CHAPTER V
THE SUPERIORITY OF THE SECOND COVENANT OVER THE FIRST COVENANT
HEBREWS 8:1-13:19

While the term “covenant” was first introduced in Hebrews 7:22, we are now confronted with the primary teaching on this subject in the New Testament. According to how we understand this vital revelation in relation to the Old Testament, so our understanding of Christian sanctification will be profoundly effected. In simple terms, does the “newness” of the New Covenant refer to something “brand new” or “essentially new,” so to speak, or alternatively something “renewed” or “newer”? Once we consider such a crucial matter, it will become evident as to just how important is the preceding context of 1:1-7:28. The danger, particularly for the Hebrew, is that of attempting to straddle both covenants. Hebrews emphatically declares that the Second Covenant has completely superceded the First Covenant.


Whereas we have contrasted two priesthoods, now we contrast two covenants, the first and the second. Christ’s priesthood deals with His distinctive office whereas the execution of that office involves the establishment of the New Covenant through His shed blood (12:24; 13:20). The superiority of the second or New Covenant is inevitably a result of the superiority of Jesus Christ’s high priesthood that is productive of “a more excellent ministry . . . as . . . the mediator of a better covenant,” 8:6. This is the superiority whereby “all [of the house of Israel] will know Me,” 8:11; of “the good things to come,” 9:11; of “the cleansing of the conscience from dead works to serve the living God,” 9:14; of an “eternal inheritance,” 9:15; of the “appearing [of Christ] a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him,” 9:28; of “sanctification through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all,” 10:10; of “the perfection for all time those who are sanctified,” 10:14; of “drawing near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience,” 10:22; of “a great reward,” 10:35; of “the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God,” 11:10; of “a better country, that is, a heavenly one,” 11:16.


Since both the One who offers and the Offering are the same, Jesus Christ the High Priest is first introduced in vs. 1-6 as He who will be “cut” according to the promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34, vs. 7-13. Reference to the New “Covenant/Testament [diatēkē]” is made seven times in the New Testament (Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25; II Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24). The qualifying “New” is καινῶς, kainos, with the exception of νέος, neos (Heb. 12:24). It is twice called a “better,” κρείσσον, kreissōn, covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6). Carl Hoch, Jr. further explains: “Only one New Testament passage uses the terminology “old covenant” (II Cor. 3:14). The Book of Hebrews does use the word ‘covenant’ in connection with the
old covenant, but never with the adjective ‘old.’ The writer calls the old covenant the ‘first’ covenant (Heb. 8:7, 13; 9:1, 15, 18).”

a. By a superior high priesthood, vs. 1-6.

The enlightened Jewishness of the author cannot be restrained, even though he has made the earthly/heavenly contrast many times before. Once again there is contrast between what transpires “in the heavens,” v. 1, and “on earth,” vs. 4-5. It should be noted that the revealed Hebrew categories of “priesthood,” “tabernacle,” “sanctuary,” “law,” “sacrifice,” and “covenant,” have not been done away with; they have simply been raised to an eternal and heavenly perspective in contrast with that which is temporal and earthly.

(1) This high priest is seated in the heavens, vs. 1-2.

Here the distinctive, elevated, exalted location of Jesus Christ as high priest is emphasized. This is the dominant theme of Hebrews, namely that Jesus Christ is better in terms of who He is, where He is, and what He has accomplished. The Law, 7:28, as embodied in Moses and Aaron, is inferior in terms of who Moses and Aaron are, where the Law was established, and what it accomplished.

(a) It is a majestic session, v. 1.

“Now the chief, crowning matter [κεφάλαιον, kephalaion, head-like] concerning the things being said [is this]; we have such a high priest who has seated [Himself] at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” This is not only a crowning truth, but it was also a crowning act, that is when Jesus Christ seated Himself beside His Father (cf. 1:3; Eph. 1:20). Creatures prostrate themselves before God whereas only Deity sits with Deity. Hence Jesus is this Deity at the place of royal honor beside His Father, otherwise reverently titled as “the Majesty in the heavens,” ἡ μεγαλωσύνη ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, or “the Majesty on high” (1:3), that is Jehovah/-Yahweh. Thus Owen comfortingly concludes:

By his glorious power he makes all things subservient unto the ends of his mediation; for he is given to be “head over all things to the church” [Eph. 1:22]. All things are in his power and at his disposal, as he is exalted at the right hand of God; and he will assuredly make them all work together for the good of them that do believe.

1 Carl Hoch, Jr., All Things New, p. 92.

2 The Jewish angel of Jehovah was called Metatron, meaning “with God,” μετὰ (with) ὑπὸ τοῦ θρόνου (throne), and thus titled as deity.

(b) It is a divinely appointed session, v. 2.

“A minister/religious servant or officer [λειτουργός, leitourgos] of the sanctuary/saints/holy things and of/within the true tabernacle [σκηνή, skēnē, tent], which the Lord nailed down/pitched [πήγνυμι, pēgnumi], not man [as Moses, the Levites, and Solomon].” The reign of Christ is portrayed according to familiar Jewish terms, even as is elsewhere used to portray the Son of God Himself (John 1:14; cf. 2:19, ναός, naos). However the whole scenario is heavenly, that is exceedingly exalted. Thus Jesus’ reclaimed residence and place of divine ministry is “in the sanctuary,” with His Father, where, of course, His intercessory interest concerns “the saints.” The earthly tabernacle, cf. 9:3, manufactured according to divine instruction, by man, was not false, but rather a shadow or pattern of “the true/real [hence imperishable, incarnate] tabernacle” that, according to progressive revelation, God Himself subsequently erected (Gal. 4:4). In a similar vein, notice that in 9:24, Christ has entered “into heaven itself.” Furthermore, in 9:11-12, “But when Christ appeared [by incarnation upon earth] as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect [incarnate] tabernacle, not made with hands [via Mary and the virgin birth], that is to say, not of this creation [human origin]; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place [as God’s pitched tabernacle] once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

(2) This high priest officiates in the heavens, vs. 3-5.

Again we make the point that while the high priesthood of Jesus Christ has a lineage via Melchizedek and the tribe of Judah that is both infinitely superior and radically different, 7:13-17, yet for the sake of the author’s addressees who have been steeped in the lineage of Moses, Aaron, and Levi, contrast continues to be made so that separation from the weak elements of the past is understood as a vital, inevitable, practical necessity. But further, we are being led from the realm of priestly office to priestly accomplishment, from Jesus Christ’s high priestly position to His high priestly cutting of a second, better, irrevocable, everlasting covenant through His blood.

(a) His offering is superior to that of Aaron, v. 3.

“For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this [high priest] also have something sacrificial to offer.” Here priestly performance is in focus. For Calvin,

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4 All three meanings are possibilities that make good sense. Bruce explains that “sanctuary” is supported by the neuter plural use of τὸ ἁγίον, ta hagia (cf. 9:2, 8, 12, 24, 25; 10:19; 13:11), Hebrews, p. 180n. Delitzsch and Owen agree. Hughes acknowledges “sanctuary” to be the accepted meaning today, although he also mentions patristic support for the masculine “saints.” Hebrews, p. 281n.

5 Bengel, Owen, Pink, agree that Christ is “the true tabernacle.” contra are Delitzsch who speaks of “the companies of worshipping angels, with the divine throne in the background,” Hebrews, II, p. 22, and Hughes who refers to “the sanctuary of God’s presence and favor,” Hebrews, pp. 283-90.
the author “intends to show, that Christ’s priesthood cannot co-exist with the Levitical priesthood. . . . And hereby is abundantly exposed the effrontery of the Papists, who make Apostles and martyrs to share with Christ as mediators in the work of intercession; for in vain do they assign them such an office, except they supply them with sacrifices.”

One offering by Jesus Christ is intimated in contrast with the plurality of the past Mosaic economy. But it must be something transcendently more grand and glorious since it is heavenly in nature, hence directly presentable to God at His very throne. Thus Delitzsch adds: “[Christ’s] sacerdotal ministration is as far exalted above that of the law as the new covenant, of which He is Mediator, is superior to the old covenant, to which the earthly sanctuary belongs, v. 6.” As Isaac Watts has written:

Jesus, in Thee our eyes behold
A thousand glories more
Than the rich gems and polished gold
The sons of Aaron wore.

Fresh blood, as constant as the day,
Was on their altar spilt:
But Thy one offering takes away
For ever all our guilt.

(b) His offering is superior to that of Moses, vs. 4-5.

The addressees have been saturated with Moses. However the difficulty is that while they are not to forget him, not to treat him with disrespect, and especially not to fail to revere such a heritage that administered the righteousness of God, yet such appreciation is to focus on all of this old covenant through new covenant lens or spectacles. This remains our problem today, especially when Christians attempt to focus on the new covenant through old covenant lens or spectacles.

1) Moses’ sacrificial economy was essentially earthy, v. 4.

“Therefore, if He was [presently] on earth [contrary to fact, since He is now in heaven], He would not be a priest, there being those offering [sacrificial] gifts according to the law.” Perhaps, as Pink suggests, some Jews objected that, “you Christians have no high priest on earth.” Here then is a telling reply. This hypothetical argument postulates Christ returning to earth to participate in the Aaronic order as a high priest. But in His being born of the tribe of Judah and a priest after the order of Melchizedek (7:14-17), He would not qualify, even as Numbers 16:40 expressly makes clear,
because Jesus was not a “descendant of Aaron.” In other words, had Jesus approached the high priest on earth, his ministry being so busy with repetitious offerings, and sought employment based upon his qualification as a heavenly high priest, the descendant of Aaron would have turned down the offer. Similarly, had the same descendant of Aaron sought employment as a high priest in heaven because of his earthly qualification, likewise, being unqualified, he also would be refused. So the Christian, under Christ’s high priesthood, is not to attempt to incorporate the old covenant with the new covenant, v. 13. Yet again, the argument reinforces the radical disassociation existing between Aaron and Christ that the Hebrew Christian must grasp.

2) Moses’ sacrificial economy was of essentially shadowy, v. 5.

“Who serve, according to a copy [ὑπόδειγμα, hupodeigma] and shadow [σκιά, skia] of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned [by God] concerning his erection of the tabernacle; for, ‘See’ He says, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern [τύπος, tupos] which was shown to you on the mountain.’” The quotation of Exodus 25:40; 26:30; cf. Acts 7:44, is but another example of how the author here makes use of the Old Testament with some flexibility, that is a subtle play on a word, cf. 1:5-13. To be precise, the “pattern” given Moses was primarily for construction purposes with regard to substantial items; that is some tangible plan or model was supplied; there was to be exact representation. But here “pattern” takes on the meaning of a shadowy copy, a type of the reality of the heavenly tabernacle. However, the big point here is, as vs. 6-13 make plain, that once the heavenly order has been established, that is the second covenant, the earthly pattern, the first covenant, loses its operative role, apart from illustrative purposes by way of contrast.

From this, Calvin makes the following three points. First. The rituals of the old covenant contained detailed, real and spiritual meanings, even concerning Israel’s expectation of a mediator. However caution should be exercised in attempting to discover meaning in every nail that was employed. Second. We are taught that all those modes of worship are false and spurious, including supposed sacraments, which men allow by invention, since they are beyond God’s command. Third. There are to be no true symbols of religion except those which conform to what Christ requires. We are to be careful lest, in seeking to adapt our own inventions to Christ, we transfigure Him, as the Papists do, so that he should not be at all like himself.

10 Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 294-95.
11 So Bruce, Delitzsch.
12 Calvin, Hebrews, pp. 183-84.
(3) This high priest mediates a better covenant, v. 6.

“But now He [God] has obtained a more excellent/distinctively surpassing [διαφορέτερος, diaphoroteros, cf. 1:4] religious ministry/sacred service, inasmuch as the covenant mediation/arbitration/go between [μεσιτίς, mesites] is better, which has been legally enacted [perfect of νομοθετέω, nomotheteo, cf. Rom. 9:4] on better promises.” Here is the lead-in to the subsequent emphasis on the second/new covenant. A better or transcendently superior ministry, even as heaven transcends earth, even as Christ’s mediation transcends that of Moses, vs. 1-5, also incorporates a “better covenant” with regard to the first covenant, based upon “better promises” with regard to the conditionality, the blessings and cursings, especially in an earthly sense, promised to God’s people under Moses. The specifics of these “better promises,” which regulate covenant fixity, are now detailed in a prime example found in Jeremiah 31, a post-Mosaic revelation, even as was Psalm 110:4.

Again, how was the second covenant to be better than the first? It certainly was not with regard to a better plan of salvation, or the incorporation of much more grace than law. We should remember that since the Fall, sinners have always been saved by grace through faith in a holy and merciful God. Rather it was as Calvin explains:

[I]t is certain that the fathers who lived under the Law had the same hope of eternal life set before them as we have, as they had the grace of adoption in common with us, then faith must have rested on the same promises. But the comparison made by the Apostle refers to the form rather than to the substance; for though God promised to them the same salvation which he at this day promises to us, yet neither the manner or the character of the revelation is the same or equal to what we enjoy.\(^1\)

This distinction may be likened to a bride’s hope in a photograph of her bridegroom that he has provided and her eventual marriage to her beloved. From an engagement promise and ring to fulfillment, the plan is the same. The photograph has a relatively weak and limited role compared to the better relationship that the actual wedding ceremony will inaugurate; it is a lifeless representation, it encourages hope, but it is vastly inferior to the eventual union based upon a better, final promise and vows signified by a wedding ring. So the second covenant, representing progress of revelation in history, declares what God has consummately done in such a better fashion, in these “last days,” in comparison with what “He spoke long ago” (1:1-2).C

b. By a superior promise, vs. 7-13.

To the Jewish mind, the mere suggestion of a second covenant is a radical truth to embrace; it suggests the necessity of a new Moses, a new Torah, a new priesthood. The preceding exposition has frankly unmasked the inherent weaknesses of the

\(^1\) David Stern refers here to the enactment of Torah, though more appropriate would be “new Torah enactment,” *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp. 687-89.

\(^{14}\) Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 185.
first Moses, the first Torah, the first priesthood, and the first gathering of the people of God. However, the recently explained, vast superiority of Jesus’ Christ’s priesthood over that of Aaron has also paved the way for even clearer explanation of a necessary second covenant, but especially as it is plainly revealed in the post-Mosaic revelation of Jeremiah 31.

(1) It is necessitated by an inferior promise, v. 7.

“For if that first [covenant] was blameless/faultless [ἀμέπτος, amemptos, cf. 7:18, though this was not the case], there would have been no place/necessity to seek a second [covenant, cf. 7:11; Gal. 3:21].” The “first covenant” here is the Mosaic covenant in its totality, not merely the civil and ceremonial aspects (Exod. 19:5; 34:27-28; Deut. 4:13), to which bilateral agreement Israel agreed (Exod. 19:8; 24:3), and witnessed through “the blood of the covenant” (Exod. 24:4-8; Jer. 34:18). The fault or blame here concerns, not intrinsic fault, but mainly the Law’s inability to effect change in the children of Israel, its lack of dynamic (Rom. 8:3-4). As Hughes explains: “The ‘fault’ of the old covenant lay, not in its essence, which, as we have said, presented God’s standard of righteousness and was propounded as an instrument of life to those who should keep it, but in its inability to justify and renew those who failed to keep it, namely the totality of fallen mankind.” 15 The misunderstanding here of the purpose of the Law, in the form of a Jewish Galatianism (cf. Luke 18:11-12; Gal. 3:1-3), the synergism of faith and works, simply magnified the sin of self-righteousness. However, should Israel have rightly understood the main purpose of the Law (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19), in no way would this have invalidated the need of the gospel initiated by the second covenant. A right understanding of the Law within Israel would have resulted in the Jews calling for gospel mercy. Here, misunderstanding of purpose by the Jews, regarding the Law’s divinely ordained design, nevertheless resulted in sin becoming even more prominent.

(2) It is revealed by Jeremiah, vs. 8-12.

We need to remember, once again, that the Jewish author of Hebrews is addressing Jewish Christians who well know Jeremiah 31:31-34, which passage from the Old Testament is the largest such unit employed in the New Testament. Not for a moment does he redefine and broaden the focus of this passage here for the sake of Gentile inclusion and perception, though he does enlarge our understanding by means of gospel spectacles, 9:11-16; 10:14-18, 29; 12:24; 13:20. At this juncture, it is probably well to appreciate also the words of the Lord Jesus to His disciples when they participated in the Passover supper: “This cup, which is poured out for you, is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). Undoubtedly the Son of God was establishing Himself as the ground of the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34, and the band of Jews gathered around Him would have instantly made the connection, though of course their understanding remained dim until post-resurrection instruction by Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

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15 Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 297-98.
The context of Jeremiah 31 is important. Here the rebellious, sinful people of God are on the brink of disaster, that is the sudden intervention of God’s judgment. Following the promise that Judah would be captive in Babylon for seventy years (25:8-11; cf. Isa. 10:5-34), and that the captives were to submit to this temporary residence (29:4-7), there also follows the promise of the judgment of Babylon (25:12-14) and the eventual restoration of the exiles back to Jerusalem (29:10-14; 30:1-3, 18-22). The language here first appears to describe that immediate exilic return which was initiated under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah (537-445 B.C.), yet the subsequent description of 31:1-26 seems to transport us to a far more comprehensive, blissful and settled return from even “the remote parts of the earth,” v. 8, than hitherto experienced. Furthermore, the introduction of a “new covenant” similarly describes a far more glorious future economy than that which spanned the return from Babylon to the savage subjection of the Hasmonean dynasty that resulted from the Roman conquest of Israel and profanation of the Temple by Pompey in 63 B.C. The mention of both “the house of Israel,” separately exiled to Assyria in 722 B.C., and “the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31), indeed all of vs. 31-34, plainly indicate a far more distant, inclusive, and glorious horizon.

(a) The New Covenant promised, Jeremiah 31:31; v. 8.

“For in finding fault [with the first covenant] He says [in Jeremiah 31:31-34] to them [the Israelites]16 ‘Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, I will bring to completion/establish on the House of Israel and on the House of Judah, a new covenant.’”17 For Jeremiah, the expression “days are coming” is always related to the return of scattered Israel to “the land” (23:7-8; 30:3; 31:27-28, 38) and the reign of Christ in a New covenant relationship with Israel in the land (Jer. 23:5; 31:31). Two crucial matters are raised here that have vast ramifications.

The first matter concerns the meaning of the phrases, “the House of Israel” and “the House of Judah.” One view is described by O. Palmer Robertson:

Part of the solution to the problem of the identification of “Israel” involves recognizing that the term has more than one use in Scripture. . . . However, one significant usage of the term that may be helpful for the question of Jeremiah’s prophecy should be noted. Old Covenant Israel may be regarded as a typological representation of the elect people of God. This assertion does not intend to suggest that Israel functioned merely in a typological role. But from an old covenant perspective, one significant aspect of Israel’s existence was the nation’s typological representation of the chosen of Yahveh.

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16 This translation, contrary to the NIV, that so much better relates to the preceding verse, uses the quite well supported ἀφότος rather than ἀφόρος. Surely the “finding fault” concerns the first covenant rather than the Israelites. So Brown, Farrar, Hughes.

17 This quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34, by the author, does not exactly follow the Massoretic Hebrew text or the Septuagint, and for this reason it may well be based upon memory.
The old covenant “serpent of brass” typologically anticipated the new covenant Christ cursed on the cross. The old covenant tabernacle typologically anticipated the new covenant reality of the chosen people of God.

When Jeremiah specifically indicates that the new covenant will be made “with the house of Judah and with the house of Israel,” this perspective must be kept in mind. If the new covenant people of God are the actualized realization of a typological form, and the new covenant now is in effect, those constituting the people of God in the present circumstances must be recognized as the “Israel of God.” As a unified people, the participants of the new covenant today are “Israel.”

This covenantal interpretation, being essentially as old as Augustine, is supercessionist. In other words, any thought of literal national Israel and literal Judah here ought to be superceded by the idea that this verse now speaks of the people of God under the New Covenant, that is the church as the spiritual Israel. It is significant that Robertson conspicuously makes no mention of the fact that the overwhelming usage of the terms “Israel” and “Judah” is with regard to literal “Israel” and literal “Judah.” For instance this holds true even in Romans where Ἰσραήλ, Ἰσραὴλ, Ἰσραηλῖται, Israelites, are used thirteen times, and never once with regard to any people or person other than those who physically descended from Jacob. Hence, concerning the analogous use of the serpent of brass and the tabernacle, the New Testament makes no such analogy with regard to Israel, notwithstanding the only refuge being taken in Galatians 6:16.

Thus J. C. Ryle rejects this spiritualizing hermeneutic as follows.

The word “Israel” is used nearly seven hundred times in the Bible. I can only discover three senses in which it is used. First, it is one of the names of Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes; a name specially given to him by God. Secondly, it is a name given to the ten tribes which separated from Judah and Benjamin in the days of Rehoboam, and became a distinct kingdom. This kingdom is often called Israel in contradistinction to the kingdom of Judah. Thirdly and lastly, it is a name given to the whole Jewish nation, to all members of the twelve tribes which sprung from Jacob, and were brought out of Egypt into the land of Canaan. This is by far the most common signification of the word in the Bible. It is the same in which the word is used in the whole New Testament. It is the same in which the word is used in the

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18 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ Of The Covenants*, pp. 288-89. Also refer to this author’s *The Israel Of God* which, in a classic supercessionist manner, declares: “Rather than understanding predictions about the ‘return’ of ‘Israel’ to the ‘land’ in terms of a geopolitical re-establishment of the state of Israel, these prophecies are more properly interpreted as finding consummate fulfillment of the ‘restoration of all things’ that will accompany the resurrection of believers at the return of Christ (Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:22-23),” p. 194.

19 The continuative “and” καί, kai, is contextually and statistically preferable when compared with the ascensive “even.” Most commonly the translation is, “and upon the Israel of God” (NASB), in which case Hebrew Christians retain a distinct identity, while the minority translation reads, “even upon the Israel of God” (NIV), in which case the church, comprising all of the people of God, is simply given a refined title, it being the spiritual Israel of God. However consider that in the New Testament of the KJV, “and” occurs approximately 9225 times (97%), while “even” occurs approximately 275 times (3%).
text which I am considering this day [Jer. 31:10]. That Israel, which God has scattered and will yet gather again, is the whole Jewish nation.

Now, why do I dwell upon this point? To some readers it may appear mere waste of time and words to say so much about it. The things I have been saying sound to them like truisms. That Israel means Israel is a matter on which they never felt a doubt. If this be the mind of many of you whose hands this address has fallen, I am thankful for it. But unhappily there are many Christians who do not see the subject with your eyes. For their sakes I must dwell on this point a little longer.

For many centuries there has prevailed in the Churches of Christ a strange, and to my mind, an unwarrantable mode of dealing with this word “Israel.” It has been interpreted in many passages of the Psalms and Prophets, as if it meant nothing more than Christian believers. Have promises been held out to Israel? Men have been told continually that they are addressed to Gentile saints. Have glorious things been described as laid up in store for Israel? Man have been incessantly told that they describe the victories and triumphs of the gospel in Christian churches. The proofs of these things are too many to require quotation. No man can read the immense majority of commentaries and popular hymns without seeing this system of interpretation to which I now refer. Against that system I have long protested, and I hope I shall always protest as long as I live.

I do not deny that Israel was a peculiar typical people, and that God’s relations to Israel were meant to be a type of His relations to His believing people all over the world.

I would have it most distinctly understood that God’s dealings with individual Jews and Gentiles are precisely one and the same. Without repentance, faith in Christ and holiness of heart, no individual Jew or Gentile shall ever be saved.

What I protest against is, the habit of allegorizing plain sayings of the Word of God concerning the future history of the nation of Israel, and explaining away the fullness of their contents in order to accommodate them to the Gentile Church. I believe the habit to be unwarranted by anything in Scripture, and to draw after it a long train of evil consequences.

Hence the promise here specifically concerns the nations of Israel and Judah, eventually to be united (Ezek. 37:15-28). This is confirmed by most of the related Old Testament references to an “everlasting covenant.” Certainly the Hebrew Christian addressees of Hebrews would readily appreciate this truth, which also indicates a present

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20 It hardly needs mentioning that these volumes are almost exclusively Gentile in authorship.

21 J. C. Ryle, Are You Ready For The End Of Time? pp. 106-107. The concluding comment here appears to allude to those centuries following Augustine in which Christian anti-Semitism was, and continues to be, a consequence of supercessionism. Also refer to the similar opinion of Horatius Bonar concerning the meaning of “Israel,” Prophetic Landmarks, pp. 247-249; 256-258.

22 Horatius Bonar confirms this when he writes: “[A]s this passage [Jer. 31:8, 31] asserts, that it was, in the first place, with the literal Israel that this new covenant was to be made, so we find it to have been. Messiah, when He came, “confirmed the covenant with many for one week” (Dan. 9:27). He confirmed His own ministry to the Jews.” Prophetic Landmarks, p. 272.
reality for the nation of Israel. But if this is so, then how is it possible for the Gentiles to participate in this distinctive New Covenant blessing? By the incorporation of “[Gentile] wild olive branches” into “the rich root of the olive tree” (Rom. 11:17), that is the Abrahamic Covenant. As Walter Kaiser explains: “The church is grafted into Israel, not Israel into the church. The new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 was made with ‘the house of Judah and the house of Israel,’ not with the church. It is not a covenant made with all humanity, but all humanity may be grafted into it.” Hence Gentile Christians are warned: “Do not be arrogant toward the [humiliated, detached Jewish] branches; but if you are arrogant [in claiming to have superceded, more worthily, unbelieving national Israel], remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you” (Rom. 11:18).

The second matter concerns the meaning of the phrase, “a new covenant” (cf. Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:13; 9:15; 12:24), which is also named in Hebrews as a “better covenant” (8:6), a “second” covenant (10:9), an “eternal covenant” (13:20; cf. Jer. 32:40). Is it an “essentially new” or “newer, renewed” covenant? The preceding context of 7:1-28, especially the absolute disjunction between Jesus Christ of Judah, as a priest after Melchizedek, and the Aaronic priesthood, would indicate that the New Covenant is essentially, fundamentally new when compared with the old Mosaic covenant. This is certainly affirmed here in v. 29. However, we must continue to remember, concerning the Abrahamic Covenant and indeed the adjunct Davidic Covenant, that the New Covenant is the ultimate fulfillment of the original promise. This point is upheld when we consider much of the Old Testament terminology regarding an “everlasting covenant” (Gen. 17:7, 13; II Sam. 23:5; I Chron. 16:17; Ps. 105:10; Is. 55:3; 61:6-9; Jer. 32:36-41; 50:4-5; Ezek. 16:60-63; 37:24-28).

Here then is the ultimate, explicit challenge, not only to Judaism that sees the Mosaic covenant and Torah as having a supposed eternal existence, but also to those Christians who attempt to maintain a partnership between Moses and Jesus Christ. This is in spite of a most clear statement here that comes to a climax, v. 13, namely that the old covenant has become “obsolete,” and “is ready to disappear.” Here, at the same time, the superior glory of this New Covenant is inextricably bound to that restoration of glory which shall come to the nation of Israel in their promised land (Gen. 12:1-3; Jer. 31:23-25; 32:37-41).

23 In other words, if it is presupposed in the New Testament that the ancient nation of Israel has been superceded by the new spiritual Israel, comprised of all people of God within the Christian church, then it is necessary to import an inclusive meaning into Jeremiah 31:31. This methodology is especially evident in Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, pp. 222-23, 288-89, and *The Israel of God*, p. 189; also W. J. Grier, *The Momentous Event*, p. 47, who fail to appreciate that the addressees of Hebrews, such as the “us” in 10:15, are Hebrew Christians.


25 Refer to the greater detail of Carl Hoch’s seven reasons giving support to this perspective. *All Things New*, pp. 105-107.
(b) The Old Covenant broken, Jeremiah 31:32; v. 9.

“Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, on the day of my having taken them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not abide in my covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord.” The language continues to focus on national Israel and Judah, but especially their distinctive Mosaic legacy. Especially note Jeremiah’s recollection concerning Israel’s commitment to and yet violation of this bilateral covenant (7:23-26; 34:17-18; cf. Exod. 24:3-8), which the author now also recollects. Consequently, God abandoned His people, yet not forever. The features of weakness, shadowiness, and faultiness, previously mentioned (7:18; 8:5, 7), that characterized the old covenant, now lead us to the distinguishing strengths or categories of “newness” that are incorporated in the New Covenant, vs. 10-12.

(c) The New Covenant defined (Jer. 31:33-34), vs. 10-12.

The contrasting unilateral nature of this covenant, its address to the heart of the human problem, its implementation through sole sovereign initiative, its fulfillment that is unconditionally certain, is as sure as the fixity of the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heavens; only if finite man can reach into and measure the infinite will Israel “cease to be a nation” and be required to give account for its sins (Jer. 31:35-37).

1) It is God’s inscription on the hearts of Israel (Jer. 31:33), v. 10.

“For this covenant [διαθήκη, diathēkē] [is that] which I will covenant [διατιθημί, diatithēmi] with the house of Israel after those days, ‘says the LORD,’ [gratuitously/ graciously] placing My laws [νόμους μου, nomous mou] into their understanding/mind [διάνοια, dianoia], and I will inscribe [ἐπιγράφω, epigraphō] them on their hearts.” In other words, God will supernaturally invade the souls of His rebellious people according to His divine, merciful initiative. By this means, saving faith will be granted to Israel; the result will be the will to believe, to admire, to praise, to worship, to obey; there will be national regeneration (Ezek. 36:22-31) and national repentance (Zech. 12:10-14). As John Brown comments:

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26 Does this simply mean that the Mosaic code, Torah, will be internalized as some suggest, such as Richard C. Barcellos, In Defense of the Decalogue, pp. 15-24; Walter Kaiser, Old Testament Theology, p. 233; and Reconstructionists? David Stern comments that the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 has become Torah, cf. Heb. 8:6b, Jewish New Testament Commentary, pp. 687-89. Given that this may be so, nevertheless would it not be more correct then to speak of “New Torah”? But this does not answer our original question. The “laws of God” here are not distinguished as “moral laws,” as Decalogue only. Hence, a new code of the righteousness of God must be intended. Further, as Moo explains, “[T]here are references in the prophets to a tôrâ that will be established in the last days and that probably does not refer to the Mosaic law as such (Isa. 2:3; 42:4; 51:4, 7; Mic. 4:2). This ‘Zion Torah,’ perhaps to be understood as a fresh publication of God’s will for His people, in continuity with but not identical to the ‘Sinai torah,’ may be what is envisaged in Jeremiah 31:33-34 and the Ezekiel texts.” Bahnsen, Kaiser Jr., Moo, Strickland, VanGeimeren, Five Views on Law and Gospel, pp. 343-47.
Others consider it [here] as a prediction referring to the new
economy generally, and that the phrases, “house of Israel,” and
“house of Judah,” are to be understood mystically of the true Israel,
whether Jews or Gentiles. But it seems to me quite plain, that the
words are a prophecy of that general conversion of the Jews to
Christianity which we are warranted to look for from many Old
Testament predictions, and from the express declaration of the
Apostle, that a period is coming when “all Israel shall be saved”
[Rom. 11:26]. It may indeed be said, How does the passage, in this
view, answer the Apostle’s object? The answer is easy. The
covenant which in the last days of the Christian dispensation the
Jews generally are to be brought under, is substantially the same
covenant which, ratified in the blood of Jesus, has been, during the
course of eighteen centuries, diffusing its blessings to an
innumerable multitude of individuals, of every kindred, and people,
and tongue, and nation.\(^27\)

The law of the old covenant was misconstrued as a revelation that
was wrongly presumed to have an intrinsic, sanctifying dynamic.
Similarly there was a wrong presumption concerning man’s
supposed possession of an intrinsic, volitional ability that enabled
him to obey this same law. Notice the right order here first of
God’s sovereign covenant commitment, “I will put My laws, . . . I
will write them, . . . I will be their God.” Then, as a consequence,
all will know Me,” v. 11. The heart of legalism is a proud
presumption, by polluted man, concerning confidence in
nonexistent, moral human ability.

Of course the Gentiles will enter into this same regeneration,
conversion, and justification according to that great gospel age in
which the “wild olive branches” are engrafted into “the rich root
of the olive tree” (Rom. 11:17); this runs parallel with that period
when “the fullness of the Gentiles” will come to pass (Luke 21:24;
Rom. 11:25). Following this will be the great Jewish ingathering
(Rom. 11:15, 23-26): “This is My covenant with them, when I
take away their sins” (Rom. 11:27).

2) It is God’s \textit{revelation} of Himself to Israel (Jer. 31:34a), v. 11.

“And they will [definitely] not teach everyone, his fellow citizen,
and everyone, his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’ [as in times
past], because all will know Me from the least to the greatest of
them [Isa. 54:13].” As Farrar explains, a further New Covenant
distinctive “is that there shall be \textit{no appropriation} of knowledge;
no sacerdotal exclusiveness; no learned caste that shall monopolize
the keys of knowledge, and lock out those who desire to enter in.”\(^28\)
In other words, there will be an anointed priesthood of all
believers (I Pet. 2:9). Formerly, there had been an emphasis upon


\(^{28}\) Farrar, \textit{Hebrews}, p. 131.
the efficacy of cerebral biblical education by means of an elite class of rabbis through synagogues, akin to a sterile church membership class. Pink adds:

During the Mosaic economy, and particularly in the last century before Christ, there was an external teaching of the Law, which the people trusted and rested in without any regard for God's teaching by the inward circumcision of the heart. Such teaching had degenerated into rival schools and sects, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essenes, etc., and they made void the word of God through their traditions (Mark 7:13). It was against such the last of Israel's prophets had announced: 'The Lord will cut off . . . the master and scholar out of the tabernacles of David' (Mal. 2:12).  

3) It is God's revelation of mercy to Israel (Jer. 31:34b), v. 12.

"Because I shall be merciful/propitious [tìleos, hileos; cf. 2:17, by sacrificial satisfaction, akin to propitiation; Rom. 3:24-26] to their unrighteousnesses, and their sins I shall [definitely] remember no longer/ever again." In contrast with the Old Covenant, which was bilateral according to obedience or disobedience, the fundamental basis of the New Covenant is God's unilateral, merciful, effectual intent that triumphantly confronts the "unrighteousnesses" and "sins" of those sinners He has set His heart upon. Notwithstanding the absence of any comment here by Calvin, this verse conveys the supreme distinction between these two covenants (John 1:17; Heb. 1:1-2), which the Apostle Paul boldly preached to the Jews in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch: "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him [Jesus Christ] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39).

(3) It is surpassing, v. 13.

"In which He said, 'a new [covenant].' He has made old/obsolete [παλαιόω, palaiōō] the former [πρῶτος, prótos; covenant]; but in being made old it is also growing old [being] near to disappearance/abolition [ἀφανισμός, aphanismos]. Here now is the author's summation of the preceding quotation concerning what he has been focusing on from the beginning. Both covenants having been ordained of God, it is wholly His prerogative, according to the gracious movement and progressive plan of His will, to replace an inferior order with a superior order. We could say of a garment, "That which is by its very nature destined to become old/obsolete is presently becoming old to the point where it is about ready to be discarded." So the old covenant, "being made old [prone to failure/obsolescence]. . . is also [presently] growing old [to the point where it is about to be discarded]." Assuming that the Jerusalem

29 Pink, Hebrews, I, p. 457.
temple is still standing and operative, then there is here, according to Jesus (Mark 13:2; cf. John 2:19) and Stephen (Acts 6:14), anticipation of the immanent destruction of Herod’s temple and the whole sacrificial order. Greg Bahnsen illustrates the difficulty here of the Theonomist when he writes: “[T]he coming of Christ has brought a change of law regarding the priesthood (Heb. 7:12), and the administrative [as opposed to the moral] order of the old covenant is vanishing away (Heb. 8:13).” However, where in the Bible do the terms “first [covenant],” v. 1, or “old [covenant],” v. 13, ever indicate the human designations of only civil and ceremonial law to the exclusion of the moral law? Furthermore, as Hoch, Jr. explains in the light of 7:12, “the new order belongs to a different law than the old order. To change Aaron is to change Aaron’s system. If Aaron goes, the covenant that designates him as its high priest also goes.” Hence it is the whole Sinaiic dispensation that has become superceded. It is “the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones [even the moral law so called], . . . the ministry of condemnation, . . . which fades away” (II Cor. 3:7, 9, 11). In accord with Galatians 3:24-25, this old covenant system has prepared the way over the centuries as “a tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now [in the continuity of history] that faith [particularly its object] has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Rom. 7:1-4). Thus Owen concludes his comment on this verse: “All the glorious institutions of the law were at best but as stars in the firmament of the church, and therefore were all to disappear at the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. Τὸ Θεὸ δοξα, [Τῷ Θεῷ doxa, To God, [let there be] glory.”


While the terms of the Mosaic covenant were written on tables of stone given to Moses, yet there was also signification by cutting, the shedding of blood by Moses in the presence of Aaron, his sons, and the seventy elders (Exod. 24:1-11). Subsequent to the building of the tabernacle, the Aaronic priesthood was established for the sacrificial maintenance of fellowship between God and His people (Exod. 29:1-9), and administratively aided by the Levites (Num. 3:5-10). Hence, in the daily life of Israel through the centuries, from Moses to the birth of the early church, the matter of most basic importance was atonement for sin, through the shedding of blood, in the presence of the holy Jehovah, again for the maintenance of fellowship for a redeemed yet sinful people. Thus the Aaronic priesthood was integral to the Mosaic covenant (7:12). Furthermore, for the author of Hebrews, the contrasting sequence of the first and

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31 Hoch, Jr., *All Things New*, p. 123.

32 Owen, *Hebrews*, IV, p. 177. In a posthumous treatise on *The Dominion Of Sin And Grace* based on Romans 6:14, published in 1688, Owen further provides four reasons why the Christian is not under law. “1. The law giveth no strength against sin unto them that are under it, but grace doth. . . . 2. The law gives no liberty of any kind; it gendereth unto bondage, and so cannot free us from any dominion. . . . 3. The law doth not supply us with effectual motives and encouragements to endeavor the ruin of the dominion of sin in a way of duty. . . . It works only by fear and dread, with threatenings and terrors of destruction. . . . 4. Christ is not in the law; he is not proposed in it, not communicated by it,—we are not made partakers of him thereby. This is the work of grace, of the gospel. . . He [Christ] alone ruins the kingdom of Satan, whose power is acted in the rule of sin.” *Works*, VII, pp. 542-51.
second covenants finds both a unity in the concept of the necessary sacrificial “shedding of blood,” 9:22, and contrast between “the blood of goats and calves,” 9:12, and “the blood of Christ,” 9:14. Thus, having introduced the concept of the superior new covenant (8:6-13), its superior “bloody” characteristic is now explained. It is significant that “blood,” ἁίμα, haima, used twenty-three times overall in Hebrews, occurs once in chapters 1-8 and fifteen times in chapters 9-10.


The preceding claim that the old covenant was about to disappear, due to obsolescence, could easily conjure up for the Hebrew reader a recollection of the intricacy of this God-ordained system. Certainly the author thinks in this direction as he recollects the architecture of the tabernacle, its component pieces, and priestly personnel, in comparison with the “how much more” overall efficacy of “the blood of Christ,” v. 14. This detailing will enhance the contrast between the obvious inferiority of the first covenant and transcendent superiority of the second covenant, in much the same way a mechanical watch seems primitive when compared with a quartz movement.

(1) The old covenant earthly tabernacle service, 9:1-10.

In an orderly fashion, first we have described the earthy composition of the tabernacle, and then its human, priestly operatives. Jewish Christian readers here, most probably being familiar with synagogue life and at the same time distant from the temple environment in Jerusalem modeled after the wilderness tabernacle, especially with regard to the role of the high priest, would find such a reminder to be stimulating.

(a) The earthly sanctuary detailed, vs. 1-5.

We are conducted from the outer “holy place” to the inner “Holy of Holies,” and there to the place where God dwells with His people, above the mercy seat and between the cherubim.

1) The first covenant earthly sanctuary, v. 1.

“Therefore even the first [covenant, cf. 8:13] was having [divine tabernacle] regulations of worship, [pertaining to] the earthly/worldly/material [κοσμικός, kosmikos] sanctuary.” The divine specifications of the old covenant were exact and detailed, even as the gospel reality is transcendentally more precise and complex. Calvin adds that the author “calls it a worldly sanctuary, because there was no heavenly truth or reality in those rites. . . . Hence the sanctuary in itself was indeed earthly, and is rightly classed among the elements of this world; it was yet heavenly as to what it signified.”33 The author well knows these regulations in detail, but in his eagerness to illuminate the more glorious

33 Calvin, Hebrews, p. 195.
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THE TABERNACLE

Ark of the Covenant
Golden Candlestick
Golden Altar of Incense
Table of Showbread
Brazen Lavar
Brazen Altar
Holy of Holies
Holy Place
Veil
Outer Court

50 cubits
100 cubits
10 cubits
heavenly order, he uses the earthly, rudimentary model, so to speak, as a launching pad, which has distinctive appeal to the Hebrew mind. The Gentile mind will need considerable instruction.

2) The first covenant outer sanctuary, v. 2.

“Now the tabernacle/tent \( \text{σκήνη} \) was outfitted/equipped \( \text{kataσκευάζω}, \text{kataskeuazō} \), the first [holy place court] in which was the lampstand, the table and the setting forth \( \text{πρόθεσις}, \text{prothesis} \) of the consecrated breads, which is called [the] Holy [place].” The lampstand was of solid gold with a main trunk and six branches, each with almond blossom heads to hold the pure olive oil lamps. Its purpose was to illuminate the Holy Place which had no windows. In its sacrificial setting, it speaks of Jesus as the “true light” (John 1:19) and the “light of the world” (John 8:12; cf. Rev. 21:22-23). It also speaks of believer priests walking in divine light, not natural light. In the same vein it speaks of illumination in fellowship based on sacrifice; Jesus cannot be light until he has become a redeemer (I John 1:7). The table of showbread, made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, was 3' long by 18" wide by 2'3" high. It could hold twelve loaves of showbread, in two rows of six, representative of the twelve tribes, that were renewed each week. This bread was eaten by the priests, being a reminder that man does not live by earthly bread alone. It was literally “the bread of the presence,” that is bread before or shown to God. Typically it speaks of Jesus as the sustaining bread of life (John 6:32, 35, 53). Believer priests need regularly to feed on Christ, especially through the Lord’s Supper. Here is God’s sustaining providence for His children, true nourishment and fellowship that are based upon sacrifice for and cleansing from sin.

3) The first covenant inner sanctuary, vs. 3-5.

Here is the scene where the author is eager to focus upon. We are taken within the veil (6:19; 10:20) where only the high priest could enter on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, each year, for the sprinkling of the blood upon the mercy seat, the lid of the ark, for the sins of God’s people.

a) Its sacredness, v. 3.

“After the second veil [there was] a tabernacle which is called [the] Holy of Holies [“\( \text{Ἁγία Αγίων}, \text{hagia hagiōn} \)”. This second veil, ten by ten cubits, was distinctly embroidered with cherubim, and much heavier than the first veil that covered the entrance to the tabernacle from the outer court. No lamp is necessary for here the holy, radiant glory of God, even that
of Jesus Christ, dwells in darkness, “thick cloud” (I Kings 8:12). Owen comments here:

The more of Christ, by the way of representation or exhibition, any institutions of divine worship do contain or express, the more sacred and holy are they in their use and exercise. But, it is Christ alone who in himself is really the Most Holy, the spring and fountain of all holiness unto the church.\(^\text{34}\)

Thus, the nearer we are to God, the more holy is our environment. However, while God has condescended to dwell upon earth, yet access to Him is only possible according to His Son’s sacrificial terms (Ps. 15:1-5; 23:6; 27:1-6).

b) Its furniture, v. 4.

“Having a golden censer/altar of incense \([\chiρυσοῦν \ θυμιατήριον, \ χρυσοῦν, \ θυμιατέριον]\) and the ark/box/chest \([\κυβωτός, \ κυβότος]\) of the covenant having been covered all around/over with gold, in which was the golden jar/pitcher having the manna and Aaron’s rod/staff which budded and the stone tablets of the covenant.” We draw nearer and nearer to that which signifies the climactic truth of v. 14.

Why is the golden altar of incense seemingly placed within the holy of holies whereas it is elsewhere located in the holy place centered just before the second veil (Ex. 30:6; Lev. 16:12, 18)?\(^\text{35}\) Theologically it is true that, from the point of view of the author, the veil of the Herodian temple has been rent in two. Nevertheless, to begin with, the altar of incense in the holy place was used daily, morning and evening, by the priests, in offering an aroma that wafted into the presence of God in the holy of holies, as do the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-5). However note that, as Bruce points out concerning the annual celebration of Yom Kippur, “not only was the holy of holies never entered without incense from the incense altar (Lev. 16:12f.), but the blood of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement was sprinkled [by the high priest] on the horns of the incense-altar as well as on the mercy-seat (Ex. 30:10; Lev. 16:25).”\(^\text{36}\) Now especially consider Leviticus 16:12-13: “He [Aaron, the high priest] shall take a firepan [censer] full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the LORD and two

\(^{34}\) Owen, *Hebrews*, IV, p. 200.

\(^{35}\) Some have suggested that here the author was mistaken. However Delitzsch responds that, “even supposing him to have been an Alexandrine Jew, he must have been a monster of ignorance and forgetfulness to be capable of such a mistake.” *Hebrews*, II, p. 55.

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE SECOND COVENANT OVER THE FIRST COVENANT

handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil. He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, otherwise he will die.” Here then the “firepan/censer,” taken within the holy of holies, is identified in the NASB and NIV as the “golden altar of incense,” χρυσόν θυμιάτηρον, chrusoun, thumiátero (II Chron. 26:19; Ezek. 8:11), though we prefer the KJV translation of “golden censer.”

The ark of the covenant, or “testimony” (Ex. 26:33), was a box 2½ x 1½ x 1½ cubits made of acacia wood, not susceptible to decay, and overlaid with gold. Within it were the duplicate tables of the Mosaic covenant that had bilaterally established a commitment to righteousness by both parties (Ex. 24:3-8), the golden jar containing manna, signifying divine provision for forty years in the wilderness (Ex. 16:32-34), and Aaron’s rod which had budded, signifying designated authority (Num. 17:5, 8-10). As God is seated in heaven on a throne that radiates holiness and dispenses mercy (Isa. 6:1-7), so on earth He sits, as it were, upon the lid of the ark of the covenant that represents both infinite holy demands and the provision of mercy by means of priestly intercession. Further clarification is given in v. 5.

c) Its glory, v. 5.

“And above it [the ark were the] cherubim [cherubs] of [the] appearing glory over-shadowing the mercy seat/place of propitiation [ιλαστήριον, hilastērion], concerning which there is now not [any need] to speak in detail.” The restriction in detail here may assume sufficient knowledge on the part of the Hebrew readers. There were two cherubs of beaten gold with “wings spread upward covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat” (Exod. 25:18-22; 37:7-9). These were the cherubim of the cloud of glory in

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37 So Luther, Bengel, Alford. While θυμιάτηρον, thumiatērion only refers to the censer, not the altar, in the Bible, there is secular usage with reference to the actual altar of incense, that includes Herodotus, Philo and Josephus. Although Hughes and others comment that the censer was made of bronze (Ex. 27:3) not gold, Hebrews, p. 311, yet Brown responds: “The ordinary censers were made of brass, but that which the high priest used when ‘he went into the holiest of all,’ we are informed by Jewish writers, was made of gold.” Hebrews, I, p. 380. It is for this reason then that we prefer to translate “golden censer,” as with the KJV. If the translation “golden altar of incense” is employed here, this refers, by association, to that which was permanently in the holy place. Refer to Shulam, Jewish New Testament Commentary, p. 692-93.

38 Along with the ark, all of these items have apparently disappeared after the Babylonian captivity since, when Pompey captures Jerusalem and invades the temple, even the holy of holies, in 63 B.C., he finds the ark to be completely empty. Bruce, Hebrews, p. 202.
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which God promised to dwell (cf. Exod. 13:21-22; 40:34-38; II Sam. 6:2; I Kings 8:10-11; II Chron. 5:11-14; Ps. 80:1; Isa. 37:16) hovering between them, above the mercy seat (Exod. 25:22; Lev. 16:2). However the focus of the cherubim is upon the God of glory and the work of propitiation, the sprinkling of the blood upon the mercy seat (Lev. 16:14-17), which Peter may allude to (I Pet. 1:12), and the author (4:16; cf. Ps. 132:8). Here then, upon the “lid/mercy seat,” ἵλαστρίτης, hilastērion, of solid gold, the sprinkled blood atoned, satisfactorily interceded between the holy covenant demands of the tables of stone that produced guilt and the holy God of Israel dwelling between the cherubim. Hence Paul writes of Jesus Christ, “whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith” (Rom. 3:25, cf. I John 2:2; 4:10). However as Hughes points out, to go beyond this application into allegorical flights of fancy is to contrast noticeably with the reserve of our author at this point.

(b) The earthly priesthood detailed, vs. 6-10.

We now move from the layout and components of the tabernacle to the participating priesthood, especially its earthly limitations, as a further prelude to “the greater and more perfect tabernacle” of which Jesus Christ is “high priest,” introduced in v. 11.

1) Its ineffectual repetitiveness, vs. 6-7.

Earthly religion is very activist; it has to be on the go in terms of working rather than resting in grace, as with say Roman Catholic ordinances, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Mormons. At the same time it usually incorporates elitism that distinguishes the clergy or a priesthood from the laity. Such was the case with Judaism, though it distinctively foreshadowed Christ’s saving gospel activity.

a) The continual priesthood activity, v. 6.

“When these things have been prepared, on the one hand the priests are entering into the first/outer tabernacle performing divine worship [λατρεία, latreia].” In the outer court of the tabernacle sacrifices were offered daily at the brazen altar; likewise ceremonial ablutions were performed daily at the brazen laver. In the holy place, where only priests could enter, the lamps of the lampstand were replenished with oil and wicks were trimmed morning and evening. Also incense was offered on the altar of incense every morning and evening. The loaves of bread on the table of showbread were renewed

40 Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 317-19.
weekly on the Sabbath. Strictly speaking, this intense religious priestly activity that involved “human hands,” v. 11, was not so futile as the impotence of the duties performed; yet collectively they anticipated that offering of Christ, “once for all [that] obtained eternal redemption,” v. 12.

b) The annual high priesthood activity, v. 7.

“But on the other hand, once yearly the high priest alone [enters] into the second/inner [tabernacle], not without [taking] blood [to sprinkle], offering on behalf of himself and for the ignorances/sins [ἀγνώμα, agnoëma] of the people.” Only on the Day of Atonement did the high priest, dressed in a “holy linen tunic . . . [and] linen turban” (Lev. 16:4), enter the holy of holies, or “the holy place within the veil” (Lev. 16:2), though twice on that day. First he offered a bull for his own sin, sprinkling blood on the mercy seat. Second he offered one of a pair of goats, sprinkled its blood on the mercy seat, after which he came out and laid hands on the remaining goat, confessing “all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins” (Lev. 16:21). Then was that goat released in the wilderness. The sacrificial bull and goat were subsequently burned outside the camp (Lev. 16:27). By this means all sin was propitiated, even that which a Hebrew could not recollect (Lev. 16:34). Here then Israel understood that sin separated man from God, and only through His appointed atonement, the shedding of blood, was reconciliation possible. Any other attempted means of mediation was an affront to the divine Holiness. However, all of this external ritual, this “symbol,” v. 9, in its impotence, yet awaited “a time of reformation,” v. 10, when shadow would give way to substance and reality. As Isaac Watts has written:

Their priesthood ran through several hands
For mortal was their race:
Thy never-changing office stands
Eternal as Thy days.

Once, in the circuit of a year,
With blood, but not their own,
Did they within the veil appear,
Before the golden throne.

But Christ, by His own powerful blood,
Ascends above the skies;
And in the presence of our God
Shows His own sacrifice.
He ever lives to intercede
    Before His Father’s face:
Give Him, my soul, thy cause to plead,
    Nor doubt the Father’s grace.

2) Its ineffectual means of access, vs. 8-10.

Man’s religious carnality, his irrational shortsightedness is evident in the fact that while he may acknowledge heaven to be a spiritual realm, with God enthroned there in all of His holy spiritual glory, yet he somehow conceives of entrance into that region to be through material means. It would be reasonable to conclude that Israel’s material sacrificial order was at best a shadow of things to come; after all, a material means of entering a spiritual state would seem quite impossible. But Israel, in sin, did not come to this conclusion (Isa. 1:13-17), and the natural man today is of the same mind. So the writer of Hebrews concludes that the earthly tabernacle economy in no way enabled entrance into the real heavenly, spiritual presence of God.

a) There is no direct access to God, v. 8.

“This the Holy Spirit is showing/making clear, [that] not yet has been manifested the way into the holy place [holy of holies] [while the] first tabernacle [that enables entrance to the holy holies] is presently standing.” This earthly representation, of divine design, had lessons to teach according to the Holy Spirit’s original intent, but it was not intended that it be regarded as possessing saving efficacy. The high priest’s annual entrance into the holy of holies did not, in reality, obtain access to God. To be sure God manifested Himself above the mercy seat, but everything offered to Him was earthly and lacked mediatorial qualification. Further, the high priest alone, and none of the people, actually experienced direct access with God, and that only annually. Thus the rending of the veil signifies that this restricted access has been displaced by open access through Jesus Christ (Mat. 27:51) and the establishment of a priesthood of believers (10:19; I Pet. 2:5). It appears implicit here that the Jerusalem temple is still standing, although its demise is imminent and necessary as a shadow that must pass for the full light of heaven to shine forth, and that without distracting conflict.

b) There is no efficacy unto perfection, v. 9.

“Which is a parable/representation [παραβολῆ, parabolē] for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which are not able, in the realm of conscience, to perfect the worshipper.” The external religious forms of the Old Covenant, but particularly the tabernacle system, are
presently symbolic and in no way effectual. As external ritualistic acts, they cannot bring change to the “conscience” \( \text{συνειδησίας, suneidēsis, knowledge within} \), while “the blood of Christ . . . through the eternal Spirit” can, v. 14; 10:1-2, 22. As Calvin puts it, all of the activity in the tabernacle did not reach the soul so as to confer true holiness. . . . for though they were true testimonies of perfect holiness, yet they by no means contained it in themselves, nor could they convey it to men; for the faithful were by such helps led, as it were, by the hand to Christ, that they might obtain from him what was wanting in the symbols.\footnote{Calvin, Hebrews, pp. 199-200.}

Israel’s problem was a failure to accept the ceremonial law as a parable only, and not respond through faith alone to God who alone justifies and sanctifies (I Sam. 15:22; Rom. 9:31-33). The Christian faces the same problem with regard to his estimation of baptism and the Lord’s table. As C. H. Spurgeon rightly admonishes us:

\[
\text{If now, with eyes defiled and dim,}
\text{We see the signs, but see not Him,}
\text{O may His love the scales displace,}
\text{And bid us see Him face to face!}
\]

c) There is no efficacy in externals, v. 10.

“Since they relate only to food and drink and various washings/cleansings \( \text{βαπτισμός, baptismos}, \) carnal regulations, until the time of restoration/reformation.setting straight \( \text{διορθώσις, diorthōsis} \) is imposed \( \text{ἐπικείμενα, epikeimena}. \)” The high priest must conform to the kosher restrictions of Leviticus 11. He was prohibited from partaking of strong drink (Lev. 10:8-11), and also required to “bathe his body in water” before and after his Yom Kippur entrance into the Holy of Holies (Lev. 16:4, 24). For Israel as a whole this insistence on a set diet and cleanliness had practical benefits for desert living. Yet here are two opposite entities that concern the essence, the ground of true biblical Christianity, that is outer religious form that arises from man’s religious initiative and compliance, or inner religious affection that arises from divine initiative (Matt. 23:26-28). However, the good news here is that, according to divine imposition, captivity to an economy of religious ritual, the old covenant under Moses, “before faith came [when] we were kept in custody under the law, . . . [when we] were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world” (Gal. 3:23; 4:3), is to be superceded by an economy of religious reformation, a new order, the new covenant under Jesus
Christ, “in the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4). Paul makes the same contrast concerning, “food or drink . . . a new moon or a Sabbath day [being] things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:16-17).

(2) The new covenant perfect tabernacle service, 9:11-14.

Here is one of those biblical occasions where an adversative conjunction, “But,” so gloriously becomes a pin that connects two parts of a divine hinge (cf. Rom. 3:21; Eph. 2:4). There is necessary connection, yet these parts comprise two different rooms, economies. One part of the hinge, vs. 1-10, attaches to the Old Testament earthly tabernacle from which we depart; the other part, vs. 11-14, attaches to the New Covenant heavenly tabernacle into which we enter, never even to think about returning to our former residence.

However, at this stage in Hebrews, which book as a whole presupposes a Hebrew understanding of the Old Testament, a more detailed comprehension of the God-ordained sacrificial system is necessary, indeed much more than the general concept of an animal offering. The overall concept of sacrifice involved substitution of the innocent for the guilty whereby atonement, “at-one-ment,” with God was accomplished. Leviticus describes five different types of sacrifices under two distinct categories.

(a) Voluntary sweet-savor/soothing aroma offerings, Lev. 1:1-3:17.

1) The burnt offering, 1:1-17.

2) The meal offering, 2:1-16.

3) The peace offering, 3:1-17.

(b) Compulsory, non-sweet savor/soothing aroma offerings, Lev. 4:1-6:7.

1) The sin offering, dealing with the root of sin in human nature, where no restitution was possible, 4:1-35.

2) The trespass offering, dealing with the fruit or acts of sin, where restitution was possible, 5:1-6:7.

In particular, concerning the sin offering of a bull brought to the outer court by the male Hebrew, after blood is sprinkled on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and poured upon its base, the fat, liver and kidneys having been burned, the carcass is burned at a “clean place outside the camp” (Lev. 4:12; cf. Heb. 13:11). On Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) a bull was also offered as a sin offering along with one of two goats, their blood being sprinkled on the lid of the arc of the covenant, that is the place of propitiation. The remaining live goat was released into the wilderness, after Aaron had laid his hands on it and thus represented the utter casting away of the sins of the people. Again the carcass of the bull was taken outside the camp (Lev. 16:1-34).
Here, as in Hebrews 9:1-10, it must be understood that the Yom Kippur sacrifice is in mind that at the same time has involved sin offerings. The blood having been shed in the outer court yet had to be taken in through the holy place into the holy of holies and there presented to God, that is sprinkled on the mercy seat, above which He dwelt between the cherubim. The same point is made in Hebrews concerning Christ’s blood having been shed; there was the necessity for He, as both sacrifice and high priest, following His death, to present His obedient, bloody self-offering within the heavenly holy of holies to His Father (Heb. 6:19-20; 9:7, 11-12, 24; 10:12).

(a) There is heavenly access through Christ, v. 11.

“But Christ having appeared [παραγινομαι, paraginomai, Luke 12:51] as high priest of good things having been brought into being, [He entered] through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not handmade, this is not that which is created.”

Here the appearing of Christ refers to His earthly ministry, His entrance onto the stage of history (1:1-2; Gal. 4:5), that yet is preeminently comprehended through His life being poured out in death, this being signified by the shedding of His blood as the Lamb of God. As a consequence, and by means of resurrection, God the Son entered the heavenly realm, and there the very holy dwelling place and throne of God the Father, the effectual mercy seat. This place of divine residence and enthronement is related to the earthly tabernacle pattern; hence Christ enters into the heavenly holy of holies through “the greater and more perfect tabernacle,” that is by means of His glorified physical body that is incomparably better than the body of Aaron, there for the sprinkling and presentation of His bloody self-offering. Certainly Aaron’s body was fully human, whereas the ascended body of Christ was of divine origin. As John Cennick has written:

He died; but lives again,
    And by the throne He stands,
There shows how He was slain,
    Opening His pierced hands:
Our Priest abides and pleads the cause
    Of us who have transgressed His laws.

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42 The translation of vs. 11-12 by F. F. Bruce has much to commend it. “But now Christ has appeared as high priest of the good things which have come to pass. Through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands—that is to say, not belonging to this creation—and by virtue of his own blood, not the blood of goats and calves, he has entered the holy place once for all, having procured eternal redemption.” Hebrews, p. 211. Also refer to the NKJV.

43 Identification of “the greater and more perfect tabernacle [σκηνή, skēnē]” is varied. As above, so Bengel, Calvin, Chrysostom, Owen, refer to Christ’s physical body (8:2; cf. John 1:14; 2:19-21; II Cor. 5:1, 4; II Pet. 1:13-14; ); Brown and Bruce plausibly refer to the holy place or outer court of the heavens that leads to the inner holy of holies (4:14; 9:12); Westcott, refers to the church as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23).
(b) There is lasting efficacy through Christ, v. 12-14.

Transportation from the earthly tabernacle scenario into the heavenly holy of holies leads to focus on the actual transaction that occurs when the Son ascends and comes before His Father. The logic is that whatever transpires before the throne of God, as it were at His very right hand, 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2, is infinitely superior to remote earthly figures.

1) The superior once and for all offering of Christ, v. 12.

"Neither through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered once into the holy of holies having secured/obtained by finding/accomplishing [εὑρίσκω, euriskō] eternal redemption [λύτρωσις, lútrosis]." The work of having accomplished redemption precedes the entrance of Christ into the holy of holies where the Father welcomes Him. However Bruce cautions us against pressing the Old Testament parallel too far.

Aaron certainly carried the sacrificial blood into the holy of holies, but our author deliberately avoids saying that Christ carried his own blood into the heavenly sanctuary. Even as a symbolic expression this is open to objection. There have been expositors who, pressing the analogy of the Day of Atonement beyond the limits observed by our author, have argued that the expiatory work of Christ was not completed on the cross—not completed, indeed, until he ascended from earth and “made atonement ‘for us’ in the heavenly holy of holies by the presentation of his efficacious blood.” But while it was necessary under the old covenant for the sacrificial blood first to be shed in the court and then to be brought into the holy of holies, no such division of our Lord’s sacrifice into two phases is envisaged under the new covenant. When on the cross he offered up his life to God as a sacrifice for his people’s sin, he accomplished in reality what Aaron and his successors performed in type by the twofold act of slaying the victim and presenting its blood in the holy of holies. The title of the Anglican Article XXXI speaks rightly “of the one oblation of Christ finished upon the cross.”

Further, John Owen adds:

It is a vain speculation, contrary to the analogy of faith, and destructive of the true nature of the oblation of Christ, and inconsistent with the dignity of his person, that he should carry with him into heaven a part of that material blood which was shed for us on the earth. This some have invented, to maintain a comparison in that wherein is none intended. The design of the apostle is only to declare by virtue of what he entered as a priest...

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44 Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 213, in which he quotes K. M. Monroe, *Evangelical Quarterly* 5, 1933, p. 404. We might say that the Old Testament portrayal of Christ’s full work of redemption in the tabernacle setting was linear, whereas in the New Testament it is more aoristic, punctiliar. Refer also to Delitzsch, who, with a distinct Lutheran perspective, maintains that the glorified body of Christ was not bloodless, *Hebrews*, II, pp. 81-89.
into the holy place. And this was by virtue of his own blood when it was shed, when he offered himself unto God.\textsuperscript{45}

Moreover, application of the Day of Atonement to Christ must be with caution since there were two sin-offerings on that occasion, namely a bull and a goat, the blood of both being sprinkled on the mercy seat (Lev. 16:11-19). However, the chief point is that, in recapitulating the thought of v. 11 concerning a transcendently greater entrance of Christ into heaven, here the life offered in sacrifice, evidenced by the shedding of blood, is of that same Christ of infinitely greater efficacy than mere dumb goats and calves. As Isaac Watts has written:

\begin{quote}
Not all the blood of beasts,
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood than they.
\end{quote}

But further, such is the potency of this sacrificial presentation that it necessitated a “once for all” [\textit{\textepsilon\textupsilon\phi\acute{a}p\acute{a}x}, ephapax,\textsuperscript{46} 7:27; 10:10], that is never to be repeated, offering.

2) The inferior offerings of the old covenant, v. 13.

“For if [and it is assumed to be true] the blood of goats and bulls, and ashes of a young female calf/heifer sprinkling \textit{\textrho\acute{a}v\upsilon\tau\acute{t}\acute{i}\gamma\acute{z}\omega}, rhantiz\acute{e}[o], those having been defiled, sanctify \textit{\textalpha\gamma\eta\iota\acute{a}\zeta\omega}, hagiaz\acute{e}[o] for the cleansing of the flesh.” This protasis more comprehensively draws together the vital matter of sin offerings in the sacrificial system of Israel. We have already understood the significance of two goats and a bull on Yom Kippur, that is these supreme sin offerings offered annually for the Hebrew nation. But added to this is an additional sin offering, that of the red heifer (Num. 19:1-22). An unblemished (sinlessness?) red heifer, never yoked (innocent?), was to be slaughtered by Eleazar, the son of the high priest, Aaron, outside the camp (13:11-12). The blood was sprinkled seven times in front of the tabernacle (12:24), while the remaining carcass was completely burned, along with the additives of “cedar wood (savor?) and hyssop (purification?), and scarlet [thread/material] (life offered in death?).” The ashes were then stored outside the camp, ready to be mixed with water, then sprinkled on anyone ceremonially defiled through association with a dead body (10:22). This cleansing water could also be used for the purification of

\textsuperscript{45} Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 280.

\textsuperscript{46} This is a strengthened form of \textit{\textalpha\pi\alpha\zeta}, hapax, 6:4; 9:7, 26-28; 10:2; 12:26-27.
defiled pagan spoils captured in battle (Num. 31:21-24). Consequently this further sin offering adds focus to the underlying problem with which Hebrews is chiefly concerned, namely cleansing from sin in the life of a redeemed child of God. For Israel this involved “the cleansing of the flesh,” though why? Owen responds.

Why then, it will be said, did God appoint and ordain them [the ceremonial laws]? . . . It was not at all on account of their outward use and efficacy, as unto the purifying of the flesh, which, as it was alone, God always despised [since they did not pursue them “by faith” (Rom. 9:31-32)]; but it was because of the representation of good things to come which the wisdom of God had inlaid them withal. With respect hereunto they were glorious, and of exceeding advantage unto the faith and obedience of the church.47

Hence, from this superficial realm of the flesh we now move to the more essential realm of the conscience (I Pet. 3:21).


“By how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to the end purpose that [you] serve the living God?” This apodas is returns us to the negative conclusion of v. 9 that the tabernacle sacrifices “cannot make the worshipper perfect in conscience.” However here the positive solution for the cleansing of this same conscience [συνειδήσις], that moral core of the soul involving self-knowledge (Rom. 2:15; 9:1; II Cor. 1:12; Heb. 10:22; 13:18), is definitively provided. Now, by an afortiori argument, 7:22; 9:11, mere earthly shadow gives way to heavenly substance.

a) In the realm of atonement.

It is by means of “the blood of Christ.” The self-offering of the Son of God, 1:1-4; 2:14, contrasts with “the blood of goats and bulls,” v. 13, that had no choice. Their unblemished condition was according to a human priest’s estimate whereas Christ’s impeccability was according to His Father’s cognizance (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Animals are less than human; Christ is human and divine. His blood is His life poured out in death, “the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (I Pet. 3:18).

47 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 292.
b) In the realm of instrumentality.

It is “through the Eternal Spirit [διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου, dia pneumatos aiōniou].” Is this, “[the] eternal [Holy] Spirit” or “[an] eternal Spirit [of Christ, His essential own]”? The former is more likely (cf. Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:18; John 3:34; I Pet. 3:18?), and particularly since in Hebrews “Holy Spirit” is used in 2:4; 3:7; 6:4; 9:8; 10:15, 29, whereas “spirit” is only used in 4:12.48 Bruce makes a significant point here:

Behind our author’s thinking lies the portrayal of the Isaianic Servant of the Lord, who yields up his life to God as a guilt offering for many, bearing their sin and procuring their justification. When this Servant is introduced for the first time, God says: “I have put my Spirit upon him” (Isa. 42:1). It is in the power of the Divine Spirit, accordingly, that the Servant accomplishes every phase of his ministry, including the crowning phase in which he accepts death for the transgression of his people, filling the twofold rôle of priest and victim, as Christ does in this epistle.49

c) In the realm of effectiveness.

It is unto the “cleansing of the conscience.” Here the judicial and regenerative aspects of the gospel coalesce in the conversion of the human soul. Here is the heart of the contrast between the efficiency of the Old Covenant and that of the New Covenant concerning man’s essential problem, namely how can an “evil conscience” (10:22, cf. I Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:15), become a “good conscience” (13:18, cf. I Tim. 1:5, 19; I Pet. 1:19; 3:16, 21)? It is through gospel cleansing, that is soul katharsis (καθαριζω, katharizō, here) by means of the blood of Christ, from “dead works,” unfruitful carnality, 6:1, that is mediated through the enlivening Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5-7).

d) In the realm of purpose.

It is for the “service [λατρεύω, latreuō] of the living God.” Thus the Christian is saved, or justified and regenerated, that, in a life of resultant sanctification, he might exclusively serve the only true and living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Such “life” distinguishes God and sanctifies. Calvin comments that, “we are not washed by Christ, that we may plunge ourselves again into new filth, but that our purity may serve to glorify God. Besides, he teaches us, that nothing can

48 This is the view of Bengel, Bruce, Calvin, Farar, and Owen. The contrary opinion of Alford, Brown, Delitzsch, Hughes, and Westcott, stresses that Christ’s “eternal Spirit” contrasts with the “extinguished spirits” of animals (cf. 7:16, 24).

49 Bruce, Hebrews, p. 217.
proceed from us that can be pleasing to God until we are purified by the blood of Christ.”

Charles Wesley writes:

A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.

To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfill:
O may it all my powers engage
To do m Master’s will.


The nature of the Old Covenant has been described as “earthly,” v. 1, requiring continuous sacrificial activity, vs. 6-7, while even the high priest had need of satisfaction for his own sin, v. 7. Such a sacrificial system could not “make the worshipper [internally] perfect in conscience,” v. 9, since it dealt only with external form, v. 10, by means of “the blood of goats and bulls,” v. 13. Hence the Old Covenant economy could not even be revamped, improved, or upgraded. Its root was according to Aaron and Levi, not the tribe of Judah and the order of Melchizedek (7:11-16). In fact it was never intended to have a brighter future any more than was the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist (John 3:30). It was not possible for the old wineskins to receive the new wine of the soul-renovating grace of Christ (Matt. 9:17; John 1:17).

(1) The terms of the new covenant, 9:15-17.

The term “covenant” may more broadly refer to an agreement or compact based upon stipulations and sanctions between two parties, by signification such as with a heap of stones (Gen. 31:44-46), salt (Num. 18:19; II Chron. 13:5), or a sandal and witnesses with regard to a wedding (Ruth 4:1-11). Yet the specific focus here concerns the vital necessity of death as that trigger which activates the terms of such an agreement. While the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 15:9-10 was signified by the death of animals, and the Mosaic sacrificial system likewise was based upon death sacrifices, yet Paul in Romans 7:1-4 brings us closer to the meaning here since it is the death of a first husband that ends an old agreement and enables a new union to a second husband. Thus the death of Christ activates closure on an old agreement and the inauguration of a new one, so that “through the body of Christ . . . you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead.” Similarly today we appreciate that only the death of an individual can activate that person’s “last will and testament;” so the author of Hebrews makes a point similar to that of Paul, except that he grounds this concept in its essential place in the Old Covenant system.

50 Calvin, Hebrews, p. 205.

51 Farrar rightly comments: “In these two verses, 16-17, and these only, διαθήκη, diathēkē, is used in its Greek and Roman sense of a ‘will,’ and not in the sense of ‘a covenant.’ The sudden and momentary change in the
(a) The old covenant necessity of death, v. 15.

“Therefore, on account of this [preceding truth], He [Christ] is the Mediator of a new covenant, so that [His] death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions based upon the first covenant, those having been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” The concluding a fortiori argument of v. 14 has yet again established the superiority of Christ’s atonement over that of the Mosaic order, nevertheless it also necessitates further explanation concerning questions that the Hebrew mind would continue to ask. There must be no misunderstanding, since the revelation of a “better covenant” has already been described, that is the identification of “a new covenant,” according to Jeremiah 31:31 (8:6-13). It must further be considered that the author’s relegation of the Mosaic Covenant to obsolescence (8:13) raises the question as to the real status, in the eyes of God, of those Old Testament sins that were merely propitiated in figurative terms. If the Mosaic covenant has been abrogated due to weakness, then of what efficacy have been its sin offerings? Paul gives the best answer here when he writes of Christ, “whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed [during the Old Testament economy]” (Rom. 3:24-25). So Hughes explains that, “the new [covenant] provides the antidote to the inadequacy of the former covenant. The new overcomes the incompetence of the old.”52 But further the New Covenant has undiminished efficacy for the future with regard to “those who have been called,” of God according to particular grace (I Cor. 1:26-31). To them belongs “the eternal inheritance” of the New Covenant that Jeremiah 31:31-40 delineates. And all of this has come about through the death of the mediator, “the blood of Christ,” v. 14.

(b) The covenant necessity of death in general, vs. 16-17.

“Death,” as represented by the Mosaic Covenant and in the person of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, raises the most fundamental question of necessity. To this Alfred Edersheim responds:

The fundamental idea of sacrifice in the Old Testament is that of substitution, which again seems to imply everything else—atonement and redemption, vicarious punishment and forgiveness. The firstfruits go for the whole products; the firstlings for the flock; the redemption-money for that which cannot be offered; and the life of the sacrifice, which is in its blood (Lev. 17:11), for the life of the sacrificer.53

This being so, then the death of the sacrifice is a substitution for the death of the one for whom the sacrifice is made. Hence, the concern of

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52 Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 366-367.
the author is with regard to the human blight of death and consequent judgment before the throne of God, as v. 27 makes plain. Herein lies the underlying importance of the argument that follows.

1) The covenant maker dead validates his covenant, v. 16.

“For where a covenant is, the necessity of death is brought in of the one who establishes it.” By implication, the activation of a covenant’s stipulations is in mind here. In the case of a civil inheritance, such a benefaction is only obtained subsequent to the death of the benefactor. Now an “eternal inheritance” has just been mentioned, v. 15, so that this spiritual benefaction can only be received upon the death of the Benefactor, who is Jesus Christ. In other words, death, by way of substitution, brings transition from death unto life and blessing, from promise to fulfillment. Westcott adds: “The Death of Christ was a chief difficulty of the Hebrews [i.e. a Messiah who dies], and therefore the writer presents it under different aspects in order to show its full significance in the Christian dispensation.”

2) The covenant maker alive invalidates his covenant, v. 17.

“For a covenant on the basis of dead men is validated, since it is never in force/operative when the one making it lives.” A will may have validity while its author is alive, but only his death sets the terms in motion. Thus legal/righteous regulation governs in this whole matter. If it is the case in the civil world, how much more it is so in the realm of the kingdom of God who is infinitely holy, establishes contractual terms, and administers them. There cannot be benefaction concerning inheritance without death; the alternative would be thievery. The necessity of the death of Jesus Christ is grounded upon the moral essence of the triune God: “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust [δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἁδικῶν, dikaios huper adikon], so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (I Pet. 3:18; cf. Luke 24:26). Life from God the Father only comes as a result of the death of God the Son (John 12:23-25).

(2) The terms of the old covenant, 9:18-22.

It is significant that having reflected on the Old Covenant with regard to the initiating role that death plays, vs. 15-17, the parallel term of “blood” is now reemployed. In the preceding vs. 6-14 where the Old Covenant sacrificial terminology is used, “blood” is mentioned five times, but “death” not once. In vs. 15-17 where illustration is used, “death” is mentioned three times and “blood” not once. Now in vs. 18-22 “blood is once again used six times, and

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54 Westcott, Hebrews, p. 265.
“death” not once. The point is that “blood” represents that which is shed to the point of death. Thus “blood” and “death” are virtually synonymous terms.

(a) There was the necessity of shed blood, vs. 18-20.

The secular necessity of death, for the enactment of a civil last will and testament, is now perceived to be an absolutely requisite element within the Mosaic order. Although in that Old Covenant instance the death of the covenant Initiator was not an explicit factor, nevertheless death through the shedding of blood was declared to be essential insofar as the expiation of sin was concerned.

1) The first covenant was based upon shed blood, v. 18.

“Therefore not even the first [covenant] was inaugurated/initiated/made new [ἐγκατάνευσεν, enkainizō, cf. 10:20] apart from blood [being shed unto death].” The original enactment of the Mosaic covenant, following the affirmation of Israel, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do,” involved “an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel” (Exod. 24:3-4, 7). There sacrifices were offered that enabled Moses to sprinkle blood on the altar and the people, and then declare, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Exod. 24:8). Hence the terms of this solemn agreement involved death for infringement by either party, that only atonement could rectify (Exod. 32:19, 30). Such a sobering reality continued to be the environment of the outer temple court, throughout the history of Israel, that was not only a bloody place, a deathly place, but also a constant reminder of death by means of the ceaseless slaughtering of protesting animals. Hence the necessity of blood/death according the first covenant would lead to the expectation of blood/death in a superceding better covenant.

2) The first covenant was based upon Exodus law, vs. 19-20.

For the Hebrew reader, the argument here is powerful in terms of his recent participation in Jewish life and the anticipated ministry of Messiah. In other words, with the inauguration of a New Covenant, it should never be thought that the principle of the necessity of a death sacrifice had been abrogated, especially if the problem concerns not simply the judicial death of the body, but also the soul (10:39).

a) The law was founded upon blood sacrifice, v. 19.

“For every commandment having been spoken/decreed [λαλήσας, laleō] by Moses to all the people according to the Law, having taken the blood of calves and goats with water
and scarlet wool and hyssop, he sprinkled ροντιζο, rhantizó both the book itself and all the people.” Certain elements included here are not found in the Exodus 24:1-8 account, such as “calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop [majoram],” and the sprinkling of “the book.” These may recall the author’s previously indicated sense of liberty in being illustrative when dealing with Scripture, especially in making association with vs. 12-13. Also the author probably has contemporary experience of Temple sacrifices being offered. Certainly he draws upon subsequent accepted supplementary practices such as the use of hyssop, bound by scarlet wool, as the instrument of sprinkling; there was also the placing of the written Word of God, that which was available at that time, on the altar where it also was sprinkled with blood.

b) The law was founded upon Exodus 24:8, v. 20.

“Saying, ‘This [is] the blood [signifying death] of the covenant which God commanded/charged ἐντελομαι you.’” Even with the blood of animals, this was a most solemn occasion, especially because of the element of death, first mentioned in the Bible concerning sin (Gen. 2:17). How much more so was the occasion when the Lord Jesus Christ declared, in the upper room, to His small Hebrew band of disciples, “this is My blood [death] of the covenant, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; cf. Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25 where “new covenant” is incorporated). The Old Covenant reference here concerns death as a sanction covered by a substitute in figurative terms. But for the author here, there is something very anticipatory (10:19-22), especially in this realm of death, that incorporates death with regard to the soul, substitution by God Himself, and pardon that is real and final (10:12, 14).

(b) There was the comprehensive sprinkling of blood, v. 21.

“But also similarly he [Moses] sprinkled the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the service/ministry, with the blood.” While the focus of v. 19 was upon the primary objects of Moses’ sprinkling with blood, namely “the book [of the covenant that God stipulated] and all the people [being respondents to the covenant],” there was also an inclusive sprinkling of secondary items. This included “the tabernacle,” not explicitly described by Scripture. However, there was a generosity of sprinkling in v. 19 above that inevitably gave a broader coverage. Also there was the sprinkling of the mercy seat on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:14-19, the sprinkling of Aaron and his sons (Lev. 8:30), and the sprinkling of the altar (Exod. 29:12; cf. Lev. 8:15). Further “all the vessels” were sprinkled. Though this is not explicitly stated in Scripture, there is inferential evidence from the consecration of Aaron and his sons
(Lev. 8:23-30), along with the explicit statement of Josephus that the vessels were sprinkled with blood. All together, along with the writer probably reflecting upon contemporary Temple practice, the whole tabernacle in general was sprinkled. The implicit reason for this is that the whole of the functioning Mosaic sacrificial system was suffused with unholiness. Hence, by means of a very limited manner of expression, “sprinkling” of the whole tabernacle edifice indicated the necessity of a comprehensive atonement that dealt with sin, not simply in terms of individual actions, but rather as a pervasive, leprous disease.

(c) There was the expiatory sprinkling of blood, v. 22.

“And almost all things are cleansed [καθαρίζω, katharizō] with blood according to the Law, and apart from blood-shedding/blood poured out in death [αιματεκχυσία, haimatekchusia] there is no forgiveness.” There were exceptions to this general rule concerning the washing of unclean clothes (Exod. 19:10), bodily washing in water after defilement from a bed, and similarly for the handler of the scapegoat (15:5; 16:26), so that in these instances death was not required. Particularly significant was, in the instance of poverty when not even a turtledove or pigeon could be obtained, the substitution of fine flour as a non-bloody sin offering (Lev. 5:11-13). Thus in the foreshadowing there was a concession in exceptional circumstances. However in the reality of the shedding of Christ’s blood there is absolute necessity (Luke 24:26; Heb. 2:10; 9:16-17). Here the main point is that, under Moses, the shedding and sprinkling of blood was profuse on account of the identical profuseness of defilement. Indeed, there are numerous pre-Mosaic indications of the necessity of the sacrificial shedding of blood (Gen. 3:21; 4:4; 8:20-22; 12:7-8; 13:4, 18; 14:18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:18-20; 35:1-7; Exod. 17:15). In simple terms, since the fall of man, his condemnation to death, indicated by the yielding up of his blood to the earth, only finds relief in the death of a divinely designated and acceptable substitute who vicariously yields up the shedding of his blood unto death. Hence, man’s great need is “forgiveness” before God concerning his defilement. His attempts at self-cleansing, self-justification are absurd, doomed to failure. The only alternative is divine substitution (I Pet. 3:18) through the death of Christ, signified by His shed blood (Matt. 26:28; John 6:53; Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:25; 5:9; I Cor. 11:25; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20; Heb. 9:14; 10:19; 13:20; I Pet. 1:18-19; I John 1:7; Rev. 1:5; 7:14; 12:11). This is the essence of the Christian gospel, as Horatio Spafford has written:

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And has shed His own blood for my soul.

55 Josephus, Antiquities, III. 8. 6.
My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more:
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.

(3) The termination of the old covenant buy the new covenant, 9:23-28.

What follows is a grand application concerning the preceding earthly sacrificial pattern, more specifically the templates that were based upon the heavenly reality. There is Christ in heaven and Aaron on earth, one sacrifice received in heaven and many sacrifices on earth, the holy place made with hands on earth and the holy place of heaven itself. However, the fact that Christ was physically sacrificed on earth, not heaven, indicates the chief concern here is with a heavenly purpose and perfection and holiness, not so much a heavenly location, as v. 23 will prove. Further, the second coming of Christ from heaven to earth “for [the consummated] salvation” of those who anticipate Him, to bring heaven to earth as it were, v. 28, further supports this perspective.

(a) The earthly copy yields to the heavenly reality, vs. 23-24.

There have already have been described, “those [priests] who offer the gifts [sacrifices] according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (8:4-5). Here again the same contrast between the heavenly reality and the earthly representation is expounded. But how could there be any necessity, as is here indicated, for the cleansing of “the heavenly things”?

1) The earthly sacrifices cleanse earthly things, v. 23a.

“Therefore, on the one hand, it was necessary for the patterns, of the [real] things in the heavens, to be cleansed with these [earthly] things [bloody offerings, vs. 18-22]. The necessity here was God’s modus operandi whereby He so often previews, by way of a shadowy representation, that which will be more grandly, really presented in the future; this necessity involves the accentuation that contrast establishes, such as with the dawning morning light appearing to be more brilliant and pronounced on account of the long preceding night of darkness; this necessity, involving the drama of redemption, was God’s commitment to progressive, climactic revelation (1:1-2; Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 13:12).

2) The heavenly sacrifices cleanse the heavenly things, 23b-24.

“But, on the other hand, [it was necessary] for the heavenly things [cf. 8:5] themselves [to be cleansed] with better sacrifices in comparison with these [earthly things]. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, an anti-type/copy [ἀντίτυπον, antitupon] of the true [holy place], but into heaven itself, now to appear [ἐμφανίζω, emphanizo] before the presence of God on our
behalf.” Carefully note that it is not heaven itself that is said to require cleansing, but rather “the heavenly things.” There is an intended parallel here with the comprehensive cleansing of the earthly things, “the book itself and all the people, . . . the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry, . . . [indeed] almost all things,” vs. 19, 21-22. Explanations have abounded at this point, though that of Bruce appears to be closest to the truth. It has frequently been asked in what sense “the heavenly realities” needed to be cleansed; but our author has provided the answer in the context. What needed to be cleansed was the defiled conscience of men and women; this is a cleansing which belongs to the spiritual sphere. The argument of v. 23 might be paraphrased by saying that while ritual purification is adequate for the material order, which is but an earthly copy of the spiritual order, a better kind of sacrifice is necessary to effect purification in the spiritual order. If we envisage the heavenly dwelling-place of God in something like material terms (and surrounded as we are by the material universe, it is difficult to avoid doing so), we shall find ourselves trying to explain the necessity for its cleansing in ways which are far from the author’s intention. . . . [But further] the people of God are the house of God, that is His dwelling place is in their midst. It is they who need inward cleansing, not only that their approach to God may be free from defilement, but that they may be a fit habitation for him. 57

This understanding is supported by Christ’s entrance “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us [emphasis added].” However, why the plural here of the “better sacrifices”? It is simply generic describing a better “class/category” of sacrifices.

Thus Christ has accomplished the heavenly conscience cleansing atonement [9:14], the consummate redemption reality, fulfilling the divine blueprint formerly laid out before the nation of Israel. He has not invested His real saving, effectual labor in a mere earthly tabernacle facility; rather He has offered His earthly atoning sacrifice before the throne of His Father “for us” [ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, huper hēmōn]. In other words, Christ has presented His case of righteous satisfaction before His Father on our behalf (7:25). So Owen expounds:

There is more in it [here] than [“for us” meaning] merely for our good. It is as it were the appearance of an advocate, a law-

56 Delitzsch defines this cleansing as that required due to heaven being darkened by God’s dealings with sin and wrath, Hebrews, II, p. 125. Owen, followed by Pink, identifies this cleansing as the dedication, solemnization, consecration of “the heavenly things.” Hence, “heaven itself was dedicated to be a habitation for ever unto the mystical body Christ, in perfect peace with the angels above, who had never sinned (Eph. 1:10; Heb. 12:22-24),” Hebrews, IV, pp. 374-375. More bizarre has been the idea of necessary cleansing due to the defilement of heaven on account of Satan’s expulsion.

57 Bruce, Hebrews, pp. 228-229. Similarly Chrysostom, Luther.

58 Delitzsch, Hebrews, II, p. 126.
appearance in the behalf of others. So it is declared (I John 2:1-2). He will at the end of all present his whole church unto God, with the whole work of his love and grace accomplished towards them. He first so presents it unto himself, and then to God (Eph. 5:26-27). Now he presents them as the portion given unto him of God out of fallen mankind to be redeemed and saved; saying, “Behold I and the children which thou gavest me; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me.' I present them unto thy love and care, holy Father, that they may enjoy all the fruits of thine eternal love, all the benefits of my death and sacrifice.”

(b) The heavenly sacrifice cleanses once and for all, vs. 25-26.

Although the once-and-for-all self-offering of Jesus Christ has already been emphasized, 7:27; 9:12, yet here stress upon this vital gospel truth is intensified even further, and will be repeated yet again, 10:10. When a surgeon operates and subsequently declares that we will probably need to have further periodic surgery, we are in no way convinced that the problem has been dealt with in an absolute sense. On the other hand, when a better surgeon operates and then assures us that there will be no further recurring problems because the surgery has dealt with the problem once-and-for-all, we are reassured about our well-being. So the finality of Jesus Christ’s atonement imparts assurance that the sin problem has been really dealt with in the sight of God; the spiritual surgery was an effectual once-and-for-all operation.

1) The priest on earth offers alien blood, v. 25.

“It was not that He would repeatedly/frequently [πολλάκις, pollakis] offer Himself, just as the high priest enters into the holy place year by year with blood belonging to another/not his own.” Under the Mosaic economy, the priesthood dealt with sins as they came forth, at best and climactically over a twelve month period when Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is taken into consideration. Yet for all of the solemnity of that great festival, repetition was necessary. Hence, for the Hebrew, there was never a sense of finality, but rather necessary, ceaseless atoning activity. Implicit then was weakness in the whole Mosaic/Aaronic system (5:2; 7:18, 28), especially in the fact of the high priest necessarily employing token animal blood, through constant slaughter, and not his own. However of Messiah it was prophesied that, “By His [God the Father’s] knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will [sacrificially] bear their iniquities. Therefore, I [God the Father] will allot Him [Messiah] a portion with the great [by means of resurrection], and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself unto death” (Isa. 53:11-12). There is no place here for Jesus Christ repeatedly offering Himself, even as Roman Catholicism teaches. The

59 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 384.
emphatic “once-for-all” teaching of Hebrews is explicitly against it, indeed it insults the finality of not only Christ’s atonement but also His session (1:3; 10:12; 12:2).


“Since/otherwise it would have been necessary for Him to suffer often from the foundation of the world/ages; but now [νυνὶ νῦν, nuni] once [ἐπὶ ἕνη, hapax] at the completion/consummation/ [συντελεία, suntelieia] of the ages/apex of history, He has appeared for the putting away [ἀθετήσας, athetēsis] of sin through the sacrifice [θυσία, thysia] of Himself.” Hypothetically, if the Aaronic pattern was applicable to Christ, then it would have been necessary for Him to offer himself repeatedly, even, as Delitzsch points out, the high priest entered the holy of holies three times on the Day of Atonement. Further, He would have had to be employed, toiling from the time sin entered the creation (cf. 4:3).

“But now,” is one of those great transitional expressions (Rom. 3:21; 6:22; 7:6; 11:30; I Cor. 15:20; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:22; 3:8; Heb. 8:6), here transferring us from the inadequacy of interminable bloody animal offerings to the adequacy of the once and for all offering of the blood of Christ. The “once” describes absolute finality, concerning settlement of the universal sin problem, being accomplished at “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4), God’s heavenly Yom Kippur, the climax/zenith/apex of history. Then, according to God the Father’s precise appointment, His Son “has appeared” (perfect tense stressing completion, but aorist in I Tim. 3:16; I Pet. 1:20), having entered the temporal world from his eternal preexistence in the bosom of His Father (John 1:18). Christ’s chief mission was the holy, legal “putting away/cancellation/disannulling,” 7:18, of sin’s guilt producing faculty before the bar of God. Such satisfaction, according to the Father’s estimation, necessitated the Son of God’s “sacrifice of Himself,” the just for the unjust, so that He [Christ] might bring us to God” (I Pet. 3:18; cf. Heb. 2:14). Thus sacrifice is at the heart of the solution to the scourge of sin; but God, as the offended party, determines that which is satisfactory as atonement, not man. Man's attempts in this regard are indicative of supreme arrogance. According to God’s infinitely holy standard, an offering must be commensurate with the offence and He who has been offended. Owen explains:

Sin had erected a dominion, a tyranny over all men, as by a law. . . . No power of man, of any mere creature, was able to evacuate, disannul, or abolish this law of sin; for the destruction and dissolution of this law and power of sin, was the great end of the coming of Christ for the discharge of his priestly office in the sacrifice of himself. No other way could it be effected. . . . It is the

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60 Delitzsch, Hebrews, II, p. 130.
glory of Christ, it is the safety of the church, that by his one offering, by the sacrifice of himself once for all, he hath abolished sin as unto the law and condemning power of it.\textsuperscript{61}

As Isaac Watts has also written:

\begin{quote}
No blood of beasts on altars spilt  
Can cleanse the souls of men from guilt;  
But thou hast set before our eyes  
An all-sufficient sacrifice.
\end{quote}

(c) The heavenly sacrifice appears a second time, vs. 27-28.

The subject of finality and closure concerning Christ’s personal, priestly atonement, in comparison with the repetitive, ineffectual, animal, Aaronic priestly atonements, continues by means of one further illustration. It has been said that “death is so permanent;” there is no recycling opportunity as those vainly suppose who believe in reincarnation. Hence, the death of the Lord Jesus also has a finality about it.

1) The death of man results in judgment, v. 27.

“And inasmuch it is appointed/laid up [ἀποκείμαι, apokeimai, Col. 1:5; II Tim. 4:8] for men to die once, but after this [comes] judgment.” It is possible to quote a verse of the Bible and convey divine, revealed truth, and at the same time have taken that same verse completely out of context. How often this verse has been used to warn man of his certain appointment with death and inevitable judgment before the throne of God. And this is certainly true, even as this verse declares, yet it is here with reference to Christ rather than man. In other words, what might be a sober earthly maxim is applied to Christ. As death for man, body and soul, is according to divine appointment (Gen. 2:17; Luke 12:20; Rom. 6:23), that knows no reversal, no repetition, so the death of Christ was equally final, but especially with reference to what it accomplished. Aaron and the priesthood did not offer themselves, though they were repeatedly making offerings. However the fact of death is not all the judgment there is. Of course in Christ’s death there is the judgment of the believer’s sin (Isa. 53:4-6; I Pet. 2:24). However, more to the point here, there is subsequent judgment by Christ the appointed judge (Acts 17:31), this being inaugurated at His coming, which v. 28 anticipates.

2) The appearing of Christ brings salvation, v. 28.

“Thus Christ, also once having been offered [unto death] for the carrying/ bearing away of the sins of many, will appear a second time [leading] unto [consummate] salvation for those

\textsuperscript{61} Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 405.
eagerly/patiently awaiting [ἀπεκδέχομαι, apekdechomai] Him.”

When the high priest entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement, it was considered a most fearful, solemn act. On his breastpiece he bore the names of the twelve tribes (Exod. 28:29) for whom he made the blood offering upon the mercy seat, above the tables of the covenant, and just below the hovering wings of the wondering brazen cherubim. The tinkling of bells on the hem of his garment indicated that he continued to live in such holy circumstances (Exod. 28:31-35; Lev. 16:4). However, the climax was reached when the high priest exited from the holy of holies and made his “appearance” before the people. This signified that the offering had been accepted and thus all the sin of Israel had been propitiated. In Ecclesiasticus, a book of the Apocrypha, we are told of this time of rejoicing when Simon the Just, a high priest during the Hasmonean dynasty, emerged from the sanctuary.

How glorious he was when the people gathered around him as he came out of the sanctuary! Like the morning star among the clouds, like the sun when it is full; like the sun shining upon the temple of the Most High, and like the rainbow gleaming in glorious clouds; like roses in the days of the first fruits, like lilies by a spring of water, like a green shoot on Lebanon on a summer day; like fire and incense in the censer, like a vessel of hammered gold adorned with all kinds of precious stones; like an olive tree putting forth its fruit, and like a cypress towering in the clouds.\(^{62}\)

So Jesus Christ, having offered himself in death to atone for the “sins of many” with finality, and presented His offering to the Father, will also depart from the heavenly sanctuary a second time and make His appearance a second time before those who long for his glorious revelation (Phil. 3:20). Such eager anticipation will be concerned with who He is (the Son of God as High Priest) and what He has accomplished (satisfactorily, once and for all, borne away sin). Here then is the consummation of salvation for those who believed and were saved in the past. Thus Owen comments:

\begin{quote}
Christ’s appearance the second time, his return from heaven to complete the salvation of the church, is the great fundamental principle of our faith and hope, the great testimony we have to give against all his and our adversaries. . . . All true believers do live in a waiting, longing expectation of the coming of Christ. It is one of the most distinguishing characters of a sincere believer so to do. To such alone who look for him will the Lord Christ appear unto salvation. Then will be the great distinction among mankind, when Christ shall appear unto the everlasting confusion of some, and the eternal salvation of others;—a thing that the world loves not to hear of.\(^{63}\)
\end{quote}

\(^{62}\) Ecclesiasticus 50:5-10.

\(^{63}\) Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 417.
So John Cennick and Charles Wesley have penned of that great day:

Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
   Once for favored sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
  Swell the triumph of His train:
      Hallelujah!
God appears on earth to reign.

Now redemption, long expected,
   See in solemn pomp appear!
All his saints, by man rejected,
   Now shall meet Him in the air:
      Hallelujah!
See the day of God appear!

(c. In the realm of a new covenant priestly service, 10:1-18.

There is no sharp break with the preceding chapter as Hebrews continues to glide from theme to theme. The contrast between the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries recedes in emphasis while the effectual finality of Christ’s atonement, compared with the ineffectual character of the repetitive sacrifices under the Law, continues to be pressed home. This leads to a call for perseverance in renewed faith, 10:22, that, not having been commended since 6:12, now resurges in emphasis, 10:38-39, and prepares the way for the definition of faith along with the gallery of faithful models, 11:1-40.

(1) The sufficiency of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, vs. 1-10.

Contrast continues to be a medium for emphatic emphasis. Christ’s effectual priesthood has already been upheld as superior to that of Aaron, it being rooted in the preceding priesthood of Melchizedek, and the non-priestly tribe of Judah, 5:1-10; 7:1-22; it was also grounded upon a better covenant, 8:6-9:14, through the death, not of goats and calves and bulls, but Christ’s once-and-for-all self-offering, 9:9:15-28. Here we are now provided with more specific details of the ordaining of this priesthood, specifically its establishment according to the terms of the new covenant that God the Father contracted with His Son.

(a) The non-sanctifying ministry of the Law, vs. 1-4.

The dilemma of man is his inability, by means of vaunted religious form and ritual, to perfect his soul from imperfection, to cleanse his inner being. Even the devout Hebrew was faced with the same dilemma when he, having pursued “a law of righteousness,” nevertheless “did not arrive at that law. Why? Because he did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works” (Rom. 9:31-32). He put his trust in symbols rather than their significance, shadows instead of “the sun of righteousness . . . with healing in its wings” (Mal. 4:2).
1) It is an ineffectual shadow, v. 1.

“For the Law, it being a shadow [σκία, skia, cf. 8:5] of the good things that are coming, it not being the form itself/image [εἰκών, eikōn] of the real objects [πρᾶγμα, pragma], is never able, yearly, in continually offering the same sacrifices, to perfect/complete [τελείω, teleioō] those approaching.” There are four levels of representation of the Mosaic Law here.

a) The Law is a shadow of good things to come.

Religious men, legally driven, live in the shadows, even when they attend a Christian church and are not authentic Christians. Saphir explains that,

Shadow (σκία, skia) is put first emphatically; only a shadow or outline of the substantial and eternal blessings promised. A shadow has no substance, but brings before the mind the form of the body from which it is projected. The image itself (οὐχ ἀτιθήν τὴν εἰκόνα, ouk autēn tēn eikonā) is given to us in Christ; a full and perfect embodiment of the good things to come."4

A shadow, outlining and shading a source of great light, is an indistinct, passing representation that anticipates a more distinct, lasting embodiment in the future (cf. I Cor. 13:9-10). To trust in or follow a shadow is to stay in the shade, it inevitably leads to coolness, stumbling and becoming lost. The Mosaic covenant, particularly the whole priestly sacrificial system, is a mere outline of the saving righteousness of God while the new covenant is the full, soul warming shining of the saving power of God.

b) The Law is unable to provide the good things to come.

Already referenced in 9:11, these good things are future in relation to the old covenant. They are the superior features of the new covenant, its finality in dealing with sin, its ability to bring in the “perfection.” However, also included would be attending substantial blessings for the child of God, the particular riches of grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:7; 3:16) that the new covenant incorporates, 11:26. Similarly, these are lasting, soul satisfying and not fleeting like a shadow.

c) The Law is less than a precise image.

While the Law is a shadow of the priestly sacrificial system, it pales before the εἰκών, eikōn, the precise replica of the reality it depicts, that is Christ as the eikōn of God (II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; cf. χαρακτήρ, charaktēr, Heb. 1:3). A similar stark

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contrast was made in 3:1-6 where Moses is a slave in contrast with Christ as a Son. Thus believers are to conform to the eikôn of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29; II Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10).

d) The Law is incapable of bringing about perfection.

The Law, that is the “weak and useless” old covenant, “made nothing perfect,” 7:18-19. Similarly, sacrifices offered “cannot make the worshipper perfect in conscience,” 9:9. However the new covenant, as here, is able to “make perfect [τελειῶ, teleioô] those who draw near [by faith],” 12:23. Hence, this perfection involves “cleansing . . . [the] conscience from dead works to serve the living God,” 9:9, 14; cf. 10:22.

2) It cannot remedy consciousness of sin, v. 2.

“Otherwise, would they [sacrifices] not have ceased to be offered on account of those worshippers, once having been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?” The author raises a rather painful question concerning the hallowed Mosaic sacrificial system, but especially the comprehensive sacrifices on the Day of Atonement; even the greatest sacrificial feast was repetitive. If it was supposedly so good and effectual, how come there were annual offerings as well as the subsidiary sacrifices of immense numbers? If it be replied that many sins required many sacrifices, this would still indicate that each sacrifice was limited in its supposed efficacy. The same question could be posed with regard to the Roman Catholic mass, its repetition that is supposedly real and effectual while not being a memorial. However, of sobering significance would be the conclusion that weakness in efficacy suggests ineffectual cleansing! And such a status could not be considered a stimulus to assurance and joy, a peaceful and cleansed conscience. So Owen rightly concludes:

The discharge of conscience from its condemning right and power, by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ, is the foundation of all other privileges [such as church membership and the ordinances] we receive by the gospel. Where this is not, there is no real participation of any other of them. 65

3) It can only awaken consciousness of sin, v. 3.

“But in those [sacrifices] there is remembrance [ἀνάμνησις, anamnêsis] of sins yearly.” Surely the author is testifying from personal experience concerning how he had repeatedly, dutifully participated in Yom Kippur and at the same time deeply reflected upon the whole celebration, of sin supposedly covered or removed and yet in reality remaining. So that year after year he pondered

65 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 436.
his personal human plight, the result being misery rather than the joy of the justified. Thus the reminder of sin without a thorough, convincing remedy is like a physician advising his patient of a mortal condition that cannot be remedied. But further, if the consciousness of personal sin remains, then is it conceivable that in fact God has not remembered our sins (cf. 8:12; Isa. 43:25)? Should this not be the case, then enmity must remain. Hence there is allusion here to the principle that, “through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20), not only by means of legal command but also the fragility of the Mosaic legal system. In contrast, the Christian is commanded by Christ to partake of the Lord’s supper “in remembrance [ἀνάμνησις, anamnesis] of Me” (I Cor. 11:24), especially the contrasting effectual finality of His dealing with sin once-and-for-all. Thus it is strongly implied here that this different kind of remembrance brings about a confidence that sin has been vanquished. Consequently the conscience is not continually agitated by guilt.

4) It cannot propitiate sin, v. 4.

“For it is impossible [ἀδύνατος, adunatos] for the blood of bulls and goats to take/bear away sins.” It is unbiblical since even the Old Testament never declared that the sacrifices ordained of God were intrinsically effectual with regard to the cleansing of the soul (I Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:6-8; 50:1-23; 51:1-19; Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 6:20; 7:21-23; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8). At best these sacrifices were typical. It is thus inadequate in that God Himself has declared that He is not propitiated by them. It is ineffectual since there is no essential saving power associated with these sacrifices. It is illogical to suggest that an external, material religious rite is capable of internal, spiritual renovation. It is experientially untenable insofar as the conscience, having complied with the Law in offering animal sacrifices, continues to be reminded of sin. Thus Isaac Watts has penned:

Not all the blood of beasts,
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood that they.

Thus Pink well sums us the sheer inadequacy and impotence of outward religious form with regard to the conversion and sanctification of a sinful soul in the sight of God.

It was impossible for any mere creature to satisfy the demands of the all-mighty Governor of the universe. The highest angel could never have adequately made compensation for the tremendous
wrong which sin had done God, nor repair the loss of His manifest
 glory; yea, had not Christ’s sinless and holy humanity—in which
He performed the stupendous work of redemption—been united in
His deity, that could not have met the claims of God nor merited
eternal salvation for His people. Far less could the blood of beasts
vindicating the honor of an infinite Majesty, pacify His righteous
wrath, meet the requirements of His holy law, nor even cleanse the
conscience and heart of man. . . . Though the Levitical sacrifices
possessed, by God’s institution, an efficacy to remove an outward
and ceremonial defilement, they could not take away an inward and
moral pollution.66

(b) The sanctifying ministry of the atonement of Jesus Christ, vs. 5-10.

Thus we have been prepared in vs. 1-4 for yet another contrasting
heavenly revelation of Jesus Christ’s superior priesthood as the ground
of the effectual new covenant. He has already been presented as
superior as a High Priest over Moses, 3:1-6, superior as a High Priest
over Aaron according to the order of Melchizedek, 5:1-10; 7:1-28, and
superior as a High Priest instituting a new covenant, 8:1-9:28. But now
a further aspect of Jesus Christ as a High Priest concerns His heavenly
negotiation of this new agreement, according to unqualified obedience,
that results in permanent, secure sanctification for the believer. Here we
consider the saving negotiation that took place between God the Father
and God the Son that is reminiscent of the emphasis in John’s Gospel
concerning the Son’s eternal relationship with His Father (John 1:18;
4:34; 13:1, 3; 17:4-5).

1) Jesus Christ has come to make a self-offering, v. 5.

“Therefore, coming into the world He [Jesus Christ] says [to His
Father], ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not wish, but a body you
prepared for Me.’” Here we return to the author’s method of
frequently making free, Messianic application concerning Old
Testament passages, with regard to the person of Christ, based
upon Psalm 40:6-8. However the words of Psalm 40 in general,
but especially v. 12, refer to David. Hence Calvin comments at this
point:

And yet the fortieth Psalm, which he [the author of Hebrews]
quotes, seems to be improperly applied to Christ, for what is found
there by no means suits his character, such as, “My iniquities have
laid hold on me,” except we consider that Christ willingly took on
himself the sins of his members. The whole of what is said, no
doubt, rightly accords with David; but as it is well known that
David was a type of Christ, there is nothing unreasonable in
transferring to Christ what David declared respecting himself, and

especially when mention is made of abolishing the ceremonies of the Law, as the case is in this passage.67

But further, “My ears You have opened” (Ps. 40:6) is paraphrased in the LXX and included here as, “but a body you have prepared for me.” Such an opening of the ears is, as seemingly here, related to obedience (Isa. 50:5). Delitzsch describes this as “an easier and more general rendering of the Hebrew,”68 while Owen designates this as a synecdoche whereby the ear is a small part that represents the larger body, again by way of paraphrase, that better addresses the embodied, obedient coming of Christ.69

However, the immediate representation here concerns the preexistent Christ coming from the bosom of the Father as a self-sacrifice that so transcendently surpassed the former, repetitive, ineffectual animal sacrifices administered by the Aaronic priesthood. In eternity past there was counsel between the Father and His Son concerning the only conceivable, righteous way of salvation for fallen mankind that would be satisfactory to the Godhead. Thus the Father ordained His Son’s incarnation for the purpose of redemptive sacrifice involving humiliation, to which plan the Son responded with unqualified assent (John 1:14). As a consequence the Father “prepared a body” which process Owen describes:

The furniture of the Lord Christ (though he was the Son, and in his divine person the Lord of all) unto the discharge of his work of mediation was the peculiar act of the Father.—He prepared him a body; he anointed him with the Spirit; it pleased him that all fullness should dwell in him. From him he received all grace, power, consolation. Although the human nature was the nature of the Son of God, not of the Father, (a body prepared for him, not for the Father,) yet was it the Father who prepared that nature, who filled it with grace, who strengthened, acted, and supported it in its whole course of obedience.70

Hence we have here a further indication of Jesus Christ’s self-consciousness. In spite of bodily exposure to all sorts of trials “in the days of His flesh” (5:7), yet ever before Him was His awareness that His earthly frame was of His Father’s provision and design; such contemplation was one of the means by which “He learned obedience from the things which He suffered” (5:8).

2) Jesus Christ has come to make an acceptable offering, v. 6.

“[With] whole [animal carcass] offerings [ὀλοκαύνωμα, holokautōma] and concerning [sacrifices] for sins You [Father] were not

67 Calvin, Hebrews, p. xxx.
69 Owen, Hebrews, IV, pp. 457-460. Similarly Bruce, Hughes.
70 Ibid., p. 461.
pleased.” David was profoundly aware of both the enormity of his sin and the necessity of a radical remedy that transcended whatever material and substantial offerings he might conceive (Ps. 40:6, 12; 51:4-5; 16-17). The greater his sense of sin, the more impossible it seemed that mere animal sacrifices could obtain real satisfaction with God. All he could do was offer genuine confession and, by faith alone, trust in the mercy and grace of God (Ps. 40:1-4; 51:1-3, 7-9). Contrariwise, a lesser view of personal sin would tend to be content with formal religious offerings. So the Son of David is portrayed as agreeably, demonstrably representing the perspective of His Father in heaven that has always been true. God is concerned with holy affections, a humble attitude in the soul: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. . . . You will delight in righteous sacrifices” (Ps. 51:17, 19; cf. I Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24; Hos. 6:6; Jer. 7:21-26).

3) Jesus Christ has come to do the Father’s saving will, v. 7-10.

Again we move from the sacrificial to the covenantal aspect of Christ’s atonement (cf. 8:1-6, 7-13). Now added emphasis is laid upon the new covenant being established according to God the Son’s submission to the decree of God the Father. There is also covenantal superiority in the fact that whereas the old covenant was established between God the Father and his people (Exod. 24:3-8), the new covenant is an agreement between God the Father and God the Son, in eternity past, that was inaugurated in the presence of His people.

a) It is the Father’s inscripturated will, v. 7.

“They said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the scroll [κεφαλις, kephalis, head] of the book it has been written of Me) to do Your will, O God.” But what is the exact Scripture reference in mind here? Remembering the frequent manner in which the author makes application from the Old Testament, it is likely he is referring to the whole of the Word of God, but especially the Tanak, that is the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Assuming that the parenthesis focuses on the preceding clause, then indeed it is true that the whole of Scripture focuses on the promised coming of Messiah (John 5:46; Luke 24:27, 45). Jesus Christ has obediently come because He was sent by His Father, as John repeatedly indicates (4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 36, 37, 38; 6:29, 38, 39, 40, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 28, 29; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44, 45, 49; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21). Here is

71 Technically, the knob or head of the rod upon which a scroll of Scripture was wound, but probably a later Hebraism, according to the LXX, that became a synonym for “scroll.”
intimate explanation of the economic workings within the triunity of God. Thus the Son is always beholden to the Father’s commission, even unto death (Phil. 2:5-11). Hence Owen sums this up:

The foundation of the whole glorious work of the salvation of the church was laid in the sovereign will, pleasure, and grace of God, even the Father. Christ came only to do his will. The coming of Christ in the flesh was, in the wisdom, righteousness, and holiness of God, necessary to fulfill his will, that we might be saved unto his glory. The fundamental motive unto the Lord Christ, in his undertaking the work of mediation, was the will and glory of God.72

b) It is the Father’s new covenant will, v. 8-9.

The preceding vs. 5-7, concerning Psalm 40:6-8, are now expounded to emphasize the stark contrast existing between the first or old covenant and the second or new covenant. This truth being established, then v. 10 will press home the practical conclusion that, through the new covenant, the Christian obtains permanent, effectual sanctification.

i The old covenant never effected satisfaction, v. 8.

“After [this] saying [above] that, ‘Sacrifices and offerings and whole [animal carcass] offerings and [sacrifices] for sin You have not desired, nor have You had pleasure in them’ (which have been offered according to the Law).” Logical sequence is now emphasized concerning vs. 5-6 that precede v. 7. Even God at times expressed displeasure with those who fulfilled the Law that He had in fact established. In other words, it is possible to offer obedience to God with which He is nevertheless dissatisfied. By implication here, even God indicated the inherent weakness of the Mosaic covenant, and thus the necessity of a better covenant (7:18-19).

ii The new covenant supersedes the old covenant, v. 9.

“Then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will.’ [In so doing] He takes away the first [covenant] in order that the second [covenant] might stand/be established.” The distinction that David made concerning mere outward conformity and inner willingness (Ps. 40:6-8) becomes the illustrative basis for contrast between the first and second covenants. It is God Himself who

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72 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 472.
decrees covenantal replacement. In “taking away” the first Mosaic covenant, he retires it. It “is becoming obsolete and growing old [and] is ready to disappear” (8:13). On the other hand He establishes the more effectual second covenant (Rom. 7:1-4), that is through the willingness of Christ that is so much more efficient that the weak, shallow willingness of man that the Law revealed. Of course Christ’s willingness confronted “the valley of the shadow of death” (Ps. 23:4), that is by means of steadfastness in the face of sorrow and grief (Luke 9:51; 12:50; John 18:10-11; Heb. 5:7-9).

c) It is the Father’s sanctifying will, v. 10.

“By which will [θελημα, thelēma] we have been sanctified [ἀγιάζω, hagiazō] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” The Mosaic covenant was bilateral, requiring the cooperation of the will of man. The “will” here is that righteous, gracious, and sovereign decree of the Father whereby the salvation of His elect would certainly be effected through the willing sacrificial offering of His Son. Human will, even the response of faith that retains validity, is not a factor here. It is the divine initiative coupled with divine certainty that makes the new covenant more effectual; it is based upon a unilateral covenant established by the will of God the Father that is fulfilled by the obedience of God the Son. As Hughes rightly comments: “The divine will cannot fail of performance.” In the saving of sinners, God does not plan, nor does His Son act, according to the basis of mere possibility, but certainty. Thus Horatius Bonar writes:

Thy love to me, O God,
   Not mine, O lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest,
   And set my spirit free.

Thy grace alone, O God,
   To me can pardon speak;
Thy power alone, O Son of God,
   Can this sore bondage break.

Consequently, this sovereign saving incorporates total or definitive, positional, not primarily progressive, sanctification, a divine consecration forever. This is complete judicial cleansing, which the perfect tense upholds, and for this reason it is “once for all” (7:27; 9:26, 28), effectually sufficient. Even the best of innumerable “whole [animal carcass] offerings” cannot compare with “the [one] body of Jesus Christ.”

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73 Hughes, Hebrews, p. 399.
(2) The sufficiency of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, 11-18.

The author of Hebrews seems skilled in argumentation, but particularly by means of progress in his a fortiori arguments. So he repeats his basic thesis of Christ's infinitely superior high priesthood and its unique ability to sanctify the soul, yet now he adds even more to what has preceded, in terms of both linguistic expression and doctrinal expansion.

(a) The satisfactory priesthood, vs. 11-14.

Again, using the argument of stark comparison, the author is convinced that the more we comprehend the transcendent, potent superiority of Jesus Christ's atonement, compared with the impotent earthly Mosaic pattern, the more we will be steadfast through assurance. This is to be the resultant subsequent thrust of vs. 22-23.

1) The old priesthood is ineffectual, v. 11.

“And every priest, on the one hand, stands daily ministering and repeatedly offering [as now in Jerusalem?] the same sacrifices which are never able to remove sins.” The emphasis moves from the high priest’s activity on the Day of Atonement to the daily offering of sacrifices by means of a plurality of priests, each according to his allotted course of service. Further, these priests were never to sit down in the temple sanctuary (Deut. 10:8; 17:12; 18:7); royalty sits, but those who serve submissively stand. However, for all of the Aaronic priesthood’s devoted activity, its incessant, correct performance according to divine institution, it was incapable of obtaining the satisfactory pardon of God for even one sin! Repetition, as with the mass or rosary, etc., is no guarantee of effectiveness (Acts 20:34). This is a sobering truth for any who place confidence in the efficacy of religious formality, even through the agency of a “qualified” religious functionary.

2) The new priesthood is effectual, vs. 12-14.

The contrasting session or posture of Jesus Christ establishes His royalty, even His Sonship next to His Father, but preeminently His effectual priesthood. Here also biblical Christianity distinguishes itself from all other religions that admonish sacrificial offerings.

a) Through Christ’s session, v. 12.

“But, on the other hand, this Man, once having offered sacrifice for sins unto perpetuity/forever [εἰς τὸ δεσποτικόν, 74] eis

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74 This perpetuity refers to the effectiveness forever of Christ’s atonement, and not to His session which idea is grammatically possible. However, Christ will arise to return a second time, 9:28.
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to diēnēkes], sat down [κατάκεφαλή, kathizō, aorist] at the right hand of God.” Here the Messianic sense of Psalm 110:1 is woven into the description of Christ’s session beside His Father. Here also is an expansion of 1:13; 8:1, but also Zechariah 6:12-13. Thus Heaven is our only Cathedral where Christ our only Bishop (1 Pet. 2:25) and High Priest is seated!

C. H. Spurgeon further expounds:

[T]he very fact that Christ is in heaven, accepted by his Father, proves that his work must be done. Why, beloved, as long as an ambassador from our country is at a foreign court, there must be peace; and as long as Jesus Christ our Savior is at his Father’s court, it shows that there is real peace between his people and his Father. Well, as he will be there for ever, that shows that our peace must be continual, and like the waves of the sea, shall never cease. But that peace could not have been continual, unless the atonement had been wholly made, unless justice had been entirely satisfied; and, therefore, from that very fact it becomes certain that the work of Christ must be done. What! Christ enter heaven—Christ sit on his Father’s right hand before all the guilt of his people was rolled away? Ah! no; he was the sinner’s substitute; and unless he paid the sinner’s dome, and died the sinner’s death, there was no heaven in view for me. He stood in the sinner’s place, and the guilt of all his elect was imputed to him. God accounted him as a sinner, and as a sinner, he could not enter heaven until he had washed all that sin away in a crimson flood of his own gore—unless his own righteousness had covered up the sins which he had taken on himself, and unless his own atonement had taken away those sins which had become his by imputation, and the fact that the Father allowed him to ascend up on high—that he gave him leave, as it were, to enter heaven, and that he said, “Sit thou on my right hand,” proves that he must have perfected his Father’s work, and that his Father must have accepted his sacrifice. But he could not have accepted it if it had been imperfect. Thus, therefore, we prove that the work must have been finished, since God the Father accepted it. Oh! glorious doctrine! This Man has done it; this Man has finished it; this Man has completed it. He was the Author, he is the Finisher; he was the Alpha, he is the Omega. Salvation is finished, complete; otherwise, he would not have ascended up on high, nor would he also sit at the right hand of God. Christian! rejoice! Thy salvation is a finished salvation, atonement is wholly made; neither stick nor stone of thine is wanted; not one stitch is required to that glorious garment of his—not one patch to that glorious robe that he has finished. ’Tis done—’tis done perfectly; thou art accepted perfectly in his righteousness; thou art purged in his blood.75

b) Through Christ’s conquests, v. 13.

“For the future waiting [ἐκδέχομαι, ekdechomai] until His enemies be placed as a footstool for His feet.” Psalm 110:1 is again (1:13) further imported into the reference to Christ’s enthronement. Thus, in the Son of God’s own conquest of death and resultant exaltation, there is anticipation of stupendous consequences that will be associated with eschatological fulfillment. Clearly all of Christ’s enemies are not immediately brought into subjection, inevitable as this may be. Thus, although “You have put all things in subjection under His feet, . . . [nevertheless] now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him” (2:8). Thus Paul declares, “He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death” (I Cor. 15:25-26). These enemies of Christ are “Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel” (Acts 4:27). The length of the hiatus, in which the gospel instrumentally continues to “plunder the strong man’s house” (Matt. 12:29), is the Father’s to determine. Thus “He [God the Father] has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man [God the Son] whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).


“For by one offering He has [sacrificially] perfected [τελειῶ, teleioo, perfect tense] unto perpetuity/forever those who are sanctified.” It is the passive waiting of v. 13 that reinforces the finality of the “one offering.” Jesus Christ is not up and about like an Aaronic priest, but resting beside His Father. The atonement He offered to His Father was accepted; it was not necessary for Him to return to earth for the purpose of making additional offerings. As it were, He is waiting on the dividends of His good investment. Such a sacrificial investment of His person established a perfect and permanent sanctification (1:3) that is intrinsic to the soul, not merely extrinsic with regard to the body. Such sanctification is both declarative in a judicial sense and at the same time effectual forever in that “the conscience is [regeneratively, 10:22] cleansed from dead works to serve the living God” (10:14).

(b) The new covenant priesthood, vs. 15-18.

The Hebrew Christian usually brings with him a legacy of saturation concerning the old Mosaic covenant, indeed it is as if this agreement had everlasting validity. However the author continues to press home the superiority of the new covenant, especially here concerning its potency with regard to the real forgiveness of sin, not merely its judicial
deferment through the promissory note of the Aaronic priesthood (Rom. 3:25; Acts 14:16; 17:30). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not only instrumental in this regard, but also in the instruction of Scripture.

1) It is Holy Spirit directed, v. 15.

“And the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us, for after having said.”

The new covenant was the actual saving work of Christ, the deed of His atonement. However Scripture, the outbreathing of God’s truth through the Holy Spirit (II Tim. 3:16; I Pet. 1:20-21), is the objective witness concerning the new covenant’s validity that should especially impress the Hebrew Christian. This Spirit of God, in inseparable union with Scripture, brings “full assurance of faith” since He “sprinkles our hearts clean from an evil conscience,” even as our water baptism signified, v. 22.

2) It is promised in Jeremiah 31:33-34, vs. 16-17.

Whereas in 8:8-12 the author quoted Jeremiah 31:31-34 as being integral to his major proclamation of the superior new covenant, there now follows a brief quotation of parts of vs. 33-34. Here a more narrow focus is in mind, namely the practical, more effectual purpose of new covenant being God’s actual, efficacious forgiveness of the sins of His people.

a) Inner renovation, v. 16.

“This covenant [διαθήκη, diathēkē] [is that] which I will covenant [διατίθημι, diatithēmi] with them after those days, says the Lord; I will place My laws upon their heart.” For Jeremiah this was a future work of Messiah. But now that the covenant has been cut through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the indication is that participants, for whom this superior agreement was intended, have undergone a radical change. Whereas Moses’ ministry was essentially environmental, according to external instruction and demand, the new covenant is the change of individual human nature. Herein is the distinguishing characteristic of biblical Christianity compared with religion in general (John 3:1-8; Tit. 3:4-7; II Cor. 5:17). However, a problem still remains, for if renewal comes in the present so that righteousness results in the future, nevertheless what about justification of the past? Of course the old covenant could neither renew the heart or actually deal with sin whether past, present, or future.

b) Outer justification, v. 17.

“[He then says,] ‘And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’” Here is the declaration of God the Father concerning the unilateral new covenant that has been
covenanted by God the Son. Here is reassurance concerning the justification of he who believes in Jehovah of Israel’s new covenant cutting Messiah. Here is pronouncement from God Himself that there is justification “as a gift by His [God the Father’s] grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). Thus God the Father really is both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). In the final analysis, what really counts for me as a sinner is not so much what I may think of my sin as what God thinks. If I am untroubled while God still holds me guilty for my sin, then that is the most perilous of conditions to be in. If I am troubled with my sin because God holds me guilty for my sin, then that is a dangerous condition to be in. If I am troubled with my sin although God declares me to be not guilty, that is a sad and unnecessary condition to be in. But if I am not troubled with my sin because God has pardoned my sin and no longer regards me as guilty, then that is the condition which the author of Hebrews endeavors to establish for the Hebrew, as well as the Gentile Christian, as vs. 22-23 confirm.

3) It is sin satisfaction with finality, v. 18.

“Hence where [there is] forgiveness of these things/sinful matters, no longer [is there] offering concerning sin.” Thus if God declares that sin has in reality been forgiven absolutely, once and for all for those who believe in Jesus Christ as God’s final Lamb (John 1:29), then it is impossible for Him to require further sacrifice. In addition, this finality means the end of the ineffectual Aaronic Priesthood and thus the Mosaic covenant that gave it birth. And thus we also reach finality with the main doctrinal argument of Hebrews. As Owen explains,

here we are come unto a full end of the dogmatical part of this epistle, a portion of Scripture filled with heavenly and glorious mysteries,—the light of the church of the Gentiles, the glory of the people Israel, the foundation and bulwark of faith evangelical.76

So Delitzsch sums up the preceding teaching:

The three main thoughts developed are, as we have seen: (1) That Christ’s priesthood, being of Melchizedek nature, is as highly exulted above the Levitical as heaven is above earth (7:1-25); (2) that Christ has accomplished, by His one high-priestly self-oblation, that which the Levitical priesthood with all its sacrifices was unable to accomplish (7:26-9:12); and (3) that our present and future salvation is assured in Him who, as the eternal Priest upon His royal throne, awaits the appointed time when He shall come again, no longer as a sin-bearer, but in heavenly majesty for final judgment (9:13-10:18).

76 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 497.
d. In the realm of a new covenant living way, 10:19-39.

After the Aaronic Priesthood has been revealed as inferior when compared with the Melchizedekian Priesthood of Jesus Christ (7:11-17), then this superior High Priest, who has brought in “a better hope” (7:19), is declared to be “the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises” (7:6). Hence following recollection of the better promise of a new covenant according to Jeremiah 31:31-34 (8:7-13), there has been relentless contrast between the old and the new covenants in terms of priestly sacrifice (9:1-14), priestly mediation (9:15-28), and priestly service (10:1-18). Now we move from the realm of comprehension of this truth to the more practical consideration of confident pilgrimage along this “new and living way,” v. 19.

(1) An exhortation to hold fast to the expression of our hope, vs. 19-25.

The preceding doctrine of Hebrews has not been pressed home by the author merely for the cause of intellectual stimulation. At the same time there has been recognized the necessity of a solid intellectual foundation that progresses from “milk . . . [to] solid food” (5:11-14). However the end purpose has been “cleansing of the conscience” that results in “service to the living God” (9:14), that is “stimulation of one another to love and good deeds” in the “regular assembling . . . and encouragement of one another” (10:24-25). But furthermore there is a necessary frame of mind and soul whereby this quality of church life is attained, namely the integration of assurance, hope, and especially faith.

(a) The expression of full assurance of faith, vs. 19-22.

Vital to the accomplishment of this fruitful fellowship is an attitude of “confidence,” v. 19, and “full assurance of faith,” v. 22. Such a result presumes comprehension of and prompting by the preceding doctrine.

1) Through confidence in the blood of Jesus, v. 19.

“Therefore, brethren, having confidence to have entrance into the holy place [τὸν ἁγίον, τὸν ἁγίον] by blood of Jesus.” The personal address here of “brethren,” 3:1, 12, distinguishes felt pastoral interest from detached abstraction. On the one hand the type has already been described, 9:3, in which divinely appointed situation the high priest alone could enter into the very earthly dwelling place of God, yearly on the Day of Atonement, though not without the sprinkling of blood, 9:7. On the other hand the antitype here is that of the believer-priest having the privilege, as it were, continually, 7:25, to enter heaven itself “by the blood of Jesus.” In other words, whereas any child of Adam would be presumptuous in attempting to approach God directly on his own terms, thus ensuring repudiation, here the only acceptable term is the intercessory shed blood of Jesus, who is also the Son of God (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). The fitness of Christ in this respect has already
been strenuously affirmed; summary recollection is now expected inevitably to stimulate a hopeful approach (4:16; I John 2:1-2).

2) Through the veil of Jesus’ flesh, v. 20.

“By which [entrance] to inaugurate/newly dedicate [ἐγκαινιζω, enkainizō] for us a new/enduringly fresh [πρόσφατος, prosphatos] and living way through the veil [καταπτήσμα, katapetasma], that which is His flesh.” This superior heavenly transaction involved both death and resurrection; hence, unlike the dead Mosaic offerings that remained dead, this Jesus remains a triumphant living sacrifice, 7:24-25. Of course the newness also contrasts with the obsolete Mosaic order, 8:13. Further, in alluding to another type, the rent veil of Herod’s temple (Matt. 27:51), following which resurrection was inaugurated (Matt. 27:52-53; 28:5-6), we are directed to the antitype, the rent body of Jesus, “His flesh” (Luke 24:30; Acts 2:42; 20:7). The rent earthly veil, like the whole Aaronic priesthood, was quite ineffectual in itself; nevertheless it pointed to the rent heavenly veil, ordinary flesh being restrictive, that has lasting efficacy, 6:19. Again, there is only real mediation, propitiation for human sin in the “blood of Jesus,” v. 19; 10:1, 4.

3) Through the reign of Jesus’ priesthood, v. 21.

“And [since we have] a great high priest over the house of God.” The term “house of God,” τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ, ton oikon tou theou, recalls where “Christ was faithful as a Son over His house [in comparison with Moses the servant]—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end” (3:1; cf. I Tim. 3:15). Here the whole people of God is described, the remnant natural branches as addressees as well as the wild olive branches (Rom. 11:5, 17). However it is the sacrificial potency and heavenly position of Christ’s priesthood (Zech. 6:11-13), so infinitely superior to that of Aaron, establishing headship, lordship, and authority, that gives this household its security, permanency, purity, and solidarity.

4) Through the cleansing of Jesus’ priesthood, v. 22.

“Let us draw near with true/sincere [ἀληθινός, alēthinos] hearts in full assurance [πληροφορία, plēroforia] of faith having our hearts sprinkled [ῥαντιζω, rhantizō] from an evil conscience and having washed [καθαρίζω, katharizo] our bodies with clean water.” Adoption into the house of God requires that we unhesitatingly, boldly, intimately relate to the Head of the household. Hence comprehension of the bona fide terms of residency that we possess will stimulate “a full measure of faith/understanding/conviction” (cf. Col. 2:2; I Thess. 1:5), a “drawing near” (4:16; Ps. 73:28),

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77 The use of ῥαντιζω, rhantizō is only found elsewhere in the New Testament in Heb. 9:13, 19, 21; Rev. 19:13.
a) The house residency qualification.

Sacrificial cleansing of the conscience [συνείδησις, suneīdēsis, literally knowledge with oneself]. Formerly it was evil, accusatory with very good reason, leading to shame and guilt. Now through “the blood of Christ” (9:14) “sprinkled” (perfect participle, suggesting completion, cf. 9:13; Ezek. 36:25-27; I Pet. 1:2) an inner catharsis has come about whereby “a true/sincere heart” results. Here then is the only ground by which a holy God can be acceptably approached.

b) The house residency signification.

“Washed” (perfect participle, suggesting completion) is perhaps a reference to baptismal cleansing of the body, in parallel with the preceding “sprinkling,” though Calvin and Owen identify water here as symbolic of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:26). Bruce suggests a likely reference to “the requirement that the priest on the Day of Atonement should ‘bathe his body in water’ (Lev. 16:4) before putting on the linen vestments in which he was to approach God in the holy of holies” (cf. I Pet. 3:21).

(b) The expression of hope, v. 23.

“Let us hold fast/securely the confession of [our] the hope, without wavering/without leaning/not being wobbly, for faithful/reliable is He who promised.” The good, well instructed conscience of v. 22 is the gyroscope of the soul that produces the stability here described. A bad conscience results in a life that is shaky and wandering. That which stimulates gyroscopic balance is grasping “the confession of the hope,” namely that which the author has so strenuously, repetitively upheld, and defined in 3:6 as the truth that “Christ was faithful as a Son over His house,” in 3:14 as the truth that “we have become partakers of Christ,” in 4:14 as the truth that “we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.” It is this truth which activates the gyroscope of the soul and thus is productive of spiritual sturdiness in turbulent times. However such is the laying hold of this truth that it inevitably expresses itself; it cannot be retained in a hidden manner (I Tim. 6:12-13). But further, the impetus, the driving force that this embraced truth generates can be relied upon to be in unfaltering supply because, “He who promised [the Father through His Son] is utterly reliable” (6:13; 11:11; 12:26).

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78 Bruce, Hebrews, p. 255.
(c) The expression of love and good deeds, vs. 24-25.

The thought of “making confession of [our] the hope” is further expounded upon, except that it goes beyond mere verbal testimony. Further, the process of ignition involves mutual interaction, not individual contemplation. In other words, the whole context of this inducement is local fellowship, not individual contemplation.


“Let us thoughtfully consider [how we might] stimulate/arouse [παροξυσμός, paroxusmos, Acts 15:39] one another to love and good works/deeds.” The renewed mind is to be employed (3:1), in conjunction with a good conscience. However this end is to be brought about as we are to inspire/kindle each other in this course. Surely this goes beyond the offering of a suggestion or a course of action that another could take. Rather it has in mind the stimulation of virtue and kindness in another through our own self evident virtue and kindness (Prov. 27:17). It is in Christian fellowship, mutual admiration, that spiritual osmosis takes place. “For not one of us lives for himself” (Rom. 14:7). Spiritual gifts operate “for the common good. . . . [for] the same care for one another. . . . for edification” (I Cor. 12:7, 25; 14:26; cf. Eph. 4:12, 16).

2) Through encouraging fellowship, v. 25.

“Not forsaking [ἐκκαταλείπω, enkataleipō] our own gathering/assembling together [ἐπισυναγωγή, episunagogê, II Thess. 2:1], as is the custom [ἐθος, ethos] of some, but exhorting/encouraging [one another] and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.”

a) Christian assembly is the forum of “love and good deeds.”

The “gathering together” here envisages local church assemblies, except that the Hebrew rather than the Greek (ἐκκλησία, ekklēsia, cf. 12:23) nuance is employed, being appropriate for the addressees attending various Messianic fellowships.

b) Christian disassembly discourages “love and good deeds.”

Some Christians have justified their neglect of church gatherings, the preaching of the Word, participation around the Lord’s Table, and involvement in mutual concern. Inherent in this neglect was the belief that there was nothing of great importance to be received or, for that matter, to be given. Here may have been arrogant, self-satisfied, aloof, unsettled transients. There may also be allusion to secret disciples who feared persecution by Jews and worldly ostracism.
c) Christian assembly must exhort to “love and good deeds.”

Here is recommendation of mutual encouragement that harks back to v. 24. There was the need of corrective instruction concerning ignorance of the interdependent role of members of the body of Christ, as well as the contribution in this regard of spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:4-30), spiritual cohesion Eph. 4:15-16; I Pet. 2:5). It may well be that some delinquent disciples were known to be involved in dubious behavior; hence the warning of v. 26.

d) Christian assembly is motivated by “the day drawing near.”

This is the day of Christ’s return, cf. Acts 2:20; I Cor. 1:8; 3:13; 5:5; II Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; I Thess. 5:2; II Thess. 2:2; II Pet. 3:10; Jude 6; Rev. 6:17. According to Delitzsch it is, “the day of days, the final, the decisive day of time, the commencing day of eternity, breaking through and breaking up for the church of the redeemed the night of the present.” The intimation is that local church ministry will include encouraging exposition on the theme of “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Tit. 2:13).

(2) An exhortation not to shrink back to destruction, vs. 26-39.

This final warning passage contrasts “the new and living way” through faith in “the blood of Jesus,” that results in a “cleansed conscience,” then “full assurance of faith” and “love and good works” in “hopeful fellowship,” vs. 19-25, with the lifestyle of those who, in mutinous separation, “shrink back to destruction,” vs. 26-39.

We should recall the warning of 6:4-8 concerning “falling away” in which it was suggested that the author, so full of Christ’s “once and for all” offering, therefore impressed upon his audience that “it was impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame,” v. 6. Hence, backsliders could not become converted all over again; rather they repentantly “will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises,” 6:12; cf. I John 1:9.

(a) Concerning present sinning, vs. 26-31.

Here is the present state of a number of nominal Christians who are judged according to their outward lifestyle. We know they forsake Christian fellowship. Now we learn of their habitual sinning, but especially a demeaning of the divine person and atoning work of the Lord Jesus, which must include the spurring of the gracious Holy

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79 Delitzsch, Hebrews, II, p. 183,
Spirit’s personal testimony. However, there is no certain evidence that these same people are true believers, even as v. 29 will indicate.

1) The consequences of backsliding, vs. 26-27.

In John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* he portrays the lifestyle characteristics of three notable apostates. There is the reprobate man in the iron cage, Ignorance deluded by a false gospel, and Temporary who gradually falls away from profession of the truth, the first mentioned especially being identified with this warning passage. He also portrays authentic backsliding by means of Christian and Little-faith.


“For if we are willingly/intentionally sinning, after having received the mature/perceptive knowledge of the truth [τὴν ἐπιγνωσίν τῆς ἀληθείας, τὲν ἐπιγνῶσιν τῆς ἀλήθειας], no longer concerning sins is there sacrifice remaining.” Whereas in 2:1; 3:12; 5:2 we have sin in the Christian described, such a unbelief, here we are dealing with a “high handed,” a “fist in the face of God” attitude described in Numbers 15:27-31, as illustrated in vs. 32-36; cf. Ps. 19:13; Heb. 12:16-17. It is defiance in the light of “the full knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4; II Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Tit. 1:1; cf. I Tim. 4:3; also John 8:32; I John 2:21; II John 1). Delitzsch is probably correct in identifying this as reversion to the dead works of Judaism. Consequently it is sin which leads to divine abandonment (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). John Bunyan describes this as sinning “past grace.” In *The Barren Fig-Tree*, which is subtitled, “The Doom and Downfall of the Fruitless Professor,” based on Luke 13:6-9 and published in 1682, he describes five signs, which are summarized as follows.

a. A person may be past grace when he has withstood and abused and worn out God’s patience. Having come to the fig-tree for fruit, and found none, God repeatedly shakes and warns it, yet still without result, so that He eventually calls for his axe!

b. A person may be past grace when God lets him alone and allows him to do anything without the restraint of difficulties, or concern with regard to holiness. The fig-tree is no longer tended, but left to grow wild.

c. A person may be past grace when his heart becomes so hard and stony that it is discarded by God as impenetrable. This is the hardness of a Lot’s wife or Pharaoh. It is a

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80 Ibid., p. 185.
hardness which God judicially hardens to a point of hopelessness.

d. A person may be past grace when he determines to garrison his heart against the Word of God. This person purposely shuts out the light so as to enjoy darkness. This fig-tree has a root that bears gall and wormwood.

e. A person may be past grace when he scoffs against the Lord and despises His messengers while being determined to pursue his own course. Thus God sets himself against such as these by causing them to perish rather thansavingly believe.\textsuperscript{81}

However, Bunyan makes the further qualifications. First, such abandonment always follows persistent, heinous rebellion. Second, distinction must be made between a despairing soul abandoned by God and a distraught soul kept by God.\textsuperscript{82}

b) The prospect of judgment, v. 27.

“But a fearful/terrifying expectation of judgment and enflamed fury which is about to consume those who are adversaries [\(\upsilon\epsilon\nu\nu\alpha\nu\tau\iota\omicron\varsigma\), hupenantios].” This wrath will be of God as a “consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29; cf. Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Isa. 26:11; 33:14; Ezek. 36:5; II Thess. 1:7-9). Note that those defiant sinners of v. 26 are here described as intransigent opposers, hupenantios being a stronger form of enantios, which is descriptive of opposition. Thus, “because of their stubbornness and unrepentant hearts, they store up wrath for themselves in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5). Such was the hopeless despair of Esau (12:16-17) and Judas (Matt. 27:3-5).

2) The Old Testament analogy, vs. 28-29.

Here the intent of the preceding sober exhortation is made clear, namely serious reflection on present accountability that should result in the repudiation of any tendency to act as these aggressive apostates. Again by means of an a fortiori argument, the new covenant Christian is confronted with heightened responsibility.

a) The severe judgment of Moses, v. 28.

“Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on [the testimony of] two or three witnesses.” Delitzsch explains:

Some eleven or twelve kinds of sin are denounced in the Mosaic law as incurring the extreme penalty of death,
e.g. willful murder, obstinate disobedience to parents, kidnapping, adultery, etc. Here the cases had in view seem to be chiefly the sins of blasphemy (Lev. 24:11-16), idolatry and seduction thereto (Deut. 17:2-7), and false prophesying (Deut. 18:20); but especially those denounced at Deuteronomy 17:2-7, where the exact phrase, ἐπὶ δυσὶ μάρτυριν ἢ ἐπὶ τρισὶ μάρτυριν [epi dusi martusin ἢ epi trisi martusin, LXX] occurs as the condition required before passing sentence of death, . . . Apostasy from Jehovah for the service of other gods is denounced in this passage of Deuteronomy as the extremest breach possible of the Mosaic law, and as such visited with the extremest penalties.83

In such cases, there was no room for mercy. Hence, if an even more heinous sin could be contemplated, as v. 29 now portrays, then the penalty could not possibly be less strict, and mercy remotely possible. In other words, punishment for premeditated, calculated sin against the new covenant ought to be more severe that comparable rebellion against the old covenant.

b) The more severe judgment of the Son of God, v. 29.

“By what worse just punishment/retribution [τιμωρία, timōria] do you think he will deserve/be considered worthy, [than he] who has stamped/trampled upon the Son of God, and considered common/worthless the blood of the new covenant [cf. 13:20] in which he was sanctified, and has treated contemptuously the Spirit of grace?” In The Pilgrim’s Progress, the despairing man in the iron cage tells Christian.

I have crucified him [Christ] to myself afresh [Heb. 6:6]; I have despised his person [Luke 19:14]; I have despised his righteousness; I have ‘counted his blood an unholy thing;’ I have ‘done despite to [spitefully opposed, insulted] the Spirit of grace’ [Heb. 10:28-29]. Therefore I have shut myself out of all the promises [of God], and there now remains to me nothing but threatenings, dreadful threatenings, fearful threatenings of certain judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour me as an adversary.”

It is significant that after Christian has concluded his visit to the house of Interpreter, he comments that all seven scenes have “put him in hope and fear,” and were intended to “make me stable.”85

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85 Ibid, p. 102.
Having spurned the Son of God.

To “stamp/trample upon” (Matt. 7:6; Luke 8:5) means to treat the divine person of Christ with intense, even demonstrable contempt. This is repudiation of former admiration. Such a person has attended the faithful, persuasive preaching of Jesus as the Son of God. But later in life this witness is regarded, as with Esau, as a mess of pottage (12:16-17), as less than earthly gain. Such was the privilege and treachery of Judas.

Having profaned the blood of the covenant.

There is also mockery of the sacrificial blood of the Son of God, “in which He was sanctified.” According to Owen and Pink, it is Jesus Christ who is consecrated by His shed blood, not the apostate. In a similar manner liberals have sometimes caricatured the biblical emphasis of “being saved by His blood” (Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 13:12; Rev. 1:5) as “slaughterhouse religion.”

Having outraged the Spirit of grace.

This must be that sin against the Holy Spirit which opposes His conspicuous, felt testimony (Matt. 12:31-32). The kind and merciful wooing/striving of God (Gen. 6:3), His manner and message, is repulsed with rude defiance. So John Brown sums up this spiritual derelict:

Such then is the crime of the apostate. He treats with the greatest conceivable indignity two divine Persons—the Son and the Spirit of God; he “tramples under foot” Him whom angels adore; he counts polluted and polluting that which is the sole source of sanctification; he repays benignity with insult—the benignity of a divine Person with the most despiteful insult. His punishment, then, must be inconceivably sever, and absolutely certain.

3) The unchanging principle, vs. 30-31.

Perhaps no one fits the preceding description of an apostate better than Judas who, in being so privileged in his exposure to Christ, nevertheless was determined to betray his Master for thirty pieces

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86 This is grammatically legitimate, though not a common interpretation. The alternative of the sanctification here referring to an apostate, rather than Christ, may be explicable with regard to the individual who, although unsaved, yet is subject to a sanctified environment (1 Cor. 7:14).

of silver, even with a kiss. Jesus declared of him, “woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24). Judas was also designated as “the son of perdition,” that is “the one destined to perish” (John 17:12). So “he went away and hanged himself” (Matt. 27:5), being destined for “his own place” (Acts 1:25).

a) The Lord will judge His people, v. 30.

“For we know He who said, ‘Vengeance/awarding retribution [ἐκδίκησις, ekdikēsis] is Mine, I will repay [the offender]’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’” Here the author soberly identifies with his audience. The free, perhaps popular quotations from the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:35-36), though identical with Romans 12:19, indicate that God, according to His inviolate holy character, will not only judge for His people but, in this instance, also judge against them (I Pet. 4:17-18). This will include those who may have apparently attained a high level of profession and acceptance (Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 13:25-28). God makes no moral concessions.

b) The Lord will judge imparting terror, v. 31.

“Fearful/dreadful [it is] for he who falls into the [judging] hands of the living God.” The author is earnestly moved to persuade according to II Cor. 5:11. The emphasis here is upon the trembling horror that awaits the sham religious professor. Since we live in a moral universe governed by a holy God, there is an inevitability, a certainty that the greatest of crimes, the most hidden of crimes will be appropriately punished. But why is God’s prospective judgment such a frightful prospect.

i) There will be the element of bewilderment and anxiety in an environment of prospective doom rather than bliss.

ii) There will be the peeling away of a facade of religiosity that reveals naked corruption and consequent shame.

iii) There will be appreciation of the worthlessness of a sham confession of faith, of ill-motivated, tawdry works.

iv) There will be disgraceful confrontation with the judging Christ we unfaithfully betrayed, demeaned, blasphemed.

v) There will be an awareness of personal unholiness that finds it unbearable to endure before a holy God.
vi) There will be a sense of utter despair since there is no prospect of mercy and grace, only eternal damnation.

Bruce makes reference to *The Translators to the Reader* which was originally attached to the preface of the King James Version of the Bible.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; but a blessed thing it is, and will bring us to everlasting blessedness in the end, when God speaketh unto us, to hearken; when he setteth his word before us, to read it; when he stretcheth out his hand and calleth, to answer, Here am I, here we are to do thy will, O God. The Lord work a care and conscience in us to know him and serve him that we may be acknowledged of him at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Holy Ghost be all praise and thanksgiving. Amen.⁸⁸

(b) Concerning past perseverance, vs. 32-34.

The author well understands that the preceding warning might so tend to depress the reader that he becomes discouraged. Hence, what follows is intended to encourage hope. This pastoral sensitivity is well illustrated by John Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian, having become incarcerated in Doubting Castle with Hopeful, even contemplates suicide recommended by Diffidence, Giant Despair's wife. However, true to his name, Hopeful encourages his companion.

My brother, said he, rememberest thou not how valiant thou hast been heretofore? Apollyon could not crush thee, nor could all that thou didst hear, or see, or feel, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. What hardship, terror, and amazement thou hast already gone through! . . . But let us exercise a little more patience; remember how thou playedst the man at Vanity Fair, and wast neither afraid of the chain, nor cage, nor yet of bloody death. Wherefore let us (at least to avoid the shame, that becomes not a Christian to be found in) bear up with patience as well as we can.⁸⁹

1) Enlightenment led to endurance in suffering, v. 32.

“But remember [ἀναμμηνήσκω, anamīmnēskō] the former days [following conversion] in which, having been enlightened [φωτίζω, phōtizō], you patiently endured much conflict [ἐμπλησίς, athlēsis].” When a Jew became a Christian in apostolic times, there resulted opposition from both pagan Rome and his kinsmen according to the flesh (Phil. 1:29; I Thess. 2:14-16). Thus it was this “enlightenment,” signified by baptism, cf. 6:4, that produced initial steadfastness; thus it is present recapitulation of the grounds of this enlightenment that will produce present endurance. Hence,

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a recollection of personal spiritual history, such as by means of a
diary, is helpful, even as was the case with Israel (Deut. 8:2-6; I
Sam. 8:12; Ps. 105:8-45), along with the implied promise (Phil.
1:6). The Christian life is very much a pilgrimage so that as we
travel, it is the calculation of the ground covered thus far, bumps
and all, that assists in our anticipation of arrival.

2) Fellowship led to endurance in suffering, v. 33.

“On the one hand reproach as a spectacle/an open display
[θεατριζω, theatrizō] of affliction, but on the other hand fellowship
with those who had become so treated.” There was no place for a
secret faith so that manifest consequences, both negative and
positive, were inevitable (Gal. 6:14). Negatively, there was
crucifixion by the world, a theatrical, bare-faced response whereby
militant opposition to biblical Christianity resulted in Christians
becoming regarded as “the scum of the world, the dregs of all
things” (I Cor. 4:13). Positively there was crucifixion to the world
whereby Christian companionship was esteemed of far greater
worth than fraternization with the world (cf. vs. 24-25). Having
suffered the loss of worldly esteem, “the fellowship of His
[Christ’s] sufferings” (Phil 3:10) was also counted of more
importance than earthly property. Hence this spiritual camaraderie
was a vital means of traversing the wilderness of this world.

3) Sympathy led to endurance in suffering, v. 34.

“For to the prisoners you showed sympathy [συμπαθεω, sumpatheō]
and the plundering/seizing of your possessions you
received with joy, knowing yourselves to have a greater possession
and [that which] lasts.” Thus the “enlightenment” of v. 32
produced a radical change of attitude concerning the loss of
material possessions, and gain of spiritual riches, that was put to
the test (Job 1:21). The response of “joy,” that is a contentment of
soul that coveted spiritual treasure, fulfilled Christ’s expectation of
true discipleship (Matt. 5:11-12). As a result of the New
Conventicle Act of 1670 in England, which state/church tyranny
punished those who did not attend Church of England worship,
fines were levied and goods distrained, taken as compensation. For
example:

Mary Tilney, widow, a gentlewoman, well descended, and of a
good estate, . . . was fined twenty pounds. . . . they distreyned and
carried away all the goods in her house they thought worth their
labor, as tables, cupboards, chairs, irons, feather-beds, blankets, the
very hangings of the room, and sheets off her bed, insomuch that
the widow was forced that night to borrow sheets of her neighbors
to lie on, being not willing to lodge out of her own house, though
invited by her friendly neighbors. As for the value of those goods
taken away, it is supposed to be betwixt forty and fifty pounds. Yet
the said Mary Tilney was more troubled at the crying and sighing
of her poor neighbors about her (who were much affected with her sufferings, she being very charitable), than for the loss of her goods, which she took very cheerfully.³⁰

(c) Concerning future endurance, vs. 35-39.

The past has been a good investment of Christian endeavor; it has laid a foundation that must be further built upon, “from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17). Initial faith at “enlightenment,” v. 32, if authentic, must “continue” (John 8:30-32). Thus we now consider the preamble to the grand exposition of the doctrine of faith (11:1-40), always keeping in mind that it is the content of faith, as communicated in Hebrews 1-10, that distinguishes the faith that is now commended.

1) Look to the promised great reward, vs. 35-36.

One of the recurring themes of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, also his *The Heavenly Footman*, is that of a forward vision of heaven that enables advancement in the present. In other words, clear views of the glories of heaven encourage the weary pilgrim not to faint, but endure “to the preserving of the soul,” v. 39. Concerning motivation, Bunyan writes:

> Know also, that heaven gates, the heart of Christ, with his arms, are wide open to receive thee. O methinks that this consideration, that the devil followeth after to destroy, and that Christ standeth open-armed to receive, should make thee reach out and fly with all haste and speed!³¹

a) Persevere with confidence, v. 35.

> “Therefore do not throw away your [present] confidence, which has great reward/compensation [μισθαποδοσία, misthapodosis, cf. 11:6, 26].” In other words, do not be like Israel, “[W]ould it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” (Num. 14:3. Do not be like Esau who traded “his own [heavenly/spiritual] birthright for an [earthly/material] single meal” (12:16). What an irrational estimation of our lives it is to disregard the rich promises of the future and revert to the poverty of the past. So Christian, having been tempted by Timorous and Mistrust to return to the City of Destruction, wisely concludes:

> If I go back to mine own country, that is prepared for fire and brimstone, and I shall certainly perish there. If I can get to the Celestial City, I am sure to be in safety there. I must venture,

To go back is nothing but death; to go forward is fear of death, and life everlasting beyond it. I will yet go forward.\textsuperscript{92}

b) Persevere in the will of God, v. 36.

“For you have need of endurance [ὤπομόνη, huponê, cf. 12:1] so that having done the will of God you may receive the promise.” Israel was to endure wandering in the wilderness with its vision focused upon “a good and spacious land, . . . a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:8). The reception of this inheritance was to be a consequence of faith obedience to the will of God (Deut. 1:34-38; 4:25-31; 30:1-10). So the Christian, in “applying all diligence, in faith [he is to] supply moral excellence, and in moral excellence knowledge, and in knowledge self-control, and in self-control perseverance, and in perseverance godliness, and in godliness brotherly kindness, and in brotherly kindness love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . [F]or as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble” (II Pet. 1:5-8, 10).

But what is “the promise” as a future fulfilled expectation, as distinct from a verbal, unfulfilled promise received (6:15; 11:33)? In 11:13, 39 the Old Testament saints “did not receive what was promised.” Yet there is the future “promise of the eternal inheritance,” 9:15, which is the “great reward” of v. 35. Thus Peter further adds concerning those who “will never stumble, . . . in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (II Pet. 1:10-11).

2) Look to the promise of the Old Testament, vs. 37-38.

a) The inevitability of judgment, v. 37.

“For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come and not delay [χρονίζω, chronizô].” This quotation of Habakkuk 2:3, perhaps incorporating “a very little while” from Isaiah 26:20 LXX, is an application,\textsuperscript{93} not a strict interpretation, in which “the vision” of anticipated judgment by the Chaldeans is related to “the coming one” (Matt. 11:3; Luke 7:19; cf. Dan. 7:13), the Messiah, Jesus Christ and His

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., p. 105.

\textsuperscript{93} Owen writes that, “the apostle accommodates a testimony out of the prophet Habakkuk,” Hebrews, IV, p. 582. For Bruce, “Our author, then, is but dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s of the Septuagint interpretation when he applies Habakkuk 2:3b to the second coming of Christ,” Hebrews, p. 273. Similarly Brown comments: “In these words there is an allusion to words employed by the prophet Habakkuk; but it is a mere allusion,” Hebrews, II, p. 32.
expected return. However the major point here is the effect that the imminence of Jesus Christ’s second coming should have upon the faithful child of God who, while presently doing “the will of God,” at the same time anticipates “what was promised,” v. 36. The time of Christ’s return is set in the concrete character of God’s plan for the ages; there will be no change in its execution. Hence, in a turbulent world in which Jesus Christ is opposed, this apocalyptic event is always to be at the forefront of the Christian’s laboring in the present.

b) The incentive of justification, v. 38.

“But My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back/retreats [ὑποστέλλομαι, hupostellomai] [in faithfulness], My soul has no pleasure in him.” While Habakkuk 2:4 is also quoted in Romans 1:17 with reference to justifying faith in free righteousness for Jew and Gentile, and Galatians 3:11 with reference to justifying faith that excludes the law, here the reference focuses upon the ongoing sanctifying, persevering nature of faith that, in spite of intervening tribulation, will culminate in Christ’s return (cf. Hab. 3:17-19). “The Rabbis said that Habakkuk had compressed into one rule the 365 negative and 248 positive precepts of the Law.Æ” As David Clarkson writes: “This living faith is not a single and transient act, but something habitual and permanent. . . . [L]iving by faith is constant dependence on God, as one without whom we cannot live.”Æ But how is such faith to be established? Clarkson further explains:

i Through the knowledge of God, His attributes. “Though faith be not knowledge, yet it is not without it. Nay, the more we know, the more we believe (Ps. 9:10). . . . Those who have known much have believed much; much in contemplation, strong in faith, as Abraham, Moses . . . David (Ps. 16:5; 73:26);.Æ Hebrews has emphasized this in 1:1-13.

ii Through the knowledge of Christ’s offices. “If faith be left in the dark, it will stagger, not know where to fix; may lay hold of a shadow, and rest upon a tottering basis; cannot be steadfast or confident. Knowledge of Christ is put for faith in Christ” (Isa. 53:11; II Tim. 1:12).Æ Hebrews has emphasized this in 1:1-3, 8, 13; 3:1; 5:1-10; 7:1-28.

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Æ Farrar, Hebrews, p. 160.
Æ David Clarkson, Practical Works, I, 174.
Æ Ibid., p. 177.
Æ Ibid., p. 182.
iii Through the knowledge of the promises of God.
“Gather them. They are the meat that you must live upon in this wilderness, angel’s food. Be as careful to gather them as the Israelites to gather manna. Be often searching the mines. Suffer not these pearls of great price to lie neglected in the field. These must defray all the charges of your pilgrimage. . . . A promise treasured up will afford comfort in our beds, in our callings, in a dungeon, banishment. Faith will starve or be inactive at such times if you have no treasure.”

Hebrews has emphasized this in 8:6-10:18; 13:20-21.

The conditional warning, in being addressed to authentic believers, does not envisage a drawing back to perdition by an apostate but, such as Peter who, in weakness, “withdrew” [ἐφυλάσσεται, hupostellao; Gal. 2:12; cf. Paul re Acts 20:20, 27] from eating with Gentiles. Hence the person envisaged here, the “you” and “he” and “we” of vs. 36, 38-39 is not the same as apostate “those” of v. 39.

3) Look away from destruction, through faith, v. 39.

“Hence we are not of those who shrink back [ἐφυλάσσεται, hupostelē] [in faith] to destruction, but of [progressing] faith [resulting in the] establishment/consolidation/preservation/right possession [περιποίησις, peripoiësis, cf. Eph. 1:14] of the soul.” Such who “shrink back” would be Balaam, Judas, Demas, etc. (II Cor. 4:10; Phil. 3:18-19; II Pet. 3:7; I John 2:19), or in The Pilgrim’s Progress, Timorous and Mistrust who retreated down the Hill Difficulty. Thus like Paul, the author has the consummation of salvation in view, and not simply its commencement (I Thess. 2:19; 5:23-24). He is “convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation” (6:9) leading to its completion (I Pet. 1:5). Thus Owen simply concludes: “Sincere faith will carry men through all difficulties, hazards, and troubles, unto the certain enjoyment of eternal blessedness.”

The following chapter then is a testimony, not simply to acts of faith but rather lives of faith that evidenced authenticating perseverance.


The mention of “faith” in vs. 38-39 triggers in the author the necessity of clarification and representation concerning this most vital truth, even as today there is much misunderstanding as to the nature of “faith,” πίστις, pistis, as though it were some irrational leap in the dark, a mindless commitment to unsupportable, unverifiable
propositions, so to speak. Francis Schaeffer has addressed such a misunderstanding as follows:

One must analyze the word *faith* and see that it can mean two completely opposite things. Suppose we are climbing in the Alps and are very high on the bare rock and suddenly the fog shuts down. The guide turns to us and says that the ice is forming and that there is no hope; before morning we will all freeze to death here on the shoulder of the mountain. Simply to keep warm, the guide keeps us moving in the dense fog further out on the shoulder until none of us have any idea where we are. After an hour or so, someone says to the guide: “Suppose I dropped and hit a ledge ten feet down in the fog. What would happen then?” The guide would say that you might make it till the morning and thus live. So, with absolutely no knowledge of any reason to support his action, one of the group hangs and drops into the fog. This would be one kind of faith, a leap of faith.

Suppose, however, after we have worked out on the shoulder in the midst of the fog and the growing ice on the rock, we had stopped and we heard a voice which said: “You cannot see me, but I know exactly where you are from your voices. I am on another ridge. I have lived in these mountains, man and boy, for over sixty years and I know every foot of them. I assure you that ten feet below there is a ledge. If you hang and drop, you can make it through the night and I will get you in the morning.

I would not hang and drop at once, but would ask questions to try to ascertain if the man knew what he was talking about and if he was not my enemy. In the Alps, for example, I would ask him his name. If the name he gave me was the name of a family from that part of the mountains, it would count a great deal to me. In the Swiss Alps there are certain family names that indicate mountain families of that area. For example, in the area of the Alps where I live, Avanthey would be such a name. In my desperate situation, even though time would be running out, I would ask him what to me would be the sufficient questions, and when I became convinced by his answers, then I would hang and drop.

This is faith, but obviously it has no relationship to the first instance. As a matter of fact, if one of these is called faith, the other should not be designated by the same word symbol. The historic Christian faith is not a leap of faith in the post-Kierkegaardian [Danish father of existentialism] sense because “he is not silent,” and I am invited to ask the sufficient reasons in regard to details but also in regard to the existence of the universe and its complexity and in regard to the existence of man. I am invited to ask the sufficient questions and then believe him and bow before him metaphysically in knowing that I exist because he made man, and bow before him morally as needing his provision for me in the substitutionary, propitiatory death of Christ.

a. The definition of faith, vs. 1-3.

It should be born in mind that the Hebrew Christian addressees here appear to have experienced considerable persecution, not only from pagan Rome, but also Judaism (10:32-34; 13:3). Hence, the following definition of faith will be exemplified in the subsequent catalog of faithful Hebrews who “by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight,” vs. 33-34.

Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, pp. 99-100.
(1) The vision of faith, v. 1.

“Faith is the assurance [ὑπόστασις, hupostasis] of hoped for [things], the evidence [ἐλεγχός, elenchos] of things [πράγμα, pragma] not seen.” We could represent the parallelism here as follows:

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Truth claims are assuredly believed even if not tangibly experienced in the present. Although the “hoped for things” are “not seen things,” there is good reason to believe that these “things” are real and prospective. There is a close parallel with Romans 8:24-25. “Hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.” But what are “the things hoped for” and “the things not seen”? Surely they concern that which was promised to the participants in the new covenant, but more specifically, “the good things to come” (10:1). These are not mere abstractions, as Westcott makes clear.

Things which in the succession of time are still “hoped for” as future have a true existence in the eternal order; and this existence Faith brings home to the believer as a real fact. So also things unseen are not mere arbitrary fancies: Faith tries them, tests them, brings conviction as to their being.

The final sentence here of Westcott exactly bears out Schaeffer’s preceding description of the investigative, questioning process that establishes true faith.

Thus the author places great store upon the future objects and Messianic scenario of faith so that his addressees might “receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (9:15; cf. 2:8; 3:6; 4:11; 9:28; 10:25, 39; 11:40; 12:22-24, 28; 13:14). “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those that love Him” (I Cor. 2:9). Such a perspective certainly reinforces and cultivates faith.

(2) The approval of faith, v. 2.

“For in this [matter of faith] the elders/ancient fathers/the past statesmen of faith [ὁι πρεσβύτεροι, hoi presbuteroi] were witnessed/testified to [granted approval concerning their faith]” (cf. 1:1). Here the profitability of biography concerning faithful men and women of God over past centuries is upheld. Even as v. 6 declares that “without faith it is impossible to please God,” so here God was pleased with the faith of many of the former leaders of Israel. In a secondary sense there was also the approval of succeeding generations of believers, as Bruce gives instances of drawn from the Hasmonean era, such as, “Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers in

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102 The alternative objective interpretation of “substance,” as in the KJV, is not supported by the usage of hupostasis in II Corinthians 9:4; 11:17; Heb. 3:14. Further, the parallelism in this verse supports the subjective interpretation of “assurance.” So Brown, Bruce, Delitzsch, Hughes; contra Owen.

103 B. F. Westcott, Hebrews, p. 351.
their generations” (Sirach, 44:1-50:21). So, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on, ... so that they may rest from their labors; for their deeds [of faith] follow with them” (Rev. 14:13). Thus Owen provides the following practical conclusions:

1. Instances or examples [from Scripture] are the most powerful confirmations of practical truths. ... 2. They who have a good testimony from God shall never want [lack] reproaches from the world. ... 3. It is faith alone which from the beginning of the world (of from the giving of the first promise) was the means and way of obtaining acceptance with God. ... 4. The faith of true believers from the beginning of the world was fixed on things future, hoped for, invisible; that is eternal life and glory in an especial manner. ... 5. That faith whereby men please God acts itself in a fixed contemplation on things future and invisible, from whence it derives encouragement and strength to endure and abide firm in profession against all oppositions and persecutions. 6. However men may be despised, vilