Cranach

Two characteristics of these spirits already dwelling in the heavenly city are cited. First of all they are ***“righteous.”*** They are ***“righteous”*** because they have been justified by grace through faith in the shed blood of Jesus as the ransom payment for their sins. This crucial New Testament term literally means to be declared ***“Not Guilty!”*** by a judge in a courtroom. In the Bible the word refers to the formal declaration of the sinner’s forgiveness accomplished by the substitutionary atonement of Christ on his behalf. Although I am guilty Christ has taken my place and in what Martin Luther aptly calls *“the happy exchange”* the innocence of the sinless Christ is graciously bestowed upon me and Christ takes my guilt with Him to the cross to pay my penalty in my place. Based on that which Christ has done the spirits of those who have died in the faith are in heaven awaiting the Day of Judgement and the resurrection of their physical bodies.

Secondly, these ***“spirits of the righteous are made perfect.”*** These faithful pilgrims have come to their heavenly goal, the finish and completion of their journey by Jesus their great High Priest who is ***“the author and finisher of their faith”*** (Hebrew 12:2) They lack nothing in their relationship with God for His work as been completed for them. The struggle when they endured, the race which they had run, as saints and sinners on earth are over. They have reached the goal and are now perfectly confirmed in their bliss for all

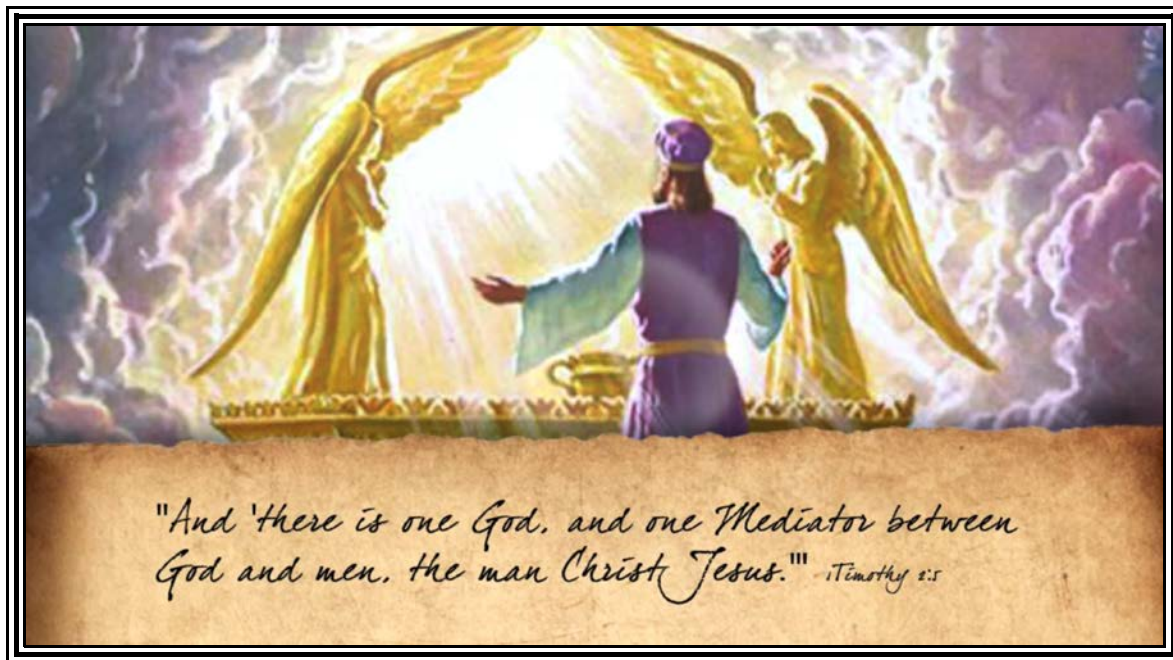
eternity. Commentator Phillip Hughes offers this comprehensive definition of the perfection of the ***“spirits of the righteous”*** in heaven:

“It is preferable to under ‘the spirit of just men made perfect’ as an inclusive designation comprehending all who through faith have been accounted righteous by God from the beginning of the world onward and who now, their earthly pilgrimage completed, have experienced for themselves that Jesus is not only the pioneer but also the perfecter of their faith. Absent from the body, they are at home with their Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21,23). It is true that they await the culminating moment of the resurrection and the clothing of their spirits with glorified bodies; yet, as Wescott observes, they are essentially made perfect since ‘they have realized the end for which they were created by virtue of the completed work of Christ.’ Their union with Christ means that they are now one with Him in the perfection of His exaltation, so that it may truly be said of them, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth.’ (Revelation 14:13)” (Hughes, p. 550)

“And to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant...” - The theme of Jesus as the perfect High Priest who as both God and Man is uniquely capable of serving as the Mediator between God and Man has already been thoroughly discussed in Hebrews. ***“Therefore, He is the Mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”*** (Hebrews 9:15) ***“But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old, as the covenant He mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.”*** (Hebrews 8:8) ***“Jesus,”*** the personal name of the Messiah/Mediator is used here to stress the dual identity of the God/man and it is placed at the beginning of the phrase for particular emphasis. The superiority of the ***“new covenant”*** has been set forth in detail in the preceding chapters.



“The Redeemed In Heaven” - Fraangelico



"There is no access to the heavenly city apart from Him. As a man of flesh and blood He is now the Mediator of the new covenant, as Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. He serves as the Mediator both by establishing that testament through His earthly ministry and by now conveying God's promised gifts to His people through His heavenly ministry. The accent in Hebrews lies on that second part of His role as Mediator...Jesus the Son mediates between God the Father and them as their High Priest now. He did not just serve as Mediator by His perfect life of obedience and by offering Himself as a sacrifice by His death on earth; He acts as their Mediator now before God in the heavenly sanctuary. Since He is the great High Priest in God's holy house, the saints on earth can now come near to God in heaven and receive good gifts as their promised inheritance from Him. There He now appears before God on their behalf and provides atonement for their sins with His blood." (Kleinig, p. 655)

"And to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" - The list of the seven features of the heavenly Mount Zion concludes, most appropriately, with a reference to the blood of Christ which is the basis for the salvation of all who will dwell in this new Jerusalem. This shed blood is the means by which the work of the Mediator has been accomplished. *"The blood that sealed the new covenant as its Mediator is blood that proclaims a better message from cleansing and release from judgement. It invites the faithful into the presence of God. (Cockerill, p. 659)* The ***"sprinkled blood"*** refers to the sacrificial ritual of the Temple, most notably the sprinkling of the blood upon the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement. The blood of the lamb which was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelite homes on the night of the Passover also comes to mind. The same term is used in Hebrews 10:22 to describe the cleansing

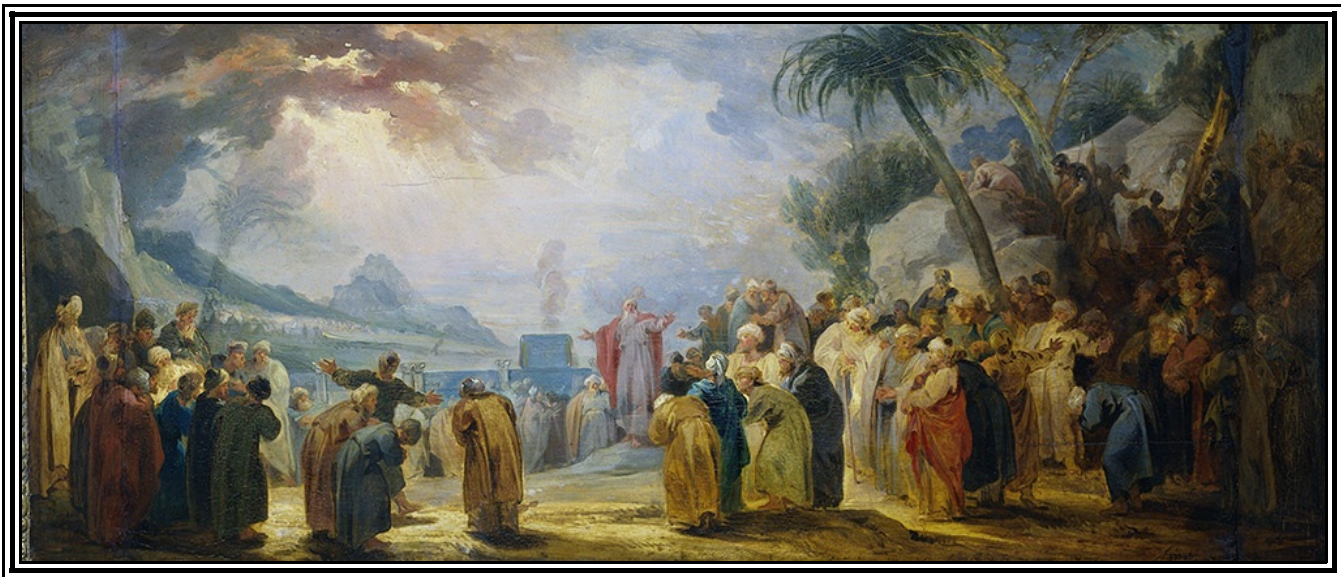
which Christ has accomplished to restore our access to God.

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by 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 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.” (Hebrews 10:19-22)

“The blood of Christ is described as ‘the sprinkled blood’ in reference to the various sprinklings of blood by divine institution under the former covenant. This is beyond doubt. For the offering of blood always involved sprinkling, at least to some extent. But there are three particularly significant examples of ‘the sprinkled blood.’ (1) The first is the blood of the Passover Lamb, an unmistakable prototype of our redemption by Christ (Exodus 12:21), (2) The second is the sprinkling of blood which confirmed the establishment of the covenant at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:6-8). (3) The third is the great Day of Atonement and the sprinkling of the blood by the High Priest within the Most Holy Place (Leviticus 16:14). As we have previously noted, these three events were the foremost prototypes of the redemption, justification and sanctification of the church by the blood of Christ. And in addition to these three, God instituted the sprinkling of blood as part of all of the burnt offerings and



“The Sprinkled Blood To Ratify the Covenant” - Hoet



“The Ratification of the Covenant At Mt. Sinai”

sacrifices for sin. I have no doubt that this designation of the blood of Christ refers to all of these sacrifices. The justification and cleansing which they accomplished occurred because they served as prototypes of the blood which the Messiah would shed. And yet, since this reference to ‘sprinkled blood’ is directly linked to the office of Christ as the Mediator of the new covenant the reference is especially applicable to the blood of the sacrifices which confirmed the former covenant at Mount Sinai. That former covenant was ratified and confirmed by its mediator (Moses) through the sprinkling of the blood of the oxen that were sacrificed. In the same manner, the new covenant was confirmed by the offering and sprinkling of blood, but this was the blood of the Mediator Himself offered in sacrifice to God, as the apostle explained in Chapter 9.” (Owen, VII, p. 348)

The writer further defines this blood as speaking ***“a better word than the blood of Abel.”*** Abel had been the first of those listed in Chapter 11's roll call of the faithful. Reference to Abel here serves to highlight the connection between the content of Chapters 11 and 12. *“The pastor ends his account of the past and present history of God’s faithful people as he began, with the mention of righteous Abel.”* (Cockerill, p. 660) God had informed Cain that his murdered brother’s blood was crying out to him from the ground (Genesis 4:11). Abel’s figurative cry for vengeance is contrasted with the shed blood of Christ, another innocent victim of brutal murder, which cries out not for vengeance but for the forgiveness of sinners, including those who had personally been guilty of taking His life.

