

CHAPTER II
THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD OVER THE MOSAIC LEGACY
HEBREWS 3:1-4:16



CONNECTION with the preceding argument especially concerns elaboration on the themes of “brotherhood,” 2:11-17a and chiefly “priesthood,” 1:3; 2:17b. Wedded to this will be continual focus, historically illustrated, on the servile Mosaic economy, especially its earthly limitations and impotence. This will be contrasted with the more glorious economy that the heavenly high priesthood of Jesus Christ has instituted.¹ If the angels were esteemed as revered heavenly beings, and Moses was, among the Jews, highly exalted as a man (Num. 12:6-8), yet such venerated servants of God pale before the incomparable Son of God.

A. Jesus Christ's priesthood eclipses Moses' legacy of servitude, 3:1-6.

For the Hebrew Christian, here addressed, the greatest problem concerned the degree to which the Mosaic dispensation, 7:11; 8:7, 13-9:1, retained any relevance in the New Covenant dispensation, 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24. The council at Jerusalem spoke to this matter (Acts 15:1-31), as did Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians. Beyond dispute the righteousness of God remains eternally the same, yet the administration of that righteousness amongst the children of God has found distinctive superintendency over the centuries of world history. For the converted Jew, he straddles two such juxtaposed administrations, and is in danger of corrupting the latter with the former. Thus the author here makes a stark contrast between the heads of these two economies to the end that, “we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope to the end,” v. 6.

1. Christ more glorious as a heavenly high priest, vs. 1-2.

The addressees are given elevated titles that in themselves suggest the elevated status of the Lord Jesus who has obtained for them this promotion from darkness to light. As “holy brethren,” a term similar to “saints and faithful brethren” (Col. 1:2), the readers are described according to the results of Christ's propitiatory priesthood, 2:17. For this reason a Christian is a saint, definitively set apart,² called unto and through redemption (I Pet. 2:9). As “partakers of a heavenly calling,” an “upward calling” (Phil. 3:14), a particular and effectual calling (Rom. 8:28; I Cor. 26-29), a “holy calling” (II Tim. 1:9), they inherit the blessings of the Man from heaven and thus boast that, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Col. 3:20). Calvin adds: “[T]o encourage them the more to pursue this study, he reminds them of their *calling*; as though he had said, ‘God favored you with no common grace when He called you into His kingdom.’”³

¹ Westcott adds: “[T]he exact comparison is not between Moses and *Christ*, but between Moses and *Jesus*. *Hebrews*, p. 72.

² Refer to John Murray's article “Definitive Sanctification,” where he maintains that Christian sanctification is primarily a decisive and definitive status rather than a gradual process. *Collected Writings*, II, pp. 277-84.

³ Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 77.

a. Christ's appointment by the Father, v. 1-2a.

“Consider” [κατανοέω, *katanoeō*, think down on/contemplate] the apostle and high priest of our confession, Jesus, being faithful to He who appointed [made] him [over the whole of His house].” Jesus’ apostleship, as an envoy, is unique in that it was a commission to be the Father’s true high priest, through death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session at His right hand. Like Moses, he was committed to a new administration of God’s household, the family committed to his care designated as the “church” (I Tim. 3:15). The strong implication, according to the following context, is that Jesus’ household administration is transcendentally superior to that temporal household administration of Moses, as distinct from Abraham, by reason of the fact that Jesus is infinitely superior to Moses. The faithfulness of Christ stems from his agreement, in the bosom of the Father, to fulfill the earthly task of redemption (John 1:18; 4:34).

b. Moses’ appointment by the Father, v. 2b.

“[Also consider] as Moses was [faithful in being appointed] also in the whole of his house.” This οἶκος, *oikos*, dwelling place, Numbers 12:7 declares to be “My [God’s] household,” the family committed to his care, the nation of Israel. Moses faithfulness to his calling (Ex. 3:1-12), like that of David, although generally pleasing to God, was yet blemished by hesitancy (Ex. 4:1-17) and unbelief (Num. 20:7-13) In many an earthly situation, such as the military, a general and a private may be generally faithful in their calling; what distinguishes them is rank and responsibilities. But with the Lord Jesus, his faithfulness, rank, and responsibilities all outshone that of Moses. However the author now focuses on rank and responsibilities that so distinguish between Christ, a Son and high priest, and Moses, a servant and governor, even though they both were called to leadership over the whole house of God. To the Gentile mind, such a distinction might seem obvious. But to the Hebrew Christian a legacy of awesome regard for Moses was common. Saphir comments:

To speak of Moses to the Jews was always a very difficult and delicate matter. It is hardly possible for Gentiles to understand or realize the veneration and affection with which the Jews regard Moses, the servant of God. All their religious life, all their thoughts about God, all their practices and observances, all their hopes of the future, everything connected with God, is with them also connected with Moses. Moses was the great apostle unto them, the man sent unto them of God, the mediator of the old covenant; and we cannot wonder at this profound, reverential affection which they feel for Moses.⁴

2. Christ more glorious as the builder of the house of God, vs. 3-4.

Up to this point the household of God under the shepherding of Moses and then Christ have been viewed consecutively in history, but not comparatively since both have been regarded as faithful, vs. 1-2. Now, at the time that Hebrews was written, the issue of overlap arises. Thus for Jewish Christians the question to be considered is whether Moses and Christ are dual heads of the people of God, whether Christ is the chief head

⁴ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, p. 173.

and Moses the subordinate head, or whether Christ alone is the head since Moses' headship has been succeeded, abrogated. The author later plainly responds: "When He said 'A new covenant,' He has made the old obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear," 8:13. Paul similarly upholds Christ's transcendent, surpassing glory when compared with Moses (II Cor. 3:4-18). It should also be noted here that Moses' headship does not merely concern the ceremonial and civil aspects of his appointed jurisdiction. The term "house" encompasses an administration or dispensation, the whole Mosaic era, the foundations of which were laid at Mt. Sinai.⁵

a. The greater glory of Christ the builder established, v. 3.

"For this one [Christ] has been considered worthy of greater glory/honor than Moses just as in the same way the builder of the house has more glory/honor than the house itself." Here Moses is intimately identified with the house of God, so encompassing was his appointed leadership over Israel. Often he spoke of feeling burdened with "this people" (Ex. 17:4; 18:18; 33:12-13), as "a nurse carries a nursing infant" (Num. 11:11-12). Hence Paul describes how "our fathers . . . were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (I Cor. 10:1-2; cf. Heb. 3:16), so integral was this national identification. However Moses did not build the house of Israel; God did that through redemption and commissioned His servant to shepherd His flock (Ex. 3:7-10). Hence Jesus Christ's superiority is one, not merely of degree as a better shepherd and leader, but rank, as the builder of the people of God, as Zechariah 6:12-13 prophesied: "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne" (cf. Matt. 16:18; I Cor. 10:1-4). Arthur Pink comments:

Though officially raised over it, Moses was not the founder of the Israelitish family, but simply a member of it. . . . Moses did not make men children of God; Christ does. Moses came to a people who were already the Lord's by covenant relationship; whereas Christ takes up those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and creates them anew. Thus as the founder of the family is entitled to the highest honor from the family, so Christ is worthy of more glory than Moses.⁶

b. The greater glory of Christ the builder illustrated, v. 4.

"For every house is being built by someone, but the one having built everything is God." Here a broad universal principle is injected that is intended to enhance the contrast between Moses and Christ. A house, by its very nature, presupposes an architect/builder, and by implication, the fact of there being many houses demands many architects/builders. But God is the architect/builder of everything, and especially His own house, though to the exclusion of the Son, as v. 6 makes clear. This leads to the conclusion, according to v. 3, that God the Father and Jesus Christ are co-architects/builders of the household of God! The further conclusion then is that Jesus Christ is deity, specifically the Son, as vs. 5-6

⁵ Bruce describes this house as "the old economy, inaugurated by Moses." *Hebrews*, p. 92.

⁶ Pink, *Hebrews*, I, p. 160.

designate (cf. John 1:1-3; Col. 1:13-17). Hughes refers to a parallel instance of this Trinitarian revelation:

Interestingly, an ‘ambivalence’ similar to that which we have here—verse 3 speaking of Jesus as the builder and verse 4 of God as the builder—occurs in I Chronicles 17, where in verse 10 David is given the promise that ‘the Lord (Yahweh) will build you a house’ and in verse 12 that the son whose kingdom would be established forever ‘shall build a house for me.’ That promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ who, as the eternal Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, is Yahweh who builds the ‘house,’ and who, as the incarnate Son belonging to the line of David, effects the building of that ‘house’ by his atoning sacrifice of himself at Calvary. Thus Moses recedes into comparative insignificance.⁷

Hence in the light of this elevation of Christ, Moses recedes further into honorable obscurity.

3. Christ more glorious as the Son over the house of God, vs. 5-6.

The argument now reaches a definitive climax in reinforcement of the clear distinction that is made between Moses’ administration of the house of God and Christ’s administration of the house of God. There is no merging here, as if Moses remains a servant in the house administration of Christ the Son. Rather Moses’ house administration, as “a shadow of the good things to come,” 10:1, has concluded, it being displaced by “a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises,” 8:6.

a. The lesser glory of Moses the servant, v. 5.