Hebrews 12:25-29

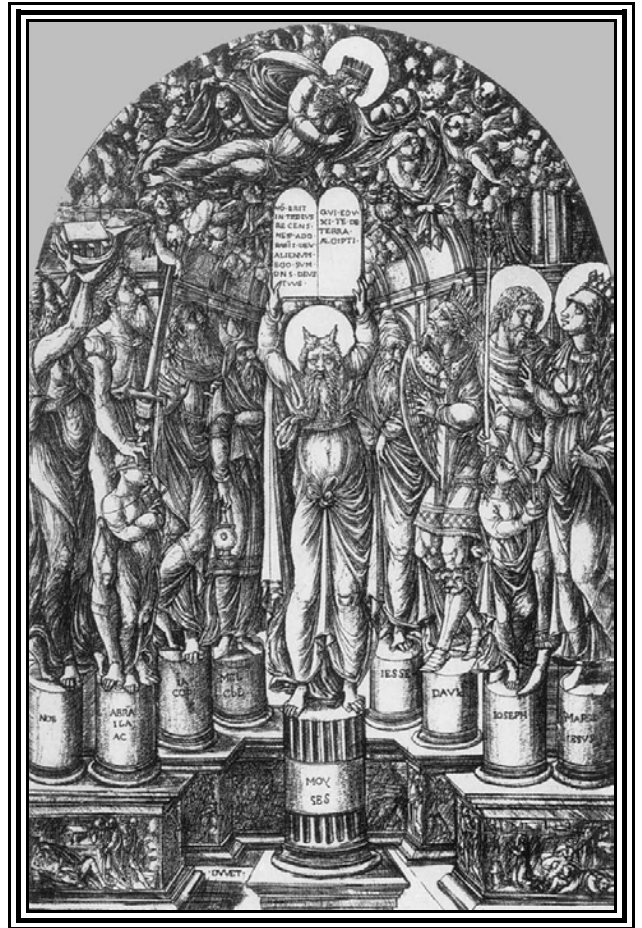
(25) See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject Him who

warns us from heaven. (26) At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, 'Yet once more I shall shake not only the earth but the heavens.' (27) This phrase, 'Yet once more' indicates the removal of things that are shaken - that is, things that have been made - in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. (28) Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus, let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, (29) for our God is a consuming fire.

“See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking.” - The structure of the text no shifts from indicative verbs narrating a series of events to imperative verbs which admonish and encourage the reader. Verse 24 had ended with a reference to *“the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”* The theme of *“speaking”* continues in Verse 25 with a stern warning *“not to refuse Him who is speaking.”* The Epistle had begun with the fundamental assertion *“In these last days God has spoken to us by His Son.”* (Hebrews 1:2) It is most perilous to *“refuse Him who is speaking,”* that is, to refuse to hear and heed the message of salvation accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The foremost example of such refusal and the danger it entails thus far has been the wilderness generation:

“Therefore, 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 hearts’; they have not known My ways. As I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’” Take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” (Hebrews 3:7-12)

“For if they did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape Him who warns from heaven.” - Arguing from the lesser to the greater, the apostle contends that the stakes are infinitely higher for his readers than they were for Israel



*“Moses And The Patriarchs”
Jean Duvet*

at Sinai and beyond. Their refusal to hear and heed God speaking caused a generation to die in the wilderness before their descendants could enter into an earthly promised land. God is now speaking his decisive word of salvation through His Son the Savior of the world. Failure to hear and heed that message will result in eternal damnation. Moses had foretold the coming of the greatest of all the prophets whose words would be absolutely decisive. He warned that those who refused to listen to Him would answer for it to God Himself.

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from among your brothers. It is to Him you shall listen...And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up from among them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put My words in His mouth and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And whoever will not listen to My words that He shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.’” (Deuteronomy 18:15,17-19)

This contrast between the Sinai covenant and new covenant in Christ is fully consistent with the basic theme of the entire epistle which is the absolute superiority of Christ over the former covenant with Israel. The letter is addressed to Hebrew Christians who are being tempted to revert to Judaism.

“In light of the retribution which overtook those who defiantly dishonored the Sinai covenant, the question is asked how we can expect to escape if we despise a salvation so incomparably great and wonderful as is ours in Christ - one of the leading themes of this epistle being the superiority, the perfection, and the finality of the redemption procured by Christ’s self offering in contrast to the imperfection and inconclusiveness of the levitical system and its sacrifices, to which the recipients of this letter are being enticed to return. The warning against apostasy under the old covenant of the Law was terrible enough; more terrible still are the consequences which will overwhelm those who defect from the new covenant of grace.” (Hughes, p. 557)

“At that time, His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, ‘Yet once more I will not only shake the earth but the heavens.’” - When God spoke from Sinai ***“the whole mountain quaked greatly.”*** (Exodus 19:18) A voice with the power to make the earth tremble remained deeply rooted in the national memory of Israel. A few examples:

“O God, when Thou didst go forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness, the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, at the presence of God, the God of Israel.” (Psalm 68:7-8)

“LORD, when You went out from Seir, when You marched through the

region of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel.” (Judges 5:4-5);

“The waters saw you, O God. When the waters saw You they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. The clouds poured down water, the skies gave forth thunder; Your arrows flashed on every side. The clash of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; Your lightning lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, Your path through the great waters; yet, Your footprints were unseen. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” (Psalm 77:16-20)

“The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. What ails you, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back? O mountains that you skip like rams? O hills like lambs? Tremble, O earth at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.” (Psalm 114:3-8)



“The Destruction Of Pharaoh In The Red Sea”

The presence of the Lord at Sinai, as previously noted, filled the people with dread. But once again, comparing the lesser to the greater, the writer quotes the prophet Haggai (Haggai 2:6f.) to warn that an infinitely greater divine visitation is coming when not only the earth but the heavens themselves - that is the entire created universe will be shaken. *“He has promised, ‘Yet once more I will not only shake the earth but the heavens.’* This shaking signifies the termination of the present time and space reality. The purpose of that removal is to make way for the new heavens and the new earth. *“This phrase ‘Yet once more’ indicates the removal of the things that are shaken, that is, the things that have been made, in order that the things that cannot be shaken shall remain.”* The new heavens and earth which the Son of God has won for His people are eternal unlike the present physical reality. Only that which is in Christ shall remain when the present world

is shaken. The introduction to the Epistle had already referred to Christ's role in the end and replacement of the created order:

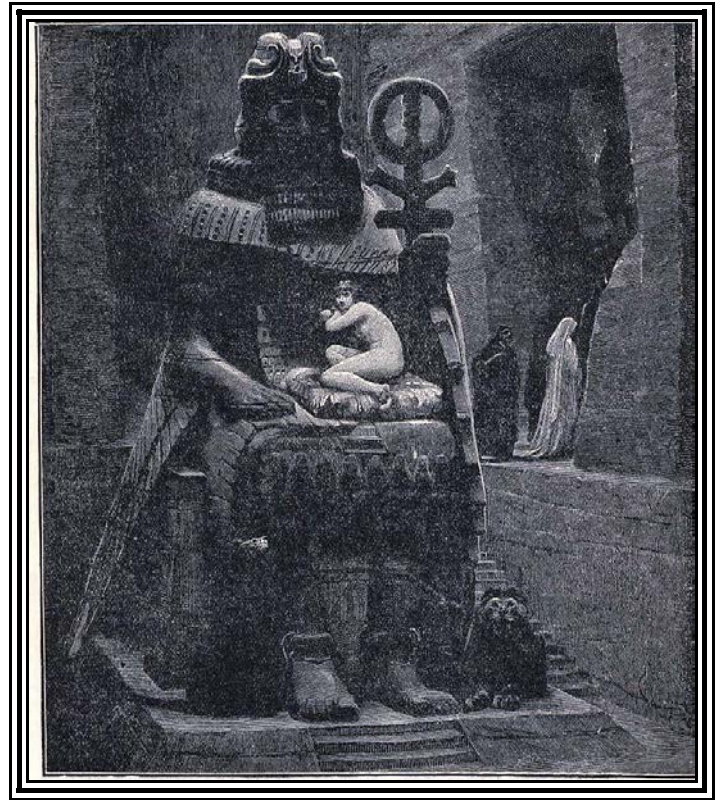
“You Lord laid the foundations of the earth in the beginning and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe You will roll them up; like a garment they will be changed. But You are the same and Your years will have no end.” (Hebrews 1:11-12)

That assertion is now expanded and explained to enable these Hebrew Christians to recognize the wonder of all that which Christ has done for them, and the urgency of appreciating the qualitative difference between the everlasting gift and the temporary realities of this world.

“God’s final judgement will shake not only the created order but even the heavenly dwelling place of God. The contrast between God shaking not only the ‘earth’ but also ‘heaven’ is a most forceful way of saying that this judgement is absolutely final. This judgement will occur ‘once more’ and is thus unrepeatable as Christ’s sacrifice and session at God’s right hand were both ‘once for all...The pastor has given two unanswerable reasons why the people should not ‘refuse Him who is speaking.’ First, if God’s judgement on those who heard Him speak at Sinai was certain, His judgement upon those who refuse to hear His gracious word, spoken from heaven through the exalted Son is much more certain. Second, as He once caused Sinai to tremble, so He will shake heaven and earth at the final judgement. That judgement will leave those who have no part in the eternal city with no place to stand.’” (Cockerill, p. 666, 669)

God sent His only Son into this world to win that everlasting blessing for His people. The only fitting response to such a wondrous gift is worship, reverence and awe. ***“Let us then be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus, let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”*** A profound sense of gratitude toward God for His goodness in rescuing His people from the curse of sin is the surest foundation for a life of faithfulness. Such a life is an ongoing act of worship lived before God in adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. ***“Acceptable worship”*** must originate in a sense of ***“reverence and awe”*** - attitudes which have become all too rare in that which passes for Christianity today. Without the humility created by such attitudes the creature may foolishly dare to approach the holy and righteous Creator on his own merit in his own way. The pride which is the essence of sin ever seeks to divert our attention away from God and toward ourselves. ***“Reverence and awe”*** guarantee that our focus will remain on God’s grace as the only way possible that we could ever be saved from sin and dare to stand in the presence of the Lord. ***“Reverence”*** should more forcefully be translated

“Godly fear.” This Greek word always denotes fear, terror, or dread in the face of imminent peril. In this instance that peril is the reality of the judgement of God which will shake the heavens and the earth. This godly fear and awe is the only appropriate perspective for the believer who would presume the right to worship and express to the deity the gratitude owed Him for all that which He has graciously accomplished on our behalf. In fact, the Greek noun in this phrase for grateful is actually a form of the word *“grace”* which certainly indicates the nature of the thankfulness involved. The second word in this combination is equally severe. ESV translates the word as *“awe.”* Once again, the intensity of the original has been misplaced in the translation. The sense of the term is overwhelming terror.



“An Offering To Baal”

John Owen suggests that the core meaning of the term is *“a sense of the majesty of God and the vast separation which divides us from Him as the consequence of our own vile sinfulness.”* The word literally means to blush with a shame so intense that it causes you to lower your gaze toward the ground. In Ezra 9:6 the prophet uses this term to describe his personal humiliation and embarrassment over the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of Israel. *“O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day, we have been in great guilt.”* The prophet Daniel also uses this emphatic noun in a similar confession of guilt on behalf of his countrymen.

“To You, O LORD, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near, and those who are far away in all the lands to which You have driven them because of the treachery that they have committed against You. To us, O LORD belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, to our fathers, because we have sinned against You.” (Daniel 9:7-8)

“For our God is a consuming fire” - The segment ends with a quotation from Deuteronomy 4:24 which explains the urgency of the warning and the necessity for the *“reverence and awe”* which has been encouraged. Having issued a prolonged denunciation of idol and the perils which they would confront as they entered the promised land, Moses pleads with



“The Idols Of the Canaanites”

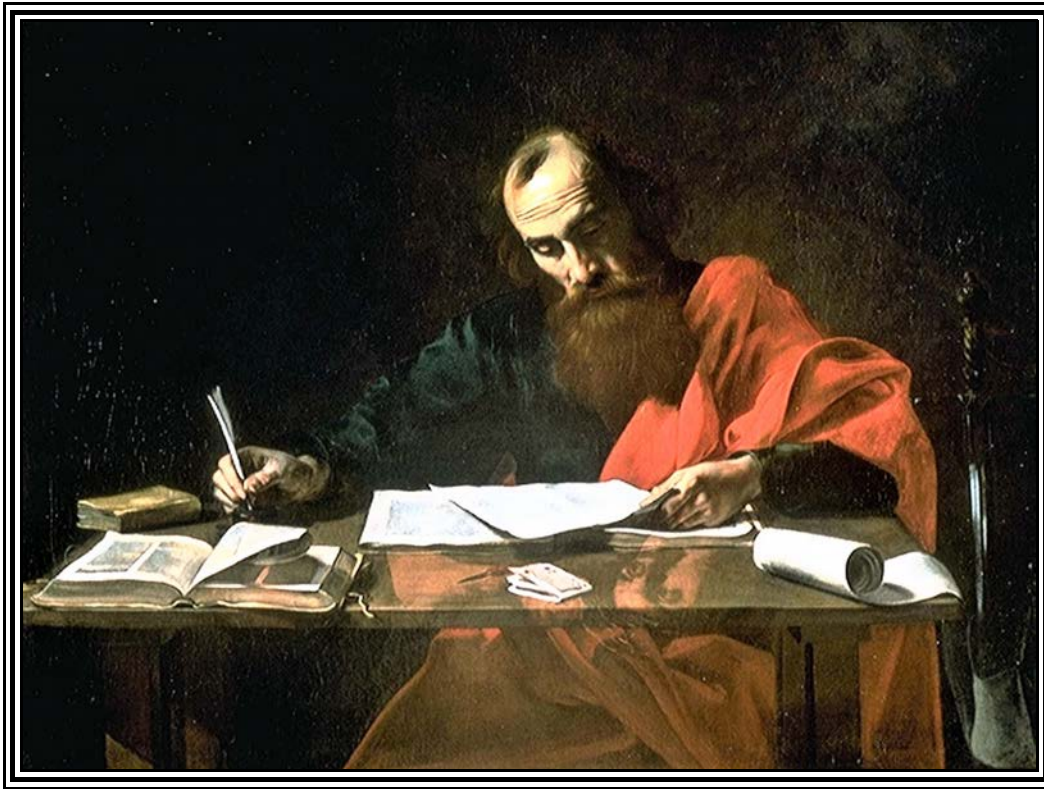
his people not to trifle with God’s commands and bring down His righteous wrath upon them: ***“Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which He made with you, and make a carved image, in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”*** (Deuteronomy 4:23-24) John Owen stresses the particular intensity of God’s wrath in response to idolatry and improper worship.

*“These words are taken from Deuteronomy 4:24 where they are used by Moses to warn the people against the worship of idols or graven images. This is a sin that God cannot tolerate. The apostle uses the same stern description of God’s wrath here to the absence of thanksgiving, reverence, and fear in Christian worship. We dare not delude ourselves by thinking that if the outward form of our worship is correct it cannot be idolatrous, superstitious, or humanly devised. For if gratitude in our hearts is lacking, and our worship is without reverence or godly fear, then God will deal with us in exactly the same way that He would deal with those who worship gods which they have devised for themselves. This expression is a metaphor. God is identified as a consuming fire in order to compare the effect of His righteous anger to the destruction caused by a blazing fire. God will consume and destroy the impenitent sinner in the same way that a roaring fire will consume and destroy everything it touches. When idolaters and false worshipers recognize the peril in which they have placed themselves they will repent in desperate fear. **“The sinners in Zion are afraid. Trembling has seized the godless. Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with the***

everlasting burnings...Behold Zion, the city of our appointed feasts, an untroubled habitation, an immovable tent...For the LORD is our Judge, the LORD is our Lawgiver; the LORD is our King. He will save us.” (Isaiah 33:14-15,20,22)...The image of a consuming fire conveys two concepts about God: the holiness and purity of His nature and His strict and righteous judgement and His particular jealousy in regard to the manner in which He is to be worshiped. Hence, in reference to the first commandment, God declares through Moses: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Exodus 20:4-6) This sense of jealousy is figuratively ascribed to God as if He were a man. In man, jealousy is an intense feeling of resentment and anger over the possibility that any one else become involved with or take away someone about whom they deeply love...Because of the unique intensity of this human emotion, attributed to God, He is said to be ‘a consuming fire...The holiness and jealousy of God cause unbearable terror in sinners and drive them away from Him. However, the opposite is true for believers, as these divine attributes create within them a sense of gracious gratitude which leads them to cling to Him evermore firmly in godly fear and reverence.” (Owen, VII, 377-378)



“The People Of Sodom And Gommorah Pleading To Their Idols”



Hebrews Chapter 13

(1) Let brotherly love continue. (2) Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (3) Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated since you also are in the body. (4) Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. (5) Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have, for He said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' (6) So we can confidently say; 'The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear; what can man do to me?' (7) Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (8) Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (9) Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods which have not benefitted those devoted to them. (10) We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. (11) For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. (12) So Jesus suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people through His own blood. (13) Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured. (14) For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. (15) Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His Name. (16) Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (17) Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (18)

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. (19) I urge you the more earnestly to do this that I may be restored to you the sooner. (20) 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, (21) equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (22) I appeal to you brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. (23) You should know that our brother Timothy has been released with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. (24) Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. (25) Grace be with all of you.

“Keep on loving each other as brothers.” - The epistle concludes with a series practical instructions as to how to go about fulfilling the author’s admonition to ***“offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe.”*** One worships God most effectively by serving God’s people in a manner that actualizes the love which we have received from God in Christ. Jesus makes this unmistakably clear: ***“This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.”*** (John 13:34); ***“By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God; nor is the one who does not love his brother.”*** (1 John 3:10) ***“The life of brotherly love constitutes an essential aspect of the worship which Christians must render to God; without brotherly love, there is no authentic worship.”*** (Ellingworth, p. 693) The series of instructions begins with a terse general statement which will be detailed in the verses that follow. ***“Loving each other as brothers”*** is the Greek word *“philadelphia.”* This is the characteristic term in the New Testament for the love which unites all Christians with one another.

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord.” (Romans 12:9-11);

“Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that, indeed, is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers to do this more and more.” (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10);

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God.” (1 Peter 1:22-23);

“For this reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue and

virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.” (2 Peter 1:5-7)

The verb is in the present tense which indicates a pattern of ongoing action, reflected in the English translation with the words **“Keep on.”** *“The author presupposes that such love exists already, that it is normal between Christians, and that, perhaps, it is threatened by current circumstances.”* (Ellingworth, p. 694) The verb is imperative, expressing a command. The practice of brotherly love among believers is not optional. It is an essential component of the Christian experience. Every Christian is a part of the family of God in Christ and all are accordingly brothers and sisters of one another. A most significant dimension of this brotherhood uniquely emphasized in Hebrews is that Christians are not merely bound to one another as brothers, but that brotherhood is created by the fact that all believers are brothers of Christ Himself:

“For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, ‘I will tell of Your name to My brothers in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.’ And again, ‘I will put my trust in Him.’ And again, ‘Behold I and the children God has given Me.’ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things...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.” (Hebrews 2:11-17)



“Abraham’s Three Guests” - James Tissot



"Abraham's Three Guests" - Tom Lovell

"Indeed, our author has provided the key to this brotherly relationship in an important passage (2:11ff.) where it becomes plain that the brotherhood enjoyed among Christians derives from Christ Himself, first of all from His incarnation through which He becomes one with us as a fellow human being, and second, by our becoming one with Him through our experience of the redemption which He has accomplished for us. Christian brotherhood, therefore, is essentially brotherhood in Christ, for as He is the only Son, so, as has already been stressed, it is through union with Him that we participate in the grace of His sonship, and in Him are accepted as sons of God, and as sons, brothers, and

fellow heirs with Him who is the heir of all things." (Hughes, p. 562)

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." - The elegant parallelism of the original text is obscured in translation. As already noted the Greek word for brotherly love in Verse 1 is *"philadelphia"* (literally - *"love of the brother."* The Greek word for ***"hospitality to strangers"*** in Verse 2 is *"philoxenia"* (literally - *"love of the stranger"*). In both phrases the *"phileo"* noun is placed at the beginning for emphasis. Hence a literal translation would read - *"Love of the brother, let it continue. Love of the stranger, do not forget."*

"The appeal of this text is enhanced by its poetic character and its witty use of language. In Greek, this whole section is a poetic piece of prose that is marked by a strong sense of rhythm, alliteration, vivid brevity of expression, carefully balanced phrases and clauses, and dramatic emphasis in word order, most of which is lost in translation. More obviously, we have the word-play on love in association with 'brotherly-love' (13:1), with 'the love of strangers' (13:2), and in contrast to 'the love of money' (13:5) (Kleinig, p. 693)

The linkage between the two phrases suggests that the point of the second command in relation to the first indicates that the focus remains upon the people of God and that the point of this specification is that the expression of love in the form of hospitality is not to be limited to those with whom we are familiar or well acquainted but is to be extended to the whole people of God, whether or not we are personally acquainted with them. The urgency of this command should be evident in the circumstances of the 1st Century.

“Travel was difficult in the 1st Century, and inns were not always the safest place to be, particularly for members of an illegal religion which the government was attempting to suppress. To open one’s home to a traveling stranger evidenced brotherly love and was considered a high virtue by Jews and Gentiles alike. Mutual support of this sort would have been vital for maintaining the solidarity of new believers, as well as aiding in the missionary expansion of the church.” (Allen, p. 607)

“Hospitality in the ancient world was prized in the ancient world because foreigners were especially vulnerable to exploitation since they had no legal status or protection in any alien community. But if a family offered hospitality to them they became honorary members of that household for as long as they stayed there. They came under the sacrosanct protection of that family and its gods. Since the earliest Christian congregations typically worshiped in the household of a member, it could act as a household in providing material hospitality to strangers. The instruction for the household to practice hospitality covers two main groups; fellow Christians who were escaping persecution and itinerant missionaries and evangelists.” (Kleinig, p. 696)



“Abraham Welcoming His Three Guests At The Oaks Of Mamre”

The encouragement not to neglect hospitality is bolstered by an example of the blessing of such hospitality in the Old Testament. When Abraham welcomed three travelers into his home his guests turned out to be angelic messengers, including the Angel of the Lord, that is the pre-incarnate Christ. They foretold his future and encouraged his faith while warning him of the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Genesis 18) John Owen contends that both Abraham and Lord in Genesis 18&19 had deliberately positioned themselves so as to be able to welcome visitors:

“It is observed that at the appearance of these angels to Abraham at the heat of the day ‘He sat in the door of his tent’ (Gen. 18:1) and at their appearance before Lot in the evening ‘he sat at the gate of Sodom’ (Gen. 19:1). Probably both of them had positioned themselves at those particular times, so that if they saw any strangers, they would be able to invite and shelter them, as indeed they did at the first opportunity. This demonstrates their eagerness to accept this responsibility for which they waited and sought opportunity.” (Owen, VII, p. 391)

The mobility facilitated by such generous hospitality was a critical factor in the growth of the early Christian church. A well traveled network of household based stopping points was established throughout the Roman world which enabled those who preached the Gospel to continue their work despite every effort of the imperial government to put a stop to it.



“Abraham Welcomes His Guests” - Dalziel

“Itinerant teachers, missionaries, emissaries, and refugees from persecution ~~relied upon a network of Christian homes for shelter and provisions~~ God’s message received and being from those to whom they minister...Christianity shared in the mobility of the Roman Empire and this was a major factor in the expansion of the church. In their travels Christians depended upon private hospitality and appear to have assumed that they would be welcomed wherever they went...The Didache urges ‘Let anyone who comes in the name of the Lord be received...If he comes as a traveler, help him as much as you can.’ (Lane, p. 512)

Ironically the sturdy system of roads which the Romans built to facilitate the rapid movement of their legions throughout the empire became, in the providence of God, a major component in the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

It is significant to note that the welcome of strangers and the visiting of those in prison which now follows in Verse 3 are both included among the actions which are to be used by Christ the Judge as evidence of the presence or absence of faith on the Day of Judgement. This demonstrates the central importance of these actions for Christians in the cultural context of the 1st Century.

“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed

of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me...And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly if you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to Me.' (Matthew 25: 34-40)

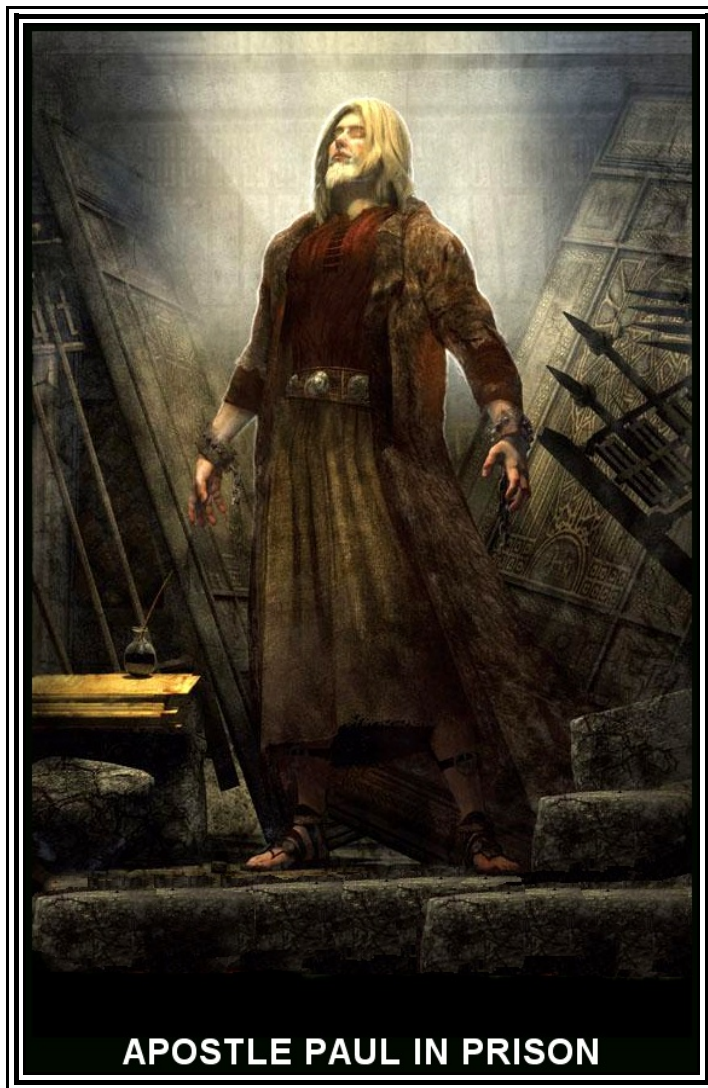
Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you are in the body.” - Roman prisons were dreadful places filthy and overrun with vermin of every description. The Romans felt no responsibility whatsoever to maintain even the most minimal living conditions and had little interest in whether or not the inmates survived their incarceration. Typically, food was not provided by the prison. Criminals were not worth the expenditure of any government funds. If the prisoner was to avoid starvation his sustenance had to be provided by family or friends on the outside and much of what they provided was stolen by corrupt guards before it ever got to the unfortunates for whom it was intended.

“The incarcerated endured great suffering because the prisons were cramped, damp, dark, and filthy. Furthermore those who kept them were often harsh and desirous of bribes. Prisoners were often given no clothes and little or no food. Thus, to ‘remember’ such prisoners was to supply their physical needs and supply them with moral support, even at the risk of exposing one’s self to possible confinement.” (Cockerill, p. 681)



“Paul And Silas In Prison”

The writer had previously commended the Hebrew for their willingness to bravely identify with those imprisoned for the faith. ***“But remember the former days 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.” (Hebrews 10:34) Now he calls upon them to “remember those in prison as though in prison with them.” This was a very real threat which loomed over every faithful believer and the solidarity of all Christians in the face of this threat would provide a powerful witness to the reality of the love of Christ which united all of His people as one. As Paul wrote to the Philippians: “I want you to know brothers that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel, to that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” (Philippians 1:12-14)

The admonition here to “remember” balances the encouragement “not to forget to show hospitality” in Verse 2.

The second phrase “and those who are *mistreated*” broadens the appeal beyond those who are in prison to include anyone who is suffering persecution for the faith. The Greek term translated here as “*mistreated*” is considerably more forceful in the original. Most commentators suggest the stronger translation “*tortured*.” A form of the same word was used in Chapter 11 to characterize the torments and martyrdom endured by the faithful: “*Others suffered mocking and flogging, even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.*” (Hebrews 11:34-35). The phrase “since you are in the body” reminds the readers that they live in the same cruel world as those who are suffering and are vulnerable to the same sufferings which are now being endured by many of their fellow believers. They should share their pain and extend compassionate love in Christ following the example of their common Lord and Savior.

“The sequence of 13:1-3 suggests an implied call to full participation in the life of the confessing community. Those who respond in love, providing shelter to persecuted brothers and sisters, visiting them in prison, and caring for them

when they are ill-treated, will, through these acts, acknowledge themselves to be Christians. Their actions will complete and validate their public confessions of Christian faith. In the absence of demonstrations of love to other confessors of Christ, public confession is an empty gesture. Confession in the form of action is indispensable for exhibiting the quality of life within the confessing community. In the context of 12:28-29, the expressions of brotherly love to which the members of the house church are summoned are the responses of gratitude that constitute authentic worship.” (Lane, B, p. 515)



“Roman Decadence” - Semiradski

“Let marriage be honored by all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled...” - Their previous reference to their own bodies and the vulnerabilities of living in this physical world is carried forward in Verse 4 to a directive concerning respect for marriage and sexual responsibility. Living in a pagan culture where human sexuality had been debased and perverted in every way possible, this encouragement and instruction was urgently necessary. Even pagan observers lamented the degradation of Roman society amid the affluence and power of the Empire. The poet/philosopher Horace wrote:

“Full of sin, our society has defiled first the marriage bed, then our children and our homes; springing from such a source, the stream of disaster has overflowed both people and nation. The young girl is eager to learn Ionian dances and soon acquires the art of flirting; even in childhood she devises impure affairs. Soon she is looking for young lovers, even at her husband’s table, and does not even choose out those on whom she will quickly bestow illicit pleasures when the lights are low. When invited she openly, and not

without her husband's knowledge, gets up and goes, whether it is some peddler who calls her or the owner of some Spanish ship, a lavish buyer of shame."
(Horace, Odes, 3.6)

The respect for the life of the body urged in the opening verses of the chapter is connected with the recognition of human sexuality as a gift of God. It is the point at which our identities as creatures originally fashioned in God's image with the need and capacity for love is most intimately bound to our physical existence. To reduce sex to brute physical desire denies the distinctiveness of human beings and defies the will of the Creator. In the beginning, God established holy marriage as the context in which love, and its sexual expression, were combined with mutual commitment and responsibility and the procreation of children. Marriage is the lifelong monogamous union of one man and one woman - whose love and commitment to each other is expressed physically in a sexual relationship, which, if God so wills, may result in the procreation of children and their nurture in the Christian faith. The selfishness which is the essence of sin contradicts that divine intent while sexual responsibility affirms the lordship of God the Creator over every dimension of our existence both spiritual and physical. To honor marriage means to fulfill the promises made between husband and wife and keep the commitments to avoid adultery and fornication which were part of the vows upon to God and to one another. At the same time divorce is to be avoided as the ultimate desecration of holy marriage. These admonitions become all the more important in the context of Scripture's comparison of marriage to the relationship between Christ and His bride the church. None are exempt from this admonition - ***"Let marriage be held in honor among all."*** The is unequivocal in warning that such sin is intolerable to God and will be punished in every instance - ***"for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."*** The future tense of the verb in this phrase points forward to the final and ultimate day of judgement. ***"The sexually immoral"*** are unmarried men or women who indulge in sexual activity. The Greek term is a form of the word *"porneia."* ***"The adulterous"*** are individuals who are married who engage in sexual activity with anyone other than their marriage partners.





“Roman Emperor Nero Celebrating the Martyrdom of Christians”

“Sexual immorality is actually a rejection of the presence and goodness of God who created the human family in its maleness and femaleness. It is an expression of a selfishness blind to the emotional fragility that characterizes every person. The writer warns that those who place personal gratification above responsibility to God and to the community of faith will encounter God Himself as Judge. This is an allusion to the final judgement that determines human destiny for all eternity. The awesome prospect of the final judgement throws into high relief the ultimate importance of respect for marriage and for sexual integrity. They represent aspects of the pursuit of holiness that are foundational to the true worship of God.” (Lane, B, p. 517)

“Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have...” - Greed and sexual immorality are frequently linked in the moral admonitions of Judaism. It is selfishness and a passion for individual satisfaction at any cost which bind the two together. Thus, for example, Philo of Alexandria sagely observes - *“All the worst quarrels, both public and private, are due to greed for either a well formed woman or possessions...The love of pleasure brings in both adultery and the love of money.”* The juxtaposition of the 6th and 7th commandments in the Decalogue seemed to encourage Jewish writers to treat sexual offenses in this order. Rabbinic counsel observed a consistent pattern in the two offenses. One rabbi, describing the three nets used by the devil to capture and damn the unwary warned: *“The first net is sexual offense, the second greed for profit...Sins of promiscuity lead to idolatry and sins of property lead to idolatry.”* The writer here is careful to point out the theological basis for greed in a lack of confidence in the providence and provision of God. Without such trust in the Lord the pursuit of material gain easily mutates into obsession which can consume all else - ***“Be content with what you have, for***



“The Parable Of the Rich Man And Poor Lazarus”

He has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you’. So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” The prerequisite for contentment in life is faith and trust in God. This was the conviction of Judaism and it remains unchanged in Christianity. The intertestamental *“Psalms of Solomon”* declare: *“With approval and blessing support me. When You strengthen me what has been given to me is enough.”* Trust in God’s provision and presence enable the believer to be content with a sense of security which is based entirely upon Him. Greed for wealth and possessions must be viewed as merely another variety of idolatry. A combination of the two typically characterizes those who ignore the heavenly city and pursue the things of this life, spurning the values and priorities of God’s Word as they conform to the delusions and deceptions of the sinful world.

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, 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.” (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

The citation from Scripture here is simply introduced with the words ***“for He has said.”*** The Greek text actually repeats the pronoun for emphasis and should thus be translated ***“for He Himself has said.”*** This is the characteristic practice of the New Testament reflecting the conviction of the early church that the prophetic writings are, in fact, the Word of God. The words which follow come from Genesis 28:15 and Psalm 118:6 - ***“I will never leave you nor forsake you...The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear, what can man do to me?”*** The writer may also have in mind the assurance of Deuteronomy 31:6-8: ***“Be strong and***

courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” The original context in Psalm 118 refers generally to confidence in the face of every form of persecution or opposition. Its use here suggests that a broader understanding than material possessions or wealth is included in the writer’s thought.

“Unlike their pagan compatriots, they have been given a new kind of life, a life free from the love of money, a life in which they can be content with their possessions as sufficient for them and their needs. They no longer belong to a consumer society with its commercial values and its fearful insecurity because they are a community that is based on brotherly love and their dependence on God for their livelihood. To be sure, they still need money and possessions, but they do not need to be driven by the love of money because they have a far more reliable source of security. They have God’s presence with them and His promises to them...Powerful people have been able to confiscate their possessions and deprive them of their livelihood, but they cannot take that away from them. They have true security in an insecure society.” (Kleinig, p. 698)



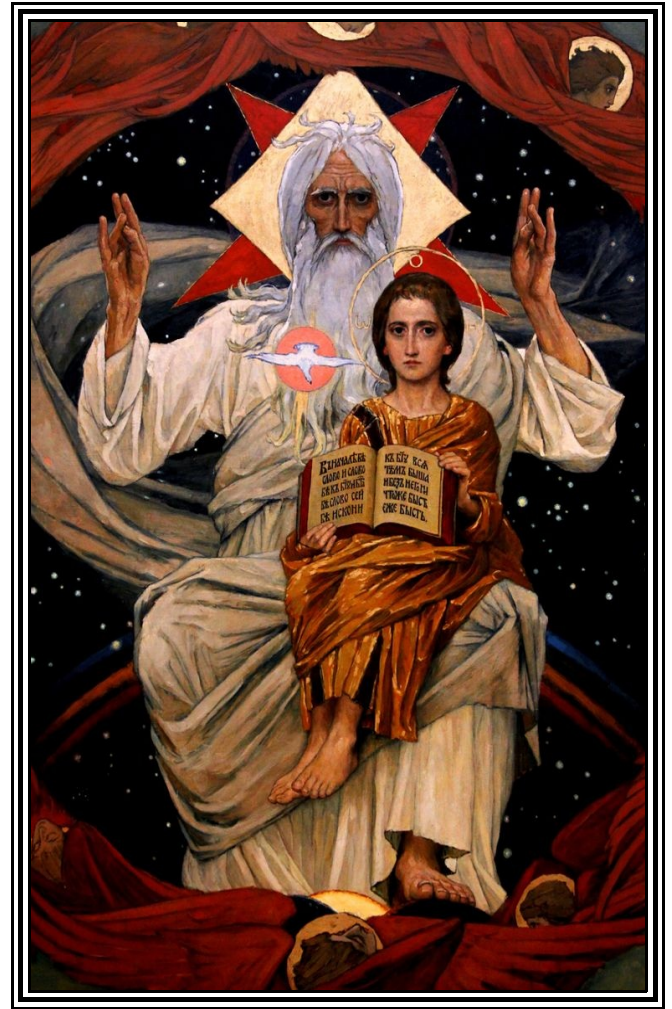
“Poor Lazarus Begging At The Rich Man’s Table”

Hebrews 13:7-16

(7) Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (8) Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. (9) Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods which have not benefitted those devoted to them. (10) We have an altar from which those who serve the Tent have no right to eat. (11) For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin, are burned outside the camp. (12) So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His

own blood. (13) Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured. (14) For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. (15) Through Him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. (16) Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

“Remember your leaders who spoke to you the Word of God.” - Three times in this concluding chapter the author refers to the *“leaders”* of the church. The summons to *“remember”* them would seem to suggest that in this instance the reference is to past leaders, perhaps those under whose leadership the congregation was founded, who are now dead. At this early date, *“your leaders”* are not men who held a particular office or position within the structure of the congregation. Such structures and offices did not yet exist and we must be careful not project current circumstances back into the



“The Same Yesterday, Today, And Forever”

context of the epistle. Such anachronism may be helpful in current debates but does not responsibly reflect the circumstances of the church at this point in its history. At this moment in church history leadership was defined by responsibility/function rather than office/position. In this instance, the text defines their responsibility/function as teaching and preaching the Word of God - *“who spoke to you the Word of God.”* The authority of the leader was simply the authority of the Word, nothing more and nothing less. He has no authority of his own because of his position but must always be the advocate of the Word, documenting and demonstrating everything he teaches from the Word. The fact that the first and foremost such leadership in the church revolved around teaching and preaching is a clear indication of the essential primacy of the Word in the life of the people of God. The contemporary church would do well to remember this fundamental reality amid the endless distractions and distortions of our current situation and the challenges which now confront every Christian congregation.

“The congregation is instructed to remember their former leaders because they spoke the Word of God to them. That is how they led the congregation. They did not establish the congregation as a holy brotherhood by themselves

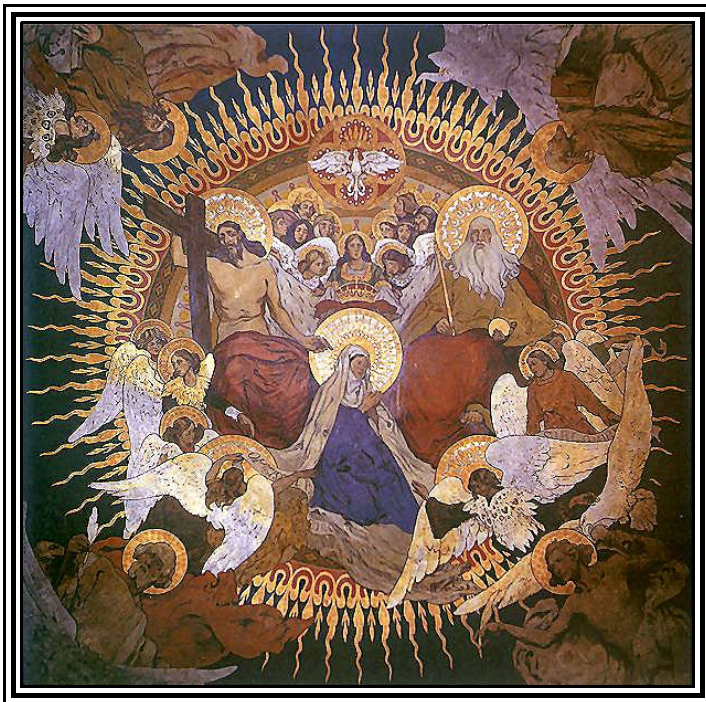
apart from God; it was not founded on what they said, but what God said. They were his spokesmen. They were the local link in the chain of speaking that came from God through the prophets and Jesus to the apostles to their leaders, and from their leaders to the congregation. The congregation, therefore, remembers them best by remembering the Word of God that they taught and enacted.” (Kleinig, p. 699)

“Consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith.” - The remembrance of their leaders involves more than remaining faithful to the Word as they taught it truth, although that is certainly of central importance. Doctrine is life and the manner in which the doctrine which they taught determined how they lived and how they died is also to be imitated and emulated.

“The recollection of the victorious witness of these persons who had first led them in the way of faith, of their joyful living to the glory of God, of their untroubled dying in the assured hope of the resurrection, should inspire them to follow their lead still and to put away all unworthy thoughts of giving up the struggle.” (Hughes, p 570)

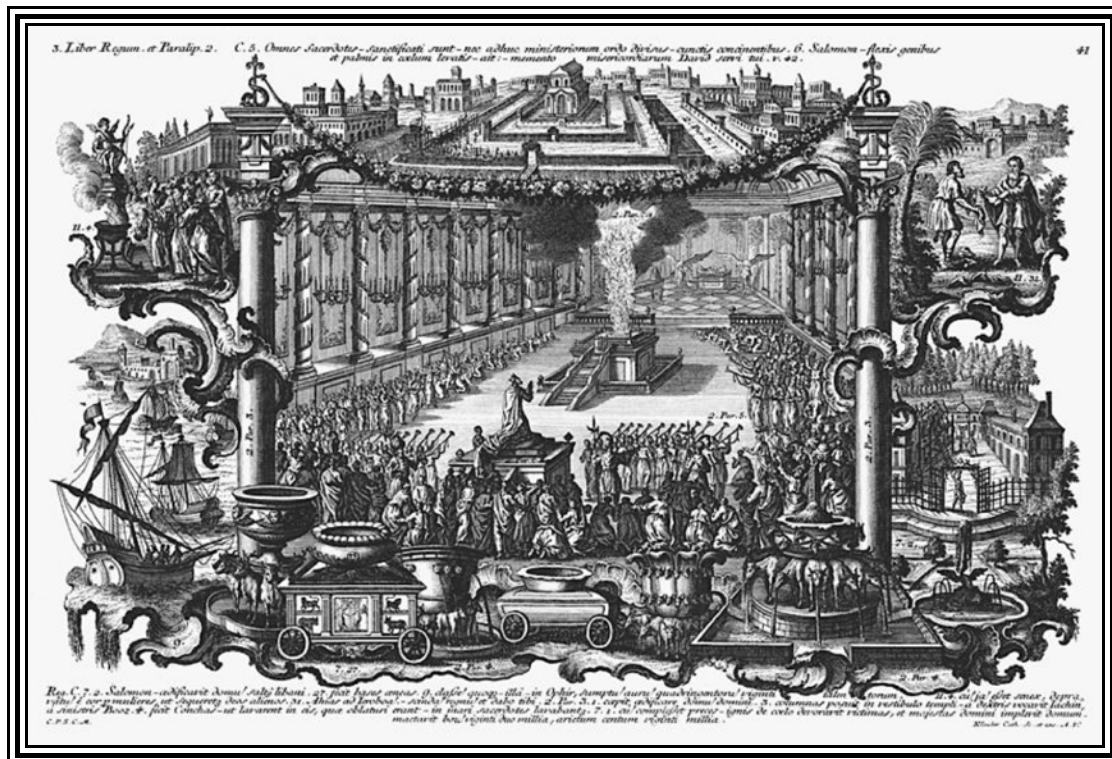
“Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.” - Human leaders come and go. An emphasis upon the constancy of Christ amid the ever changing circumstance of this world began the epistle. **“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain. They will all wear out like a garment, like a robe You will roll them up. Like a garment they will**

be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.” (Hebrews 1:10-12) That same emphasis now returns to assure the readers that the truth of God in Christ cannot and will never change. This basis assertion is followed by the admonition to avoid the ever-changing ideas, fads and fashions of men - **“Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings.”**



“The Same Yesterday, Today, And Forever”

“These teachings are ‘diverse’ because they appeal to the bored imagination by their colorful novelty, showy variety, and superficial glitter, and ‘strange’ because they are alien to the tradition of the congregation and unauthorized by Christ and those whom He had



“The Altar Of Burnt Offerings In Solomon’s Temple” - Klauber

appointed to teach God’s Word. So the congregation is warned not be carried off its course and away from Christ by these flamboyant propositions.”
(Kleinig, p. 700)

In this instance the reference appears to be to the allure of the ceremonial and diet laws of Judaism - ***“For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace and not by foods which have not benefitted those who are devoted to them.”*** The words recall the temptation to fall away from Christianity and revert to the former ways of Judaism which form the context of the letter. The old way of the Law and its letter has proven to be barren, useless, and incomplete. The way of Christ is the way of ***“grace”*** which alone is capable of actually strengthening the heart.

“We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.” - This fascinating verse assumes a comfortable familiarity on the part of the reader with the ritual practices of the Tabernacle/Temple. There were two altars in the both the Tabernacle and the Temple. The Incense Altar in the Holy Place stood before the curtain which concealed the Most Holy Place. Its fragrant smoke rising upward signified the prayers of God’s people rising upward to heaven. The Altar of Burnt Offering stood in the Courtyard of the Priest before the entrance to the Sanctuary. The design and placement of the Altar of Burnt Offerings was carefully specified by God and a prototype of that Altar was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:22-26; 27:8) The sacrificial animals were slaughtered nearby and then burned upon the great altar, again the rising smoke signifying the presentation of the sacrifice to God. The entire worship of Israel revolved around that altar



"The Roman Destruction of the Temple AD 70"

and the sacrifices made thereon. The blood poured out upon the altar, foreshadowing the once for all shedding of the blood of God's only Son upon the cross, was the essence of it all. Without that altar there would have been no temple, no priesthood, no offerings, no atonement or sanctification, no God-pleasing worship. Portions of the meat and bread from the daily peace offerings and grain offerings were eaten both by the families who presented the offerings and the priests who actually made the sacrifices. However, the meat from the sin and guilt offerings and the bread from the daily public grain offering could only be eaten by the priests (Leviticus 6). However they were not permitted to eat the meat from a sin offering made on their own behalf or that of the entire nation since that would also have included them. The contrast between the former covenant where the blessing of participating in the holiness of God through this most holy food was limited only to the priests who were offering the sacrifices, and the new covenant in Christ under which all the people of God share in His body and blood at His altar is a decisive demonstration of the superiority and finality of the new covenant.

"In 13:10 we have another relatively certain allusion to the Lord's Supper as a sacrificial banquet - 'we have an altar from which those who serve at the Tent have no right to eat.' Hebrews 10-13 recalls God's provision of holy meats for those who served at the altar. Since they served God there, they were His guests. They had the right to eat some of the most holy food from God's table...In contrast to the most holy food by which they shared God's holiness, the whole Christian congregation has food to eat from another table: the church's altar, the place where they present their offerings and receive

God's heavenly, holy food. That is not their right, according to the Law of Moses, but a new privilege, a gift of grace. Even though 13:10 does not explicitly identify the food that Christians eat, the mention of the bodies of sacrificed animals in 13:11, and of Christ's blood in 13:12, suggest that it is the flesh and blood of Jesus. By that meal they receive what is good for them. It is the body of Christ, given for them (Luke 22:19, and the blood of Christ shed for them for the forgiveness of sins." (Kleinig, p. 304)



"My Body And My Blood For You"

The priests who ***"serve the tent,"*** that is, the Levitical priesthood which continues its ministry at the earthly temple in Jerusalem, having spurned and rejected Jesus as the promised Messiah, ***"have no right to eat"*** with the people of God in Christ who commune together at His altar.

"For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the Holy Places by the High Priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood." - The contrast now shifts to the rituals of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and the self-sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. Three crucially important distinctions between the two are presented.

In the first instance, the identity of the High Priest who carries out the sacrifice is different. In the earthly temple it is the current occupant of the long corrupted line of Aaron who performs the ancient ritual. At our altar it is the eternal High Priest of the Order of Mechizedek, our Lord Jesus Christ who made the once for all sacrifice and is now seated at the right hand of God in heaven which is ***"the true tent that the Lord set up, not man."*** (Hebrews 8:2) ***"Now the point in what we are saying is this; we have such a High Priest,***

One who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven; a minister in the Holy Places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.” (Hebrews 8:1-2) Unlike the human occupant of the earthly office, this heavenly High Priest had no need to offer a blood sacrifice for Himself because He was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26) Therefore He Himself could be the perfect offering for the sins of mankind.

Secondly, the place in which the sacrifice was offered was different. The earthly sacrifices of the former covenant were made within the sacred precincts of the Temple so that their blood could sanctify the Temple itself and maintain its ritual purity. Only then, could their bodies be burned ***“outside the camp”*** - that is, outside both the Temple and the walls of the Holy City. The bodies were burned so that they could not be eaten, unlike the body and blood of Christ which is available to all of His people in the Sacrament of the Altar. Christ was crucified outside the wall, because He had taken upon Himself all of the guilt and corruption of sin.

Finally, the once for all sacrifice of Christ ***“outside the gate”*** signals that the beneficiaries of His offering are different than those of the ancient rituals. Christ died on the hill of Golgotha outside the gate to signify that He had come as the Savior not merely of those who dwelt within the encampment of Israel, but for all of mankind.



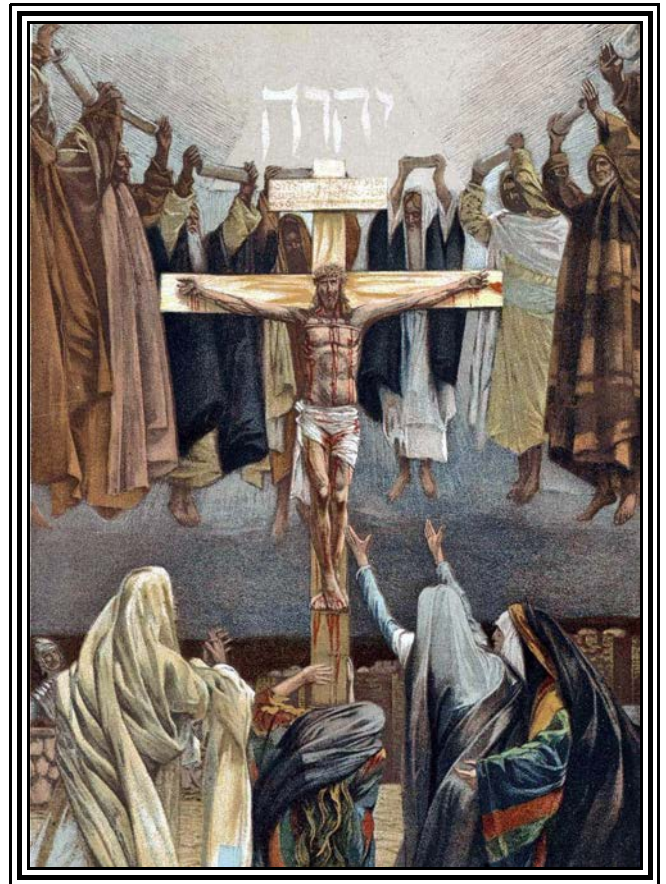
“Golgotha” - Jan Styka

“Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” - To Hebrews struggling with heritage and on the verge of apostasy from Christianity back to the comfortable Judaism of their past, the admonition of Verse 13 cuts directly to the heart of the matter. Christ has changed everything. Israel’s rejection of God’s promised Messiah has altered her status in regard to Yahweh in the most radical way possible. They can no longer rely upon the old Mosaic order to bring them into right relationship with God. The curtain which barred the way to the Holy of Holies has been irrevocably torn apart. Continuing to go through the motions of that which was intended from its original institution at Sinai to prepare the way is no longer worship. It is blasphemy! Messiah Jesus is the decisive and

essential figure. The Judaism of the 1st Century and thereafter - intertwined with national pride and self-righteousness - is a damnable perversion of the covenant which God had graciously established with their forefathers. To return to that perversion would cause them to be cut off from the salvation which they had come to know in Christ.

“What was formerly sacred is now unhallowed, because Jesus had been expelled from it; what was formerly unhallowed is now sacred because Jesus is there...The ‘camp’ stands for the established ordinances and fellowship of Judaism. To abandon them is a hard thing but it is an absolutely necessary thing.” (Bruce 380-381)

Judaism without Christ is a false and idolatrous religion. Every drop of blood shed in every sacrifice offered on the great altar before the Sanctuary of the Temple is a defiant rejection of the blood of Christ shed once for all for sinners upon the cross. The apostle pleads with his readers to stand with Jesus - **“to bear the reproach which He endured.”** *“Christians must share in the shame which Christ experienced in His own crucifixion through their identification with Jesus. The author makes it clear that such an identification will bring the hostility of the world against Christians.”* (Allen, p. 621) Most appropriately, these words are drawn from the Old Testament and the lament of the Messiah in Psalm 69:



*“Christ The Messiah Foretold By The Prophets”
James Jacques Tissot*

***“Let not those who hope in You be put to shame through Me,
O LORD God of Hosts.
“Let not those who seek You be brought to dishonor through Me,
O God of Israel.
For it is for Your sake that I have borne reproach,
That dishonor has covered My face.
I have become a stranger to My brothers,
An alien to my mother’s sons.”*** (Psalm 69:6-8)

“From the beginning of the Epistle, the author has been addressing the concerns of Jewish Christians who continued to adhere to the customs of the

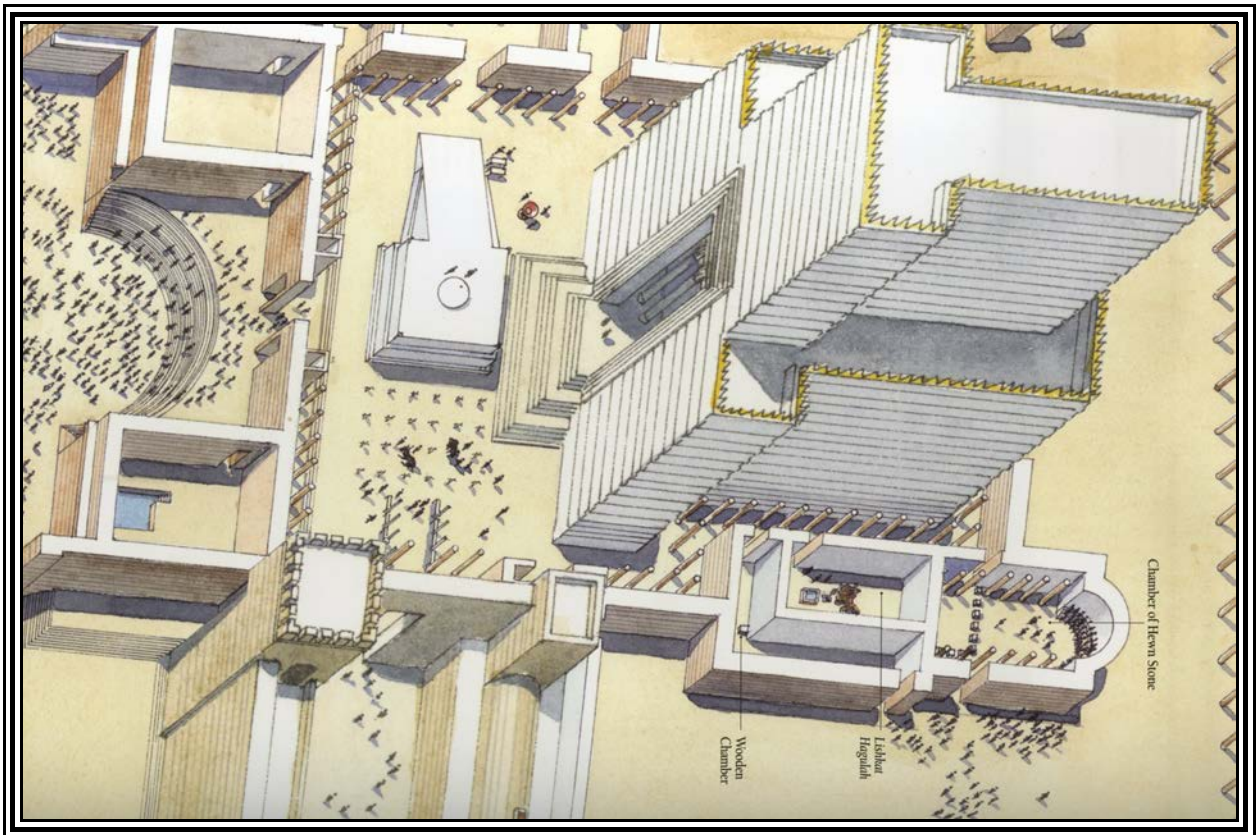
synagogue and its practices. This entire letter poses a strong challenge to such behavior. We know that in Syrian Antioch it was not until the 7th Century that Jewish influence on Christianity ended. Judaism was an ancient religion whose history stretched back across millennia and would no doubt held a strong appeal, as such, to those who were now Jewish Christians and part of a 'new' religion. Furthermore, Judaism was a 'religio licita' that is, a religion recognized by Roman law and authorized to be observed throughout the empire. As such, it provided an umbrella of protection against Roman persecution, at least until the outbreak of the Jewish War in AD 66. Between AD 60 and 70 Jewish nationalism likely brought pressure to bear on Jewish Christianity to identify and stand in defense of the homeland against the ever growing Roman threat. The bottom line for the author of Hebrews is the mutual exclusivity of Judaism and Christianity." (Allen, p. 622)



“I Have Trodden the Winepress Alone” - Wierx

“For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” - Like all of the faithful who have gone before, these Hebrew Christians must recognize that this earth and the things of this earth will not endure. They are not at home. We must learn, as did all the faithful before us to spend our brief time in this world as strangers and pilgrims who are journeying toward ***“the city that is to come.”*** Our Savior awaits us there, seated in glory and power at the right hand of God.

“Through Him, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips that acknowledge His name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” - Once again, the terminology of the text is drawn from the Book of Psalms. In Psalm 50, the people are urged to turn away from empty ritualism and offer to God a



“The Sanctuary And The Altar of Burnt Offerings In Herod’s Temple”

“sacrifice of praise”

***“The Mighty One, God the LORD
speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.
Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth...
Offer God a sacrifice of praise, and perform your vows to the Most High,
and call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you and you will glorify Me...
The one who offers praise as his sacrifice glorifies Me;
to one who orders His way rightly, I will show the salvation of God.”***
(Psalm 50:1-2; 14-15; 23)

The daily sacrifices of the former covenant are now obsolete and irrelevant in light of the perfect sacrifice, offered once for all by Messiah Jesus upon the cross. The words of the Psalm have been literally fulfilled:

***“I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds,
For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine.
If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fulness are mine.
Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?”*** (Psalm 50:9-13)

God had long ago foretold through His prophet Daniel that He would one day render all of the sacrifices of the Temple obsolete with the presentation of a perfect sacrifice: ***“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness to seal both the vision and the prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”*** (Daniel 9:24) Jeremiah sounded the same wonderful promise of a day when a new Jerusalem would forever replace the ruins of its temporary earthly counterpart and the voices of praise would ring out forever in the streets of that city:

“Thus says the LORD in this place of which you say, ‘It is a waste without man or beast, in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant, or beast, there shall be heard again the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride, the voices of those who sing as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD; ‘Give thanks to the LORD of Hosts for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.’” (Jeremiah 33:10-11)

This theme of a permanent end to the ritual sacrifices of the earthly Temple has sounded repeated throughout the Epistle. For example:

“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 Jesus Christ, once for all. And every priest stands daily in his office offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which could never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God...For by a single offering, He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:9-14)

“For Christ has entered not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer Himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own...But as it is He appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” (Hebrews 9:24-26)

The ***“sacrifice of praise”*** which is the worship of the new covenant can only be offered ***“through Him,”*** that is, through Christ who offers His people His true body and blood in the Holy Eucharist, that is, the ***“Thanksgiving.”***

“So we have a holy meal, a Eucharist, in which the sanctifying body and blood of Jesus are received. The celebration of this meal is marked by thanksgiving and praise, thanksgiving to God for what He gives His people as a gracious

gift, and praise which tells what God has accomplished for His people through His Son.” (Kleinig, p. 709)

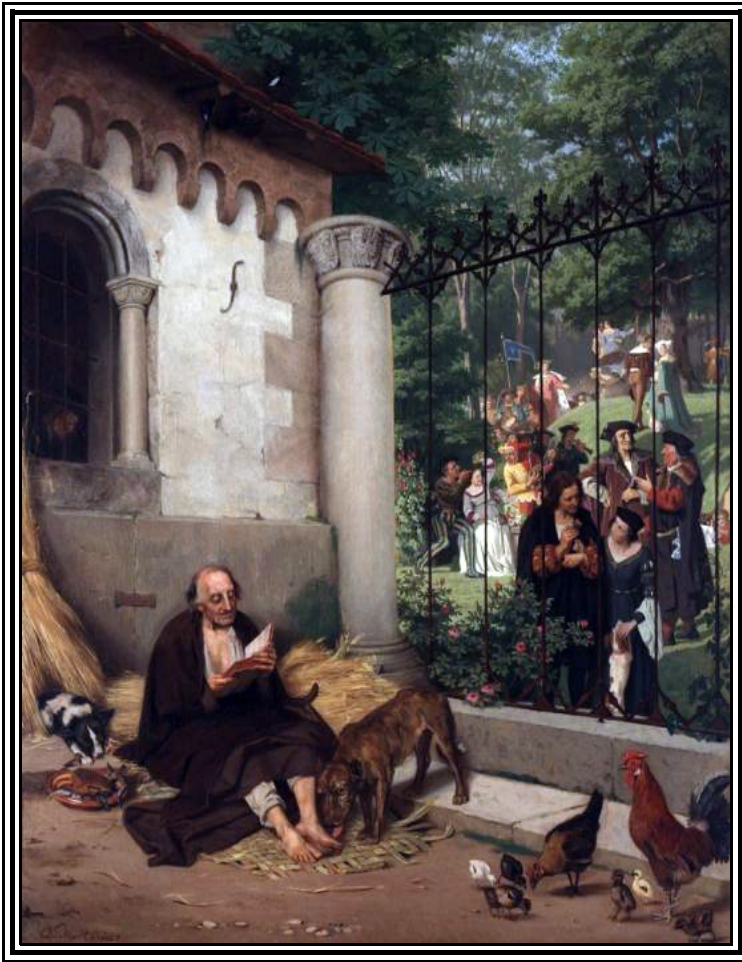
This grand ***“sacrifice of praise to God”*** is to be offered up ***“continually.”*** It is to resound from every assembly or believers around Word and sacrament everywhere upon the earth, just as it goes on eternally in the praise of saints and angels before the throne of God in heaven. Earthly circumstances should not limit or eliminate the ***“sacrifice of praise to God.”***

“And around the throne, on each side of the throne are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind, the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings are full of eyes, all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is, and is to come.’ And whenever the living creatures give thanks to Him who is seated on the throne, and worship Him who lives forever and ever, they cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy are You, O Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created.’” (Revelation 4:6-11)

This continuous ***“sacrifice of praise to God”*** in Christ is ***“the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.”*** The characterization of grateful praise as ***“the fruit of lips”*** here is drawn from Hosea 14 where the prophet reminds the sinful nation of Israel that the Lord’s deliverance of His people requires a response of grateful praise from those who have been the recipients of His divine grace: ***“Return, O Israel, to the Lord thy God; for the people have fallen through thine iniquities. Take with you words and turn to the Lord your God; speak to Him that you may not receive the reward of***



“Worship”



"The Rich Man And Poor Lazarus"

unrighteousness, but that you may receive good things, and we will render in return the fruit of our lips."

(Hosea 14:2-4) At the same time, as the following verses will clearly demonstrate, the *"sacrifice of praise"* involves a great deal more than singing hymns or liturgy. It must be not only the *"fruit of our lips"* but the fruit of our lives. Accordingly, Hosea also declares: *"I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."* (Hosea 6:6) Hosea's colleague Micah reinforced that point even more forcefully: *"But will the LORD be please with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?...He has showed you, O man, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:7f.)

"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." - No doubt our author had prophetic texts like those of Hosea and Micah in mind as he adds the caveat that the true worship of God is not confined to a sanctuary or a song.

"Just as sanctimonious participation in outward forms of worship is no substitute for a heart that is right with God and life lived fully to His praise, so too is a heart that is right with God and life lived fully to His praise no substitute for compassionate concern for one's fellow man...The Hebrew Christians whom our author was addressing were faltering in their fulfillment of both tables of the Law. Hence the appeal to them not only to praise God continually, but also not to neglect to do good to their fellow men and to share, sacrificially, such things as they have with others in need. 'Let us not grow weary in well-doing,' Paul urged the Christians in Galatia, 'for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially those who are of the household of faith.' (Galatians 6:9f.) This too belongs to our service of sacrifice, and because it springs from a loving and compassionate heart, is pleasing to God. Indeed, it is part of the true imitation of Christ whose love and compassion for mankind were the motive not only for the good that He did on earth, ministering to the afflicted and binding up the heartbroken, but also for His redeeming sacrifice of Himself on the cross of Calvary." (Hughes, p. 585)

Hebrews 13:17-21

(17) Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (18) Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. (19) I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. (20) 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, (21) equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

“Obey your leaders and submit to them...” - in Verse 7, the Hebrews had been encouraged to remember the faithful leaders of their past as an example and inspiration for the present. They are now admonished to ***“obey and submit to”*** their present leaders. This admonition constitutes an endorsement of the current leadership of the congregation and suggests that the congregation as a whole has not shown proper deference and submission to those who were currently serving as leaders within the congregation. It further



“Pray For Us”

suggests that the writer has received a report, either in writing or in person that this was not the case. Dissension within the congregation is harmful to all. If the leaders are facing opposition and obstruction from individuals within the church that would not merely be frustrating to them but would be harmful to everyone. Thus the encouragement - ***“let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you.*** The Apostle Paul had issued a similar admonition to the Thessalonians: ***“We beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you to esteem them very highly because of their work.”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:12) The verb, ***“they are keeping watch over your souls”*** carries the pastoral connotation of a shepherd guarding and guiding his flock. This point will be reinforced by the subsequent



reference to Jesus as ***“the great Shepherd of the sheep”*** in Verse 20. The great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas once used the example of the Bethlehem shepherds to whom the angels announced the birth of the Savior as an example of the responsibility of all those who serve as leaders within the church:

“Now these shepherds, I say, they watch the whole night, they attend upon their vocation, they do so according to their calling, they keep their sheep, they run not hither and thither, spending the time in vain and neglecting their office and calling...Here, by these humble shepherds all men may learn to attend upon their offices and callings. I would wish that clergymen - the curates, parsons, and vicars, the bishops and all other spiritual persons - would learn this lesson by these poor shepherds; which is this, to abide by their flocks and by their sheep, to tarry amongst them, to be careful over them and not to run hither and thither after their own pleasure, but to tarry by their benefices and to feed their sheep with the food of God’s Word, and to keep hospitality and so to feed them

both soul and body.” (Hughes, p. 587)

Those who presume to lead within the church are answerable to the Lord of the church - ***“as those who must give an account.”*** Given the eternal implications of this leadership the task should be undertaken and implemented ***“with joy and not with groaning.”*** The Shepherd of Hermas, a pastor of the generation which followed the apostles, makes a similar observation about his own ministry: *“Have peace among yourselves that I also may stand joyfully before the Father and give an account of you all to the Lord.”* (Lane, p. 556)

“Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.” - The final admonition in this series is a solicitation of prayers on the writers behalf. Advocates of Pauline authorship note that this is a characteristic feature of the epistles of St. Paul. He makes it clear that his request for prayer is in no way an indication that his ministry to them has failed or been inadequate - ***“we are sure that we have a clear conscience.”*** He has spoken the truth of God to them without equivocation or hesitation. As we have seen, at a number of points throughout the letter that necessitated what must

have been an uncomfortable bluntness for the recipients of the letter. His only motive and intent was to act ***“honorably in all things.”*** His urgent desire to come to them soon assures them of his love and concern for their well being - ***“I urge you the more earnestly to do this so that I may be restored to you sooner.”*** These words clearly require a previous relationship with the congregation, perhaps as its apostolic founder.

“Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ...” - The author, who has just requested prayers on his own behalf from his readers, now concludes his epistle with a magnificent benediction upon them. As has typically been the case throughout the epistle, he includes himself in the blessing, expressing once more his solidarity with all believers in his identification of himself as one who has also been saved by grace - ***“working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.”*** The terminology here continues to reflect the theology which has been expressed throughout the epistle.. The language parallels the closing benediction of Paul in 1 Thessalonians: ***“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it.”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) The ***“God of Peace”*** is the God who has acted to restore harmony between Himself and His sinful people by raising Christ from the dead after He shed ***“the blood of the eternal covenant”*** upon the cross. Thus, once more, Hebrews asserts the perfect completion of the new covenant over the former covenant in that it has accomplished everything necessary by paying the ransom price for sinners in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus as the perfect High Priest. The completion of that covenant not only insures salvation to the faithful but also equips them here and now to carry on our lives ***“in a manner which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen!”***

“I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.” - The standard formulas for the conclusion of a letter are observed in the brief closing paragraph. The readers are encouraged to hear and heed the content of the letter. A bit of news and a promise that young Timothy will be visiting soon as the messenger of the writer. Finally, greetings and grace to all.