“And Moses was faithful in [ἐν, en] the whole of His [God’s] house as a dutiful server/minister [θεράπων, therapōn] for the purpose of being a witness of the things that would later be spoken [by God].” Here Moses’ calling was to serve *in* his house in contrast with Christ who is a Son *over* his house, v. 6. Again there is allusion to Numbers 12:7 where the LXX also uses θεράπων, which R. C. Trench distinguishes as indicating “the sense of one whose services are tenderer, nobler, freer than those of the δοῦλος, doulos.”⁸ Yet Moses’ appointment was provisional, in a broader sense not unlike that of John the Baptist. Westcott explains: “Moses not only witnessed to the truths which his legislation plainly declared, but also to the truths which were to be made plain afterwards. The O. T. in all its parts pointed forward to a spiritual antitype (cf. Deut. 18:15ff).”⁹ The addressees will have already recollected the words of Jesus: “For he [Moses] wrote about Me” (John 5:46; cf. Luke 24:27). Hence the argument prepares the way for the final *coup de grace* in v. 6, “But Christ”!

⁷ Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 134n.

⁸ Trench further comments: “It will follow that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, calling Moses a θεράπων in the house of God implies that he occupied a more confidential position, that a freer service, a higher dignity was his, than that merely of a δοῦλος, doulos, approaching more closely to that of an οἰκονόμος, oikonomos, in God’s house; and referring to Numbers 12:6-8, we find, confirming this view, that an exceptional dignity is there ascribed to Moses, lifting him above other δοῦλοι, douloi of God.” *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 30-2.

⁹ Westcott, *Hebrews*, p. 77.

b. The greater glory of Moses the Son, v. 6.

“But Christ was faithful as a son over [ἐπί, epi] his [God’s] house, of which house we are, if we hold fast/cling to the confidence and boasting of the hope firm until the end.”¹⁰ Again, while both Moses and Jesus were “faithful,” there is a vast difference between the loyalty of a slave to his master based upon performance and that of a son to his father based upon begetting, 1:5. Hence while the “faithfulness” of Jesus far surpasses that of Moses, an esteemed employee of God, the point of emphasis here concerns the greater rank of Jesus as the “Christ” and a “Son,” and His greater responsibilities, as builder/proprietor “over His [God’s] house.” Now the more specific identification of Christ’s edifice/household is explained by the emphatic expression: “Of which house we [even we] are [belong]” (cf. II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; I Pet. 2:5). Thus, according to Westcott, “Christians are ‘the house of God’ and no longer the Jews [Matt. 21:43].”¹¹ Further, the subsequent teaching suggests that here the author’s mind, in immediately recollecting the shabby, unfaithful reputation of Israel as “the people of God,” expects “better things” in the dispensation of the church, 6:9; 11:39-40; 12:24.

However the superior nature of the New Testament household of God, based upon Christ’s status and faithfulness, yet involves the responsibility of its inhabitants, expressed conditionally, to persevere. Hence citizenship is authentic, “if we hold fast/cling to the confidence and boasting of the hope firm until the end.”¹² This is the second of several warning passages, cf. 2:1-4, that often draw upon the failures of Israel and thus the inferior Mosaic legacy. The similar exhortation, “let us hold fast the confession of our hope,” 10:23, also uses κατέχω, katechō, meaning to hold firmly by clasp tightly, even as unbelievers who “suppress the truth [hold it down in opposition] in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18). In other words, Christians, those “of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10; cf. Eph. 2:19; I Pet. 4:17), are to employ exertion in their earthly pilgrimage (John 8:31-2) since, by obvious implication, outside influences are hell-bent on derailing travelers. There is no consideration here of effectual grace through election that will guarantee this progress (Eph. 2:10), as true as is this doctrine of perseverance. However we do have here exhortation that that is particularly suited to the Calvinist lest he presume upon the sovereignty of God. Hence, as Hughes warns: “[A] man whose profession of faith is contradicted by the quality of his life should examine himself to see whether he is a Christian at all (II Cor. 13:5). Security in Christ does not absolve one from personal responsibility: quite the contrary, for the regenerate man is under total obligation to God.”¹³ Thus Bruce points out:

Nowhere in the New Testament more than here do we find such repeated insistence on the fact that continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality. [He further

¹⁰ The words, “firm until the end,” μέχρι τέλους βεβαίαν, mechri telous bebaian, giving sense that is appropriate, are also identically found in v. 14 and may have been added here where there is qualified manuscript support.

¹¹ Westcott, *Hebrews*, p. 78.

¹² A. T. Robertson classifies this as a third class conditional sentence, being undetermined, but with the prospect of determination, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, V, p. 355.

¹³ Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 139.

refers to those,] ‘who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away’ (Mark 4:5f., 16f.). This is precisely what our author fears may happen with his readers.¹⁴

However, the conditionality here takes into account means, namely the cultivation of confidence and boasting in “our hope,” cf. 10:23, which is the consummation of our salvation, that glorious event when Jesus Christ appears a second time and thus, “we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (I John 3:2). Adjusted focus on this hope will “strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet,” 12:12-13.

B. Jesus Christ’s participation eclipses Moses’ legacy of regression, 3:7-19.

“Therefore,” *Διό*, *dio*, is the “strongest inferential conjunction”¹⁵ indicating a close logical relationship with the preceding contrast between Moses and Jesus Christ. Not surprisingly this contrast, although less explicit, nevertheless permeates the following more practical exposition that draws upon Israel’s unsavory, unfaithful reputation under Moses’ administration, cf. vs. 14, 16. Hence, “Therefore . . . [according to the quotation of Psalm 95:7b-11 describing the household of Moses] take care, brethren [of the household of Christ], that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God,” vs. 7a, 12. In other words, the superiority of the household of Christ does not invalidate present vulnerability concerning sin.

1. The legacy of wilderness backsliding, vs. 7-11.

“Just as the Holy Spirit is saying,” solemnizes the following quotation of Psalm, 95:7b-11. That is, it reminds the Hebrew Christian addressees, who are most familiar with the Old Testament writings, that they are to reverence the sacred record as the inscribed voice of the Spirit of God, as 9:1, 8; 10: 15 confirm (cf. II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:20-21). The Psalm as a whole is an invitation to praise the Lord vocally, joyfully, reverently, dependently, vs. 1-7a, yet at the same time with a manner that is not tainted with unbelief, vs. 7b-11. This injunction, as a whole, is equally applicable to the Christian, notwithstanding his subjection to Christ’s headship.

a. The Spirit’s warning about attentiveness, v. 7.

“Today, if you hear His voice” indicates a condition, as in v. 6, being undetermined, but with the prospect of determination. The fact that attentive hearing is not assumed suggests a measure of indifference amongst the people of God. Hence the immediacy of the psalmist’s call becomes the immediacy of the author of Hebrews, so that he aims at arousing listless professors lest they drift into unbelief and “not enter My rest,” vs. 11, 18-19, which is elaborated upon in 4:1-11. There is no time for delay: “But encourage one another day

¹⁴ Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 94.

¹⁵ Dana, H. E. and Mantey, Julius R. *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 245.

after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin," 3:13, cf. 4:7. However, by way of encouragement, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and *today* and forever," 13:8. Paul gives a similar warning: "'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine upon you.' Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise" (Eph. 5:14-15). Hence living under sovereign, redeeming grace calls for alertness, vigilance, not presumption.

b. The Spirit's warning about hardheartedness, v. 8.

While God hardened Pharaoh's rebellious heart just prior to the exodus of God's people, Israel hardened its own heart after that same redemptive exodus, and continued to do so onward to the time of the psalmist and beyond to Paul (Acts 19:9). This regression is also a possibility in the household of Christ, notwithstanding greater privileges under greater leadership, being "partakers with Christ," vs. 14-15. We might coin this "hardening [σκληρύνω, sklerunō]" here as "sclerosis of the soul." Such a reality is addressed by Paul in I Corinthians 10:1-12 where Israel is a sorry illustration of how God's people backslide, vs. 1-10. Hence, "these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall," vs. 11.12. Hence, Saphir warns: "And if Israel was not faithful under Moses, and their unbelief brought ruin upon them, how much more guilty shall we be, and how much greater our danger, if we are not faithful unto the Lord Jesus?"¹⁶

c. The Spirit's warning about testing God, v. 9.

The history of Israel, from its redemption until possession of the promised land, is one of persistent carnality that provokes God to anger and discipline. In the wilderness of Sin they murmured due to the lack of bread, at which God gave them manna (Ex. 16:1-36). At Rephidim they murmured for the lack of water from the rock (Ex. 17:1-7). In the wilderness of Sinai, soon after receiving the law, they made and worshipped a golden image (Ex. 32:1-35). At Taberah they murmured for lack of flesh; and the quails were sent, followed by a dreadful plague (Num. 11:1-35). At Kadesh-barnea they refused to go up and take possession of the land of promise (Num. 14:30-14:10), which brought down on them the awful sentence referred to in the Psalm here quoted, v. 11; and after that sentence was pronounced, they presumptuously attempted that which they had formerly refused to do (Num. 14:39-45). All these things took place in approximately two years after they left Egypt. Thirty-seven years after this, again we find them at Kadesh-barnea, murmuring for want of water and other things (Num. 20:2-13). Israel provoked God by its inappropriate carnality, πειράζω, peirazō, yet He proved/tested δοκιμασία, dokimasia, faithful according to, "My works for forty years." Similarly the Christian is warned of being provocative (I Cor. 10:21-22), of so testing God by our inappropriate carnality that we prove

¹⁶ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, p. 193.

His holy, refining, disciplining goodness (cf. I Pet. 1:6-7), and lose rest, v. 11, 18-19.

d. The Spirit's warning about the anger of God, v. 10.

A possible, though less common translation, is: "For forty years I was angry with this generation," which is supported by Psalm 95:10 NASB, NIV. This anger, or "loathing" in Psalm 95:10, קָוַט, qāwt, is God's "indignation/burden of high displeasure," προσοχθίζω, prosochthizō, only here and v. 17 in the New Testament. The Psalmist could reflect upon the centuries of persistent unbelief that had failed to heed the warning of Moses: "Remember, do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord" (Deut. 9:7). Now the author of Hebrews reflects upon the subsequent warning of Psalm 95, including the Davidic era via Psalm 78:40-41.

How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness
And grieved Him in the desert!
Again and again they tempted God,
And pained the Holy One of Israel.

Within the household of God's people, there was cyclical indifference to righteousness, like a treadmill (Neh. 9:6-37), that was confronted with God's revulsion at such habitual rebellion. It was like the prodigal son returning home and then reverting to the far country, with this procedure being repeated over and over again. It was a trampling on redemption out of Egypt not appropriated by true faith. Waywardness and ignorance indicated no qualification for entrance into the land of promised rest. Suffice to state here that the Lord Jesus confirms this same principle. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matt. 7:22-23).

e. The Spirit's warning about judgment, v. 11.

"Accordingly, I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter into My rest." Having formally, but not faithfully, identified with redemption out of Egypt, such outward religious professors will not participate in the rest that God supplies only for the faithful. Here we are introduced to a key word in Hebrews, namely "rest" which concept is variously described as "My rest," 4:3, 5, "His rest," 3:18; 4:1," κατάπαυσις, katapausis, and a "Sabbath rest," σαββατισμός, sabbatismos, 4:9. In the Old Testament scenario, the unbelief of Israel resulted in the original generation being assigned to death in the wilderness (Num. 14:22-23), that is with the exception of Caleb and Joshua who, on account of faithfulness, did enter the land of promise (Num. 14:24, 30; Deut. 1:36, 38). The land as such was to be the home of the redeemed, "a good and spacious land, . . . a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8), a safe place suitable for worship: "When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for

His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD" (Deut. 12:10-11). Such a residency prefigured a present/future rest for the authentic Christian.

2. The legacy as a present lesson, vs. 12-19.

As the people of God in the Old Testament were subject to apostasy, so the people of the New Testament need to be warned that they are also capable of a similar relapse. While an economic distinction has been made, that of Christ's superior administration having superceded that of Moses, yet the essential gospel principle of *sola fide*, faith alone, is no more or less applicable (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Hence the Old Testament has much to teach us, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, v. 7, concerning the restlessness of the quasi redeemed, and the soul rest of those authentically redeemed.

a. Encouragement in Christ is to replace unbelief under Moses, vs. 12-13.

Here balanced pastoral care is exhorted in negative and positive terms, using warning and encouragement, discipline, 12:4-11, and vision, 12:1-3.

(1) Negatively, keep a watch for symptoms of unbelief, v. 12.

"Brethren, look out lest there is in any of you an evil heart of unbelief that leads to it falling away from God." While the address here is to "brethren," assumed genuine Christians, the warning is that, like the wide infection of unbelief in Israel leading to the disinheritance of a considerable number, so in the local church care is to be taken that the same infection is not allowed to develop, as with "a little leaven [that] leavens the whole lump" (I Cor. 5:6). Some may have "an *evil* unbelieving heart," πονηρός, *ponēros* more often referring to the evil of the world and unbelievers (Luke 6:45; Acts 17:5; II Thess. 3:2; II Tim. 3:13; cf. Heb. 10:22). John Brown comments:

The word 'evil' sometimes signifies 'wicked, diseased,' and sometimes 'mischievous or destructive.' In all its senses it is very applicable to unbelief. . . . Faith naturally leads to holiness and happiness, to purity and peace; and unbelief as naturally produces guilt, depravity, and ruin. It is probably the last of these ideas—that of mischievousness—that the Apostle meant to convey by the epithet 'wicked,' as he immediately proceeds to show how unbelief excludes him who indulges it from the rest of God, into which only those who believe can enter.¹⁷

Hence the "falling away," ἀφίσταμι, *aphistami*, meaning to step aside from, describes a process leading to the final departure of apostates (Matt. 13:20-21; I John 2:19). Such a downgrade is all the more to be fearfully shunned when it is contemplated that it involves a rejection of the "[only] living God," of heaven and earth (Jer. 10:5-10), that is God the Son; it is thus a rejection of spiritual life by those who do not authentically possess it.

¹⁷ John Brown, *Hebrews*, I, p. 178.

(2) Positively, encourage unto symptoms of belief, v. 13.

“But encourage/exhort yourselves each day, while it is called ‘Today,’ in order that none of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” If “an evil, unbelieving heart” in v. 12 describes a genuine apostate, mirrored by the apostasy of much of Israel, yet the genuine child of God can also backslide, almost though not altogether, even “foully though not finally,” as Spurgeon puts it. The rescue of a Christian from this predicament is now contemplated, and means of grace are to be employed. The continuous “encouragement,” παρακαλέω, *parakaleō*, employs a verb used in its noun form to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit to a believer (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 17:7) as well as the advocacy of Jesus Christ for the believer (I John 2:1). Here is a ministry that requires “coming alongside” and not simply confrontational rebuke. In this instance, believers in general, and not simply elders, are to reciprocally care for one another both remedially and preventively. On the one hand there is to be sober sensitivity and dread lest anyone “be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” On the other hand means of encouragement are mutually to be employed. But what are they? To begin with there is to be the cultivation of a sense of urgency, “as long as it is called ‘Today,’” along with caution concerning “the deceitfulness of sin,” its beguiling propositions (Jas. 1:13-16). Further the environment of this encouragement is to be where the saints are “assembling together” and “encouraging [παρακαλέω, *parakaleō*] one another,” 10:25-6. Moreover “this word of exhortation [παρακαλέω, *parakaleō*] . . . [is that which] I have written to you briefly,” 13:22. However the preceding context of “encouraging one another,” 10:25, indicates the substance of this interactive ministry. It is encapsulated in 10:19-24, being the exhortation to “hold fast the confession of our faith,” v. 23, based upon Jesus Christ’s high priestly “new and living way,” vs. 19-22, that should stimulate “one another to love and good deeds,” v. 24. Thus Arthur Pink sums up:

As fellow pilgrims in a hostile country, as members of the same family, we ought to have ‘care for one another’ (I Cor. 12:25), to ‘love one another’ (John 13:34), to ‘pray one for another’ (Jas. 5:16), to ‘comfort one another’ (I Thess. 4:18), to ‘admonish one another’ (Rom. 15:14), to ‘edify one another’ (I Thess. 5:11), to have ‘peace one with another’ (Mark 9:50). Only thus are we really helpful one to another. And, note, the exhorting is to be done ‘daily,’ for we must not be weary in well doing.¹⁸

Charles Wesley has also exhorted in this vein:

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
 Who joins us by His grace,
 And bids us, each to each restored,
 Together seek His face.
 He bids us build each other up;
 And gathered into one,
 To our high calling’s glorious hope
 We hand in hand go on.

¹⁸ Pink, *Hebrews*, I, p. 180.

b. Participation in Christ is to replace unbelief under Moses, vs. 14-19.

The doctrine of perseverance is normally understood to be the inevitable consequence of particular election. That is, predestination of the chosen sinner unto salvation guarantees that there will be perseverance in Christian living unto the end of this earthly pilgrimage. But, for practical reasons, here the author of Hebrews reverses this order so that participation in Christ is established as certain, "if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." Thus perseverance authenticates true conversion. This thought is reinforced here by the recollection of Israel's sorry history of hard-heartedness and unbelief that disqualify the claim of redemption out of Egypt and candidacy for rest in Canaan.

(1) The need of present perseverance in Christ, vs. 14-15.

The author's *present* pastoral interest continues. He is concerned about the evidence of Christian faith and vitality "today," the time of opportunity and accountability, while the day of salvation is present. The past and future are only validated by the present. Hence for the Christian "rest" remains a present possibility, not a lost option as with Israel in the wilderness.

(a) Present participation in Christ, v. 14.

"For we have become partakers with Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm to the end." The word "partakers," μέταχος, metachos, recalls our brotherly relationship with Christ, 2:11-12, 17, the association we have in "flesh and blood," 2:14.¹⁹ This relationship has existed from conversion to the present, and will continue "if we hold fast." Here, as in v. 6, we have a third class conditional sentence, being undetermined, but with the prospect of determination. Again, the author does not presume upon the spiritual status of his audience, and neither should they. What we are to hold fast is literally our "substance," ὑπόστασις, hypostasis, hence confident, substantial steadfastness, cf. 3:6, καύχημα, kauchēma, in Christ's household, 3:6, from beginning to end. As Bruce comments: "The Israelites made a good beginning when they crossed the Sea of Reeds and praised God for their deliverance; but the good beginning was not matched by their later behavior."²⁰

(b) Present hearing of Christ, v. 15.

The repetition here of 3:7, 13, cf. 4:7, is for emphasis, that is the present urgency of perseverance. Here is a sober warning for the decisionism of modern evangelism, the fruit of which has been the absence of perseverance. Yes, you made a decision years ago, but the vital question, as was the case with the writer of Psalm 95:7, concerns

¹⁹ Bruce, Farrar, while Hughes, Owen, and Westcott, among others, translate "partakers of Christ," there being a suggested allusion to profession of faith at baptism. But sufficient consideration of 2:11-12, 17 is lacking.

²⁰ Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. p. 101.

“Today.” Do you still hear the voice of God through His indwelling Holy Spirit and the preached Word? If you do, then keep on in your faith pilgrimage. But if not, like Israel, notwithstanding a profession of redemption, you will perish and not inherit the rest that God provides for His persevering children. Pink adds: “Thus the sins of others before us are to be laid to heart, that we may avoid them.”²¹

(2) The need of present warning of God’s anger, vs. 16-19.

Fake religion that is a mere formal replica of the true, as distinct from bald, blatant pagan religion, especially arouses the displeasure of God since it is a charade of devotion toward Him. Hence the author senses this serious condition amongst his addressees. It is an astonishment that the privileged in grace deport themselves so ungraciously, that the professors of grace are demonstrably pretenders. As a result he is again reminded of the tragic example of Israel in this regard which participated in outward national redemption and yet was destitute of inward regeneration. Many professing Christians make the same unfruitful boast.

(a) Those redeemed out of Egypt angered God, v. 16.

The first of three questions suggests incredulity concerning Israel’s “provocation” παραπικραίνω, *parapikrainō*, cf. v. 8, its stimulation of God to indignation. How could it be that God’s elect people should commit spiritual harlotry? This privileged status is further heightened by the fact that His chosen people “had heard” special revelation of God’s holy purposes for Israel. In spite of this the response was unbelief, disobedience. It is significant that the transgressors here are described as “all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses.” Obviously a remnant, represented by the families of Caleb and Joshua, is exempt from the exclusion of the congregation as a whole from the land of promised rest. Nevertheless, a large majority had *formally* been delivered out of Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb, they had *formally* passed through the divided waters of the Red Sea, they had *formally* submitted to the leadership of Moses, yet participation in all of this was by means of “pursuing a law of righteousness, . . . by works,” not the righteousness which is “by faith” (Rom. 9:31-33). By way of parallel, many a professing Christian testifies of having savingly believed in the blood of Jesus, of having been baptized, of having become a church member, while at the same time lusting after Vanity Fair and complaining about being neglected by God; but such people will not enter into His promised rest (Matt. 7:21-23). Hence “Today,” v. 15, the child of God is to not presume upon grace.

²¹ Pink, *Hebrews*, I, p. 185.

- (b) Those subject to death through sin angered God, v. 17.

The second question warns of unexpected judgment. The consequence of forty years of spurious faith was forty years of God's "indignation/burden of high displeasure," v. 10. In effect God declared to Israel, "Because of persistent unbelief, you can rot in the wilderness, and rot in hell," protestations of initial conversion notwithstanding. There had been no authentic frontsliding to begin with, no continuance in a life of faith following conversion. Jesus Christ was similarly cautious regarding initial profession of personal redemption. "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free'" (John 8:31:32; cf. 2:23-25). Hence "Today," v. 15, the child of God is to take stock of his present spiritual status (II Cor. 13:5).

- (c) Those denied rest through disobedience angered God, v. 18.

The third question warns of a lost inheritance. This repeated mode of admonition is intended to sober the indifferent and arouse the lethargic. As with v. 17, the assumption is that those professing to be children of God are addressed, and not the world at large. Probably there was frequent, glib talk by the Israelites about eventual entrance into Canaan, the land of rest, after transition through the Sinai peninsula. But this religious verbosity merely cloaked unbelief and disobedience. So John Brown comments: "If unbelief and disobedience to the will of God as 'spoken by Moses' brought down on our fathers such judgments, what may we expect if we are unbelieving and disobedient when He makes known His will to us 'by His Son?'"²² Likewise Christians superficially speak of going to heaven; they sing "Beyond the Sunset," "Sweet By and By," "I Am Bound for the Promised Land," "I've Got a Mansion," "Over the Sunset Mountains," "Beulah Land," while their daily lives remain absorbed with the onions and leeks and garlic of Egypt, so to speak; they attend church regularly yet never delight to speak of the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus; their appetites in music and literature are of this world. Such a lifestyle is simply one of unbelief and disobedience cloaked by religious trappings.

- (d) Those denied rest through unbelief angered God, v. 19.

"Thus we see/understand that they [faithless Israelites] were not able [aorist passive of δύναμαι, dunamai] to enter into [the land of promised rest] on account of unbelief." The inescapable conclusion that the preceding three questions have stimulated, based upon biblical history, is that true saving faith, resulting in obedience, is persevering faith. This is not to deny the possibility of weak and strong faith. However, true faith is grounded upon the life of God in the soul that is never extinguished; counterfeit faith, however formally impressive, eloquent

²² Brown, *Hebrews*, I, p. 191.

and passionate, yet is void of the life of God. True faith has direct and unalloyed linkage with God; false faith has no saving linkage with God.

C. Jesus Christ's rest eclipses Moses' legacy of unbelief, 4:1-16.

While the addressees of Hebrews have already been soberly warned concerning unbelief by means of the example of Israel, the focus now concentrates even more pointedly upon the key term of "rest" that most of the "redeemed out of Egypt" failed to inherit (3:18-19). The historic scenario has presented a sequence of three related elements. *First*, there is redemption rest appropriated through faith (expressed on the night of the Passover), though many Hebrews participated in a mere outward form that was void of faith. *Second*, there is transition rest maintained through faith (expressed during the wilderness sojourn), though many Hebrews, lacking faith, perished at that time. *Third*, there is completion rest that is appropriated by those who have persevered in faith (maintained through entrance into Canaan). It should be noted that the distinguishing feature of each element is the absence or presence of faith/obedience (3:12, 18-19), and this continues to be true (4:2-3, 6, 11).

1. The rest born of the good news, vs. 1-3.

The word "rest," *κατάπαυσις*, *katapausis*, means a state of repose resulting from the cessation of vigorous work, as illustrated by the fact that God "rested on the seventh day from all His works," v. 4, from His intensive creative labor, cf. Genesis 2:2; Acts 7:49. Here the "rest" of the child of God is his faith in Christ, both initial, ongoing, and culminative, but here it is especially present rest in the grace of the gospel and future consummate rest designated as "entering that/My/His rest" (3:3, 11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10). As Saphir puts it: "[T]he believer has *rest*, now on earth, and hereafter in glory. Resting in Christ, he labors to enter into the perfect rest of eternity."²³ This pilgrimage in rest is portrayed by Israel's wilderness travail and entrance into Canaan. Note that this national repose was to include not only deliverance from enemies (Deut. 12:10-11), but also, "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper" (Deut. 8:7-9).

a. The warning of lost rest, v. 1.

"Therefore let us fear lest a promise to enter into His rest being open before us, any of you seem to have fallen short of it [you miss the opportunity and perish]." Here a right fear in Christian living is encouraged, that which is neither presumptuous nor neglectful of personal responsibility (10:31; 12:28), which attitudes lead to complacency, indifference. It is stimulated by the sober recollection of a great multitude of Israelites who, although confident of entering Canaan, yet found themselves excluded (3:18-19; cf. Matt. 7:21-23); they had no rest in the wilderness and lost the prospect of rest in Canaan. But what specifically is the "promise to enter into His rest"? Some suggest the chief thrust here, as with vs. 3, 9-10, concerns that future state rest, whether it be the millennium, a new

²³ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, p. 219.

heavens and a new earth, or heaven.²⁴ But with John Owen and others we believe that the main emphasis here concerns a present gospel rest through faith, for the following reasons.²⁵ First, v. 3 literally translates, "For we are entering into [present, not future tense] the rest, those believing." Second, the repeated emphasis on "today" as a now opportunity indicates the need for present faith that appropriates present gospel rest in contrast with the unbelief of Israel that forfeited rest in the wilderness, as well as beyond. Third, the "promise" here concerns Christ and the gospel itself, which Scripture plainly declares to be the means by which a state of rest is presently obtained (Matt. 11:28-30) through faith, v. 2. Hence, as Owen concludes, "[T]he rest, therefore, here intended is that rest which believers have an entrance into by Jesus Christ in this world."²⁶ Thus the warning here concerns those who, like Israel, participated formally in redemption, yet without authentic faith. Thus to profess faith in Christ formally, yet not savingly, is to "come short" of rest in Christ, like the five foolish virgins who lacked oil and were excluded from the wedding feast (Matt. 25:1-12); it is to be lost in the church, having made a formal profession that is not the work of regeneration. From another perspective, such are not far from the kingdom yet they perish outside the gates of heaven!

b. The good news of faith redemption, v. 2.

"For indeed we have been evangelized [had the gospel preached to us] even as those also [Israelites in the wilderness]; but the Word they heard [the Word of hearing] did not profit/benefit them, it not being united/joined with faith in those who heard." Paul describes this same void of faith within Israel (Rom. 9:30-33). For the sake of practical argument concerning the essential, distinguishing element of salvation through faith alone, a close parallel is considered between the past evangelization of Israel and the present evangelization of the "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling [based upon] Jesus Christ, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (3:1), who comprise "His house" (3:6). But what is the identity of the "good news" here that both communities are said to have received? The context suggests it is not the Passover/redemption gospel, but the good news of promised rest, that is the prospect of Canaan/the millennium/new heavens and new earth/heaven.²⁷ To pursue and enter the land flowing with milk and honey, *sola fide* was required, and this principle remains true today; pilgrimage toward and inheritance of the future blessed state will likewise be through identical *sola fide*. In both instances, there is assumed to be the hearing of the good news, but what matters is that cognition be joined to embrace so that profit results, comprehension of the truth must be wedded to personal assimilation of the truth so that entrance into rest results. This is the "profit/benefit" which the authentic pilgrim can rightly anticipate, that is "the city which is to come" (13:9, 14). No

²⁴ Thus Hughes, Pink. For Jonathan Edwards, the millennium of Revelation 20 "is the sabbatism of the world; when all shall be in a holy rest, when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and there shall be nothing to hurt or offend, and there shall be abundance of peace, and 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the seas' [Isa. 11:9]. *Works*, Vol. 5, p. 410.

²⁵ Owen gives six reasons, *Hebrews*, II, pp. 215-7; also Brown, Bruce, Westcott.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

²⁷ So Brown, Farrar.

embrace or assimilation of this gospel results in perishing in the wilderness (3:17-19). As Bruce remarks: “[I]t is not the hearing of the gospel by itself that brings final salvation, but its appropriation by faith; and if that faith is genuine faith, it will be a persistent faith.”²⁸

c. The good news of faith rest, v. 3.

“For we are entering into the rest, those having believed, just as He has said: ‘As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter into My rest,’ although His works had been finished from the completion of the world.” Here the Christian life is portrayed as pilgrimage, like John Bunyan’s graphic representation in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, as a journey whereby, following departure from the City of Destruction, there is transition and arrival at the Celestial City.²⁹ All three stages require *sola fide*, but the present and future aspects are our chief concern (cf. 6:1-3). However, for those presently believing, what assurance and comfort is there to be obtained in the present, even “today”? It is argued that while Israel failed to enter God’s rest in the past, yet God’s original rest, which He has continued to enjoy, and thus its continuation, has guaranteed for the faithful the present availability of and participation in God’s rest, even for “today” and beyond. Therefore “it *remains* for some to enter in,” v. 6, and “there *remains* a Sabbath rest for the people of God,” v. 9. In other words, all is not lost because a large proportion of Israel did lose promised rest at a time when rest was available. Hence the implied encouragement here is for pilgrims to persevere in faith, in Christ, which establishes the present entering into God’s rest. Since creation, God has not only rested Himself but also continued to provide His rest through faith alone. For the authentic believer, present and ongoing rest is a reality, the unbelief of Israel notwithstanding, because God continues to rest from creative works even as the believer has repudiated justifying works, that is “his works,” v. 10, “dead works” (9:14).

2. The rest born of the Sabbath pattern, vs. 4-11.

While there is obvious continuity with v. 3, yet the focus sharpens on the “seventh day,” which for the Hebrew Christian, having a legacy of strict, materialistic sabbatarianism, would be highly significant, but especially its application to the present and future rest of the believer. However it is vital first to understand here God’s Sabbath, His rest, as that place where the believer enters and finds repose through faith. Only then can we appreciate the superiority of that Sabbath rest which Christ mediates when compared with the sabbatarianism which Moses administered.

²⁸ Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp. 105-6.

²⁹ It is noteworthy that in considering the origin of Bunyan’s pilgrimage motif, there is good reason for believing that Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16; 13:14 are primary sources. Refer to Philip Edwards, “The Journey In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*,” *The Pilgrim’s Progress, Critical and Historical Views*, ed. Vincent Newey, pp. 111-117.

a. God's original seventh day rest, vs. 4-5.

As with (2:6), the "somewhere," πού, pou, hardly suggests uncertainty on the part of the author; rather the expression introduces a common, notable, principal quotation, which here unquestionably defines the foundation of sabbatarianism.³⁰

(1) The establishment of perpetual Sabbath rest by God, v. 4.

"For He said, as we know concerning the seventh [day], in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'" This reference to Genesis 2:2; cf. Exodus 20:11; 31:17, draws attention to God's unending rest. Each of the preceding six days of divine labor had closure, but the seventh ushered in a glorious age, based upon the admiration of completion; "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). So His perpetual Sabbath remains, His works of maintenance notwithstanding (John 5:17), and in grace God delights to incorporate restless sinners into His rest. They in turn respond with the praise of God's rest following creation, and His Son's rest following the completed work of redemption. (John 4:34; 5:17; Heb. 10:12). Saphir well comments:

Thus God gives us His rest as our rest. It is written in the Book of Genesis that God rested on the seventh day, and that *thus* (in His rest) all His works were finished. The rest of God is the consummation and crown of the creation. . . . Heaven and earth are to be filled with His glory. The rest of the seventh day declares the sovereignty, majesty, and blessedness of God, which all things according to their capacity are to show forth and to rejoice in. Hence, if you will think of it, this Sabbath of God is the substratum and basis of all peace and rest—the pledge of an ultimate and satisfactory purpose in creation. Without this idea the world is nothing else but constant motion without progress, journey without end, toil without reward, question without answer. "Sabbathless Satan." In this word Milton expresses a great thought.³¹

(2) The loss of Sabbath rest by Israel, 5.

"And again in this [matter/passage], 'They shall not enter into My rest.'" Here Bruce asks an important question that many commentators ignore: "But in what sense does God speak of 'My rest'? Does it simply mean 'the rest which I bestow' or does it also mean 'the rest which I myself enjoy?'"³² The repetition here of Psalm 95:11 from 3:11; 4:3, suggests the emphasis of a fundamental theme that is more specifically explained by the truth of v. 4, namely that God entered into His own rest, His own repose from creative labor. So Bruce responds: "[T]he rest which God promises to his people is a share in that rest which he himself enjoys."³³ Hence the pilgrim who labors

³⁰ Thus Westcott translates, "as we know," or "to quote familiar words." *Hebrews*, p. 96.

³¹ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, pp. 221-2. In a footnote here he wisely adds: "In considering the 'rest of God' in Genesis 2, we should dismiss from our minds the questions concerning 'Sabbath and Lord's day,' which are apt to narrow and cloud our view of this great subject."

³² Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 106.

³³ *Ibid.*

in disobedience, who toils in the face of grace, 13:9, does not rest through faith, does not enter into God's own rest. In a similar manner, the toiling disobedience of Adam and Eve led to their expulsion from the rest of Paradise and the tree of life, that God had labored to prepare, unto restless labor in a fallen world (Gen. 3:23-24). Such is the vagabond existence of all sinners, as Cain discovered (Gen. 4:11-15). As with Israel's unbelief, and contemporary Gentile unbelief, the inevitable result is restlessness of soul and life. Contrast the numerous Old Testament descriptions of saving faith resulting in restful union with God according to His preparation. (Ex. 19:4; Ps. 36:7-9; 57:1; 91:1-10; Jer. 6:16; 30:10; 50:33-34; Heb. 2:4; 3:17-19).

b. God's remaining Sabbath rest, vs. 6-11.

We must keep in mind that the Hebrew Christian addressees are about to receive decisive encouragement in v. 9 concerning the truth that they are not presently disqualified from the rest born of faith. Here the argument based upon the analogy of the Old Testament, the lost rest born of Moses' administration, is brought to a conclusion. However this loss was not total, and not simply because of the geographic entrance of Caleb and Joshua into the land of promise. Rather there remained the availability of rest during the ongoing history of Israel up to the time of David.

(1) The rests of yesterday and today, vs. 6-8.

The argument is now careful to avoid misunderstanding concerning the "land of milk and honey" rest that Israel was promised and eventually inherited. There is a more important rest of the soul that is not territorial but rather the rest of faith, the contented, works renouncing repose of the believing soul in Christ and His completed work of redemption.

(a) The prospect of a future rest, v. 6.

"Therefore since it is remaining for some to enter into it [God's rest], and those before having been evangelized did not enter [God's rest] on account of being disobedient/unpersuaded," Although most of Israel died in the wilderness, yet the descendents, along with the families of Joshua and Caleb, did enter the earthly rest (Josh. 18:1). However Hebrew Christians, while racially identifying with this valued historic legacy, and the sober warning it provides, ought to appreciate a more significant, abiding principle of soul rest by faith. In other words, for the Hebrew Christian his rest is not primarily to be concerned with establishing residence in the land of Israel.

(b) The gain of rest according to David's exhortation, v. 7.

"He again appoints/marks out a certain day saying 'Today,' through David, after so much time [after the entrance of Joshua into Canaan], just as has been said before [in vs. 3:7, 13, 15]: 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.'" Farrar explains: "The argument is that 'David' [cf. 'the Holy Spirit.' 3:7], (a general name for the

'Psalmist') had, nearly five centuries after the time of Moses, and three millenniums after the Creation, still spoken of God's rest as an offer open to mankind."³⁴ Further, the addressees could readily conclude that from the time of David until the first century A.D., residence in the promised land could hardly be described as restful, harmonious, and abundant.

(c) The absence of rest according to Joshua's administration, v. 8.

"For if Joshua [Ἰησοῦς, *Iêsous*] gave them rest, He [God] would not be speaking about another [day] after these days [of entrance and administration under Joshua]." Hence, if the rest that Joshua introduced, at the crossing of the Jordan, was the one and only rest that God envisaged for Israel as the people of God, then it would not make sense for David to describe a subsequent rest in Psalm 95:7-11. Thus Hughes adds:

This method of argument takes on added force when it is remembered that when Psalm 95 was written the Israelites were settled in the land of Canaan, so that the conclusion that a rest other than and beyond that of Canaan was intended becomes all the more obvious—and it is confirmed in the course of the subsequent history of the people when they are expelled and alienated from that territory.³⁵

(2) The Sabbath rest of today and beyond, vs. 9-11.

According to the preceding context, the author plainly has in view an *abiding* rest for his addressees who are "the people of God." That some should now define this rest as incorporating a "Sabbath-keeping" or "Christian Sabbath," as do John Owen³⁶ and Arthur Pink,³⁷ to this writer seems to introduce an astonishing reversal of emphasis. Refer to the comments of Saphir contained in Footnote 31.

³⁴ F. W. Farrar, *Hebrews*, p. 90. In dealing with the present use here of Psalm 95:7, he also describes it as "*illustration* [rather] than . . . Scriptural proof." Ibid, p. 91. Calvin similarly comments: "He [the author] now begins to embellish the passage which he had quoted from David. He has hitherto taken it, as they say, according to the letter, that is, in its literal sense; but he now amplifies and decorates it; and thus he rather alludes to than explains the words of David. . . . [T]he sum of the whole is this, that what God threatens in the Psalm as to the loss of rest, applies also to us, inasmuch as he invites us also at this day to a rest." *Hebrews*, p. 95.

³⁵ Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 160.

³⁶ Owen, *Hebrews*, II, pp. 326-331. "[I]t [is] undeniably manifest that the apostle here proves and asserts the granting of an *evangelical Sabbath*, or day of rest, for the worship of God to be constantly observed. This, I say, he doth, though he doth not this *only*, nor separately." p. 327.

³⁷ Pink, *Hebrews*, I, pp. 210-211. "[I]t cannot be gainsaid that Heb. 4:9 refers directly to *the Christian Sabbath*. Hence we solemnly and emphatically declare that any man who says there is no Christian Sabbath takes direct issue with the N.T. scriptures." p. 210.

(a) It is for the people of God, v. 9.

“So then [emphatic] there is remaining a Sabbath rest/sabbatism for the [authentic] people of God.” The present tense here emphasizes a present repose in the soul of the believer even though a consummate, eschatological rest is also included. More specifically it is a σαββατισμός, sabbatismos, which expression, as distinct from “Sabbath,” σάββατον, sabbaton, is only used here in the New Testament. This sabbatism is a faith lifestyle, a perpetual rest by faith, in contrast with a works lifestyle, v. 10, that anticipates perfect rest with Christ in his completed kingdom.³⁸ So Calvin comments: “[T]here is a sabbathizing reserved for God’s people, that is, a spiritual rest; to which God daily invites us.”³⁹ p. 98. Westcott similarly describes, “not an isolated sabbath but a sabbath-life.”⁴⁰ In the same vein Charles Wesley has written:

Sing to the great Jehovah’s praise;
 All praise to Him belongs;
 Who kindly lengthens out our days
 Demands our choicest songs.
 Our residue of days or hours
 Thine, wholly Thine shall be;
 And all our consecrated powers
 A sacrifice to Thee:
 Till Jesus in the clouds appear
 To saints on earth forgiven,
 And bring the grand sabbatic year,
 The jubilee of heaven.

Thus, according to Brown, a Christian is “the man who by believing is introduced into that state of holy happiness which is begun on earth and perfected in heaven. This state of rest is called a sabbatism, or sacred rest—the rest of God; and it deserves the name, for he who has entered into it has fellowship with God—rests along with God.”⁴¹

(b) It is works excluding, v. 10.

“For the one [the believer] who has entered into His [God’s] rest also himself has rested from his works even as God [has rested] from His own [works].” “For/since,” γάρ, gar, plainly links the meaning of “sabbatismos” in v. 9 with the explanatory truth of this verse, so that most commentators see here confirmation that Christian soul-rest is the

³⁸ Bruce draws attention to the talmudic interpretation of the title of Psalm 92, “A Psalm, a Song for the Sabbath Day.” It reads, “a psalm, a song for the time that is to come, for the day that shall be all sabbath and rest in the life everlasting.” He also sees a parallel with Revelation 14:13. *Hebrews*, p. 109n.

³⁹ Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 98.

⁴⁰ Westcott, *Hebrews*, p. 98.

⁴¹ Brown, *Hebrews*, I, pp. 209-210.

intended meaning,⁴² as the above translation supports. Some have translated in general, "For the one [Christ] who has entered into His [God's] rest also Himself has rested from His [Christ's] works [of redemption]."⁴³ From 6:1 it is plain that the author of Hebrews is concerned that his addressees should not focus on elementary teaching such as "repentance from *dead works*;" further they are to focus on "how much more will the blood of Christ through the eternal Spirit . . . cleanse your conscience from *dead works* to serve the living God" (9:14). Hence they are here "to rest from their [carnal] works," that is rest by faith in the bosom of God who has provided an eternal rest.⁴⁴ So in prayer Augustine explains:

Lord God, grant us peace . . . the peace of rest, the peace of the Sabbath, the peace without an evening. All this most beautiful array of things, all so very good, will pass away when all their courses are finished—for in them there is both morning and evening. But the seventh day is without an ending, and it has no setting, for though has sanctified it with an everlasting duration. After all thy works of creation, which were very good, thou didst rest on the seventh day, although though hadst created them all in unbroken rest—and this so that the voice of thy Book might speak to us with the prior assurance that after our works . . . we may find our rest in thee in the Sabbath of life eternal.⁴⁵

3. The rest born of the Word of God, vs. 11-13.

It is well to now consider that while the believer is to rest from his works through faith, v. 10, the practical matter of the cultivation of faith must now be considered. After all, weak faith leads to "falling away" (3:12; 4:11), exclusion from rest (3:19; 4:6), while strong faith leads to "full assurance" (10:22), the "conquering of kingdoms, [the] performance of righteousness" (11:33). By what means is faith stimulated? How is the substance of faith communicated? How is unfaithfulness distinguished?

a. The exhortation to responsible rest through faith, v. 11.

"Therefore let us be diligent/make haste/be earnest [II Pet. 1:10-11; Phil. 3:13-14] to enter into that rest so that no one, as an example of disobedience, will fall."

⁴² Brown, Bruce, Calvin, Farrar, Hughes, Westcott.

⁴³ Owen is a leading proponent of this interpretation, called "ingenious, but unsatisfactory" by John Brown, who appears to be followed by Pink, and more recently, Joseph A. Pipa, *The Lord's Day*, pp. 111-129. Significantly, all three here seek to uphold that the "sabbatismos" of v. 9 refers to a Christian Sabbath established by Christ in v. 10. Thus Owen concludes: "The first day of the week, the day of the resurrection of Christ, when he rested from his works, is appointed and determined for a day of rest or Sabbath unto the church, to be constantly observed in the room of the seventh day, appointed and observed from the foundation of the world and under the old testament." Owen, *Hebrews*, II, p. 336. Here, it is claimed is *the* sanction for the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday, becoming the Christian Sabbath, Sunday.

⁴⁴ It is objected by Owen and others that the rest of the believer, being from carnal works, is quite different from God's rest, being from His creation works. True as this may be, it misses the point that the believer's rest finds its redemptive source in God's rest. In other words, "we who have believed enter that rest," which is "My [God's] rest," v. 3, cf. vs. 5-6.

⁴⁵ Aurelius Augustine, *Confessions*, xiii, 35f.

Surely there is no thought here of participation in Sabbath day conformity. A present attitude is required so that a future inheritance might be obtained. A wrong, faithless attitude, leading to the loss of hoped for blessing like Israel in the wilderness, exclusion from consummate rest, that is fall from the way of grace and its inheritance, will result in a person becoming an example of the consequences of unbelief. Implicit here is the need of a specific course of action, the employment of means by which faith and obedience, also “fear” (4:1), are aroused. But further, faithlessness and disobedience must also to be dealt with. In this regard the Word of God is the discriminating means by which there is both edification and condemnation.

b. The exhortation to accountability before the Word, vs. 12-13.

Recall the neglect of Israel, mentioned thus far, with regard to the preached Word that resulted in disobedience/unbelief, 3:7, 15; 4:2, 6-7. Consider also the concrete, inscripturated revelation given through Moses and the prophets as a whole which was to be both an instrument of blessing and cursing according to the measure of faith exercised in it by the Hebrew people.

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.⁴⁶

(1) The power of the Word of God, v. 12.

“For the Word of God [ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, *ho logos tou theou*] is living and powerful and sharper beyond any two-edged [two-mouthed] sword, cleaving/severing and thus dividing as far as between soul and spirit, both joints and marrow, and is able to critically discern the thoughts of the heart.” It is disputed as to whether “logos of God,” a distinctive title for Jesus Christ in the writings of John, in fact here refers to Jesus Christ⁴⁷ or the

⁴⁶ Deut. 30:15-20.

⁴⁷ Supported by Augustine, Gill, and Owen who admits that few amongst the Protestants are of his view, *Hebrews*, Works, III, p. 350. It is agreed that the ὁ λόγος, *ho logos* in v. 13 is an idiomatic expression for accountability, supported by other instances, especially 13:17, also Matt. 12:36; 18:23; 25:19; Luke 16:2; Rom. 14:12; I Pet. 4:5, “. . . to whom we give account.” Virtually every translation gives this rendering. Yet it is also claimed that the “Him with whom we have to do is God the Son rather than God the Father. However Alford points out that while the expression here in v. 12, “the Word of God,” is nowhere else indicated in *Hebrews* concerning Christ, cf. “word” in 2:2; 4:2, 12, 13; 5:11, 13; 6:1; 7:28; 12:19; 13:7, 17, 22, yet throughout this Epistle, at least ten times, He is consistently designated as the “Son of God,” cf. 4:14, *Hebrews*, IV, p. 82. Note also that in 1:3 the Son “upholds all things by the word [ῥῆμα, *rema*, not *logos*] of

inscripturated Word.⁴⁸ The latter understanding best fits the overall context of Hebrews, and especially 3:7, 15; 4:2, 4, 7, 8, where the spoken message is repeatedly emphasized. Hence God's proclaimed Word, this spoken, objectively inscribed message, is at the same time "living." But to better represent the emphasis here, we translate, "For living is the Word of God." The intrinsic, indivisible active quality here disallows any expression commonly made with regard to preaching such as: "The Word needs to come alive, be made alive." Whatever dullness or impotence might be evident in the act of preaching, it is the fault of the preacher and not the Word. In response to subjective fanaticism, Calvin was of the same opinion, namely that the letter of the Word is never to be understood as separate from the Spirit of God who is in reality of the essence of that same Word. "[B]y a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the world may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word. . . . [T]he Word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses the illumination of his Spirit to believers."⁴⁹

As a consequence of the vitality of Scripture, it is also "powerful," energetic, active, ἐνεργής, *energēs* (Isa. 55:11; II Cor. 4:6; Heb. 1:3; 11:3; I Pet. 1:23), not only as in the history of Israel as expounded here (Deut. 32:45-47), but also now in the history of the Christian church, such as with Stephen's preaching concerning "living oracles" (Acts 7:38; cf. 4:2; Rom. 1:16; II Cor. 2:14-17). Hence the Word of God needs clarity of exposure, not activation using human ingenuity. There has never been a faithful herald of God's truth who has not held this high view of Scripture; there has never been effectual preaching that has lacked this appreciation of the nature of the God-breathed, written revelation (II Tim. 3:16). The life of the Bible is the exhaled life of God! Now we are given down-to-earth illustrations of this power.

(a) The Word of God as a sword.

This inspired, written revelation is "sharper beyond any two-edged [literally two-mouthed] sword [μάχαιραν δίστομον, *machairan distomon*], cleaving/severing and thus dividing as far as between soul and spirit, both joints and marrow." Elsewhere in Scripture Jesus Christ

His [God's] power. In 11:3, "the worlds were prepared by the word [ῥῆμα, *rema*, not *logos*] of God." In 11:19, from Mt. Sinai came, presumably from Christ, "the sound of words" [ῥῆμα, *rema*, not *logos*]. In conclusion, concerning Hebrew addressees, it is more likely that they would interpret "the word of God" as Torah rather than Messiah.

⁴⁸ Supported by Alford, Brown, Bruce, Calvin, Chrysostom, Farrar, Hughes, Westcott. We would also add Delitzsch who, while declaring that, "it would therefore be to pervert and confuse the sense to interpret, with the ancients, . . . ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ as designating Christ the personal Logos," yet he concludes that "we may concede . . . that our present passage (Heb. 4:12, etc.) is one of those which prepare for the thesis first distinctly enunciated by St. John, that Jesus Christ, in His own eternal pre-existence, is the Word of God." *Hebrews*, I, pp. 202, 209.

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, IX, 3.

is never the personification of a sword, though He wields a sword of judgment, sometimes portrayed as proceeding from His mouth as a *rhomphia* or long sword (Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21). However here Scripture is compared with a short sword, a *machaira* or dagger, for close combat (Eph. 6:17; cf. LXX Judg. 3:16; Prov. 5:4). Such a “two-edged” sword was agile, supremely penetrating, never dull, yet the Word of God transcends this capability. Yet necessary skill in spiritual warfare, in “fighting/striving the good fight/conflict of faith” (I Tim. 6:12), should not be neglected here. Augustine suggests that the double edge reflects the Two Testaments; more likely we might make application concerning the sword’s ability both to rescue and condemn (Rom. 13:3-4; II Cor. 2:14-17).

The piercing/penetrating and dividing ability of the Word is necessary when confronted with “hard-heartedness” (3:7-8, 13, 15; 4:7), an “evil, unbelieving heart” (3:12). Here the witnessing Christian and the preacher wrestle with this same problem, namely how to wield God’s appointed weapon in such a way as to pierce and lay bare the defensive façade of the unbeliever and the callous insensitivity of the believer. Again, responsible training under faithful Christian mentoring is required so as to avoid mere data dumping, misinterpretation through ignorance, striking at lesser issues, and foster dexterity, diagnostic skill, and appropriate application. But further, in Ephesians 6:17, we are to “take . . . the sword of the Spirit . . . with all prayer and petition.” The target is the root of man’s essential problem, the “soul and spirit” represented by the “joints and marrow” (cf. I Thess. 5:23), which, when penetrated, result in excruciating pain, not mere discomfort (Acts 2:37; 5:33; 7:54; 26:14). The Word dissects in human life as nothing else can. Calvin writes that, “there is nothing so hard or strong in man, nothing so hidden, that the powerful word cannot pervade it.”⁵⁰ While the main thrust here concerns divine assault upon unbelief, even with resulting judgment, as was the case with Israel,⁵¹ yet a wounded, savaged soul must not be our goal but rather a restored soul that rejoices in gospel recovery.

(b) The Word of God as a judge.

The end result of penetration and exposure is revelation of the deep-dyed corruption, the exceeding sinfulness of sin that inhabits the heart, and thus our deepest musings. Who would readily expose his hidden “thoughts and intentions” when the cosmetic of hypocrisy has fooled so many people? Here is forbidden territory, until God cuts with His scalpel and lays bare the unveiled, shocking decay, the heart of unbelief shrouded in phony religion. Thus the Word of God is a “κριτικός,” *kritikos*, a discerning critic of the inner, deepest ravines of human thinking and reasoning. The same may be said of the Living Word of God (Matt. 9:1-4; John 2:23-25), who, at His return, will “bring to

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 104.

⁵¹ Brown, *Hebrews*, I, pp. 216-7.

light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God" (I Cor. 4:5).

(2) The penetration of the God of the Word, v. 13.

"And there is no creature hidden/unnoticed before Him, but all things are naked having been exposed before the eyes of Him with whom we must give account [of our inner condition]." There is a subtle turn of emphasis from the Word of God to the God of the Word, the Creator in relation to not only the "creature" (Rom. 1:25), but also "all things," all of creation.

(a) His inescapability.

However, "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He sees all his steps" (Ps. 34:21). There is no possibility of doing things in secret (Ps. 44:21; Rom. 2:16; Eph. 5:12). God lays bare the human soul with scalpel-like precision and thoroughness,⁵² which leaves man "naked" in His presence, unclothed with hypocrisy and sham religious trappings. In particular it is the thought life that is laid bare, the devious motives, the raw concealed unbelief; all of it is exposed in the very presence of God; there is nowhere to hide. Human righteousness proves to be a vain plea.

(b) His accountability.

Here we are reminded of the ongoing scrutiny of divine justice that presently confronts us because we live in a moral universe; it concerns He whose eyes see all, hence "He with whom we must give account," eventually at God's judgment throne, where we cannot turn from the fixed gaze of His holy countenance. What will we say when every contrived excuse has been stripped away from us? Here the terrible destiny of the religious unbeliever is contrasted with the "Sabbath rest for the [believing] people of God," v. 9.

4. The rest born of a qualified high priest, vs. 14-16.

When the religious person is confronted with the problem of personal sin, there are basically two courses that he can follow. On the one hand he can attempt bold continuation, justification or excuse making, obfuscation or attempted cover-up, or outright denial. All of these involve faithless disobedience which has been the writer's particular concern up to this point (3:12, 18-19; 4:1-2, 6, 11). On the other hand a religious, indeed a faithful person may be honest in the acknowledgment of his sin. In confessing it, while at the same time despising it, he desires, not a devious way of escape, but God's gracious dealing with his sin according to His holy design. This is now the author's more positive concern. Hughes quotes Martin Luther who declares at this juncture: "After terrifying us, the Apostle now comforts us, after pouring wine into

⁵² The word *τραχηλίζω*, *trachēlizō*, to lay bare, refers to the throat, here as if seized and forced back in exposure and thus defeat as by a soldier or wrestler.

our wound, he now pours in oil.”⁵³ After all, the preceding revelation of God’s all-seeing focus on the depths of a man is enough to make any genuine child of God quake, let alone a disobedient pretender. Hence we move into the realm of remedy for the disturbed child of God, while not altogether leaving behind necessary warning.

Hence emphasis upon the Old Testament priesthood, previously introduced in 2:17; 3:1, is now enlarged upon as the basis for making comparison with the superiority of the New Testament priesthood of Jesus Christ. As the Old Testament priesthood was established to deal with sin in a people redeemed out of Egypt (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19), so the New Testament is the basis for dealing with sin in the true child of God who has been redeemed from “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” Here is the balm for the wounded soul. In this regard it becomes increasingly obvious that the author assumes a Hebrew understanding of the sacrificial system that was introduced under Moses. Hence Jewish Christians are at an advantage in understanding Hebrews.

a. Jesus Christ, the *exalted* high priest, v. 14.

“Therefore, having a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast/cling [κρατέω, *krateō*,] to our profession [of faith in this Jesus].” When the soul is wounded, its only hope of restoration is in the qualified Good Physician. Here then are Jesus’ two areas of fitness for spiritual surgery (2:18) at this point. First, he is “the Son of God;” which is the primary title of Jesus in Hebrews (1:1-2, 5, 8; 3:6; 5:8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29), and incorporates the high Jewish meaning of deity, come as an earthly, heavenly revelation or God-man of God the Father. Second, he has “passed through the heavens,” that is he has ascended through resurrection to session beside the Father, as vindication of his completed atonement (2:17). No earthly priest has ever remotely attained such exaltation.. The potency of his intercessory position will be later expanded upon (7:25). However, this heavenly court is to be our center of focus. John Bunyan recounts in his *Grace Abounding* exactly how a perspective of this heavenly reign of Christ was such a remedy for his sorely wounded, anxious condition.

But one day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my Conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, *Thy righteousness is in Heaven.*; and methought withal, I saw with the eyes of my Soul Jesus Christ at God’s right hand, there, I say, as my Righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was a doing, God could not say of me, *He wants [lacks] my righteousness*, for that was just before him. I also saw moreover, that it was not my good frame of Heart that made my Righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame of Heart that made my Righteousness worse: for my Righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, *the same yesterday, and today, and forever* (Heb. 13:8). Now did my chains fall off my Legs indeed, I was loosed from my affliction and irons, my temptations also fled away.⁵⁴

⁵³ Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 169.

⁵⁴ John Bunyan, *Works*, III, §§ 229-30, pp. 35-6.

b. Jesus Christ, the *proven* high priest, v. 15.

The reason why our “profession [of faith in this Jesus],” v. 14, is not in vain, but suitable to our present earthly sojourn, is now explained; indeed proof continues through to 10:23 concerning “holding fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” Concerning Israel in the wilderness, God provided a priestly service for the sins of those redeemed out of Egypt that nevertheless incorporated “weakness and uselessness” (7:18; 28), that is mere shadows and types (8:4-5; 9:8-9; 10:1, 3-4). In that economy priests died (7:23) and priests needed to continuously make offerings (7:27; 9:6, 25; 10:2, 11). By way of contrast, a transcendently greater and more effectual priestly service has been established through Jesus Christ. Hence, to turn the author’s double negative statement around, “we have a high priest who has the capacity/ability [δύναμαι, *dunamai*] to sympathize [συμπαθέω, *sumpatheō*, literally identify with heartfelt pathos] concerning our weaknesses [ἀσθένεια, *asthenia*, spiritual infirmities, frailties].” This sympathy involves Christ being “tempted in all things that are likened to our own temptations [I John 2:16] apart/quite distinct from [actual committal of] sin.” As David Clarkson explains:

He does not only know what it is to be poor, in want and necessities, as one who having always lived in plenty himself, has an account of the poor and necessitous condition of others, but he himself was poor (II Cor. 8:9). . . . He knows what it is to be in pain, not only as one who having been at ease all his days, hears but others complain of it, but as one who himself has felt it, and that in extremity. . . . He knows what it is to be despised and set at nought, to be abused and reproached, to be hated, and persecuted, and despitefully used. He knows the sorrows of life, and the pangs of death; not as the angels know them, by sufferings of others, but by his own experience, as one that has suffered all these himself. . . . He knows what it is to be tempted to sin, , troubled with horrid suggestions from Satan; what it is to be deserted of friends, of all men.⁵⁵

Yet in the midst of this furnace of affliction, Christ’s impeccability is upheld (John 8:46; 14:30; II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 2:22; I John 3:5). Here full though veiled deity and full humanity maintain a harmonious union. Original humanity was untainted with sin, and neither was the humanity of the last Adam, notwithstanding the reality and trauma of his temptations (Matt. 4:1-11; 26:38-39), especially the “loud crying and tears” in learning “obedience from the things which He suffered” (5:7-8). This perfect holy purity in no way is considered an impediment to genuine sympathy. Victorious resistance to sin in no way diminishes the reality of confrontation with sin any more than yielding to temptation indicates a more intimate encounter with sin. Refer to Westcott’s comment in this regard quoted in 2:18. Indeed, as Hughes comments, “his sinlessness meant that the temptations came to him with a sharpness far greater than is known to us whose minds and wills have become dull through frequent failures.”⁵⁶ While we have known the enemy, often in defeat, Christ has best known the enemy through uncompromising victory. For the defeated, this Vanquisher is the best one to know. A vanquished Christ could hardly come to our aid. So Isaac Watts sums up the conflict and our comfort.

⁵⁵ David Clarkson, *Works*, III, pp. 83-84.

⁵⁶ Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 173.

With joy we meditate the grace
 Of our High Priest above;
 His heart is made of tenderness,
 His bowels melt with love.
 Touch'd with a sympathy within,
 He knows our feeble frame;
 He knows what sore temptations mean,
 For he has felt the same.
 But spotless, innocent, and pure,
 The great Redeemer stood,
 With Satan's fiery darts he bore,
 And did resist to blood.
 He in the days of feeble flesh
 Pour'd out his cries and tears,
 And in his measure feels afresh
 What every member bears.
 Then let our humble faith address
 His mercy and his power;
 He shall obtain deliv'ring grace
 In the distressing hour.

c. Jesus Christ, the *merciful* high priest, v. 16.

Since the throne of mercy, upon which High Priest Jesus now sits, has been convincingly described thus far, there follows a pleading invitation for children of God to deal with their sore wounds accumulated along life's heavenward pilgrimage. "Therefore, let us be drawing near with confidence to the throne of grace [where Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father] so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help at the right time [appropriate for God, satisfying our cry for mercy]." The exhortation describes an ongoing approach to an approachable and receptive Christ since, "as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust" (Ps. 103:13-14). Further, "a bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish" (Isa. 42:3). Here is a "throne of grace," as it were superceding the mercy-seat of the Old Testament, hence not a thundering and accusatory Mt. Sinai (12:18-21), but a place where mercy reigns (12:22-24). Such language depicts reigning grace (Rom. 5:17, 21). Clarkson adds:

Here love resides; here grace reigns; here mercy keeps the throne. And this should keep up our affection; we should not be off and on, up and down. Decays and declinings should be hateful to us. Delight should be constant: love still sparkling, desire always upon the wing, when we come to the throne of grace, while we may find the Lord there; and he is never off, his people may find him ever upon his throne.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Clarkson, *Works*, III, p. 127.

The same form of encouragement was given to the disciples, otherwise described as “the poor in spirit, . . . those who mourn . . . the gentle, . . . those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, . . . the merciful, . . . the pure in heart, . . . the peacemakers, . . . the persecuted.” The Lord Jesus assured them that at his throne of grace there would be dispensed, “participation in the kingdom of heaven, . . . comfort, . . . the earth as an inheritance, . . . holy satisfaction, . . . mercy, . . . the vision of God, . . . godliness, . . . a heavenly reward” (Matt. 5:3-12). With such comprehension, there is every reason to be “confident” (cf. 3:6) that our Advocate on high will hear our cry, dispense mercy, with the result that we appropriate timely grace. Here then is specific instruction regarding how we ought to pray in time of need, especially when vexed by Satanic trials, and also sing, even as John Newton guides us.

Behold the throne of grace,
The promise calls us near;
There Jesus shows a smiling face,
And waits to answer prayer.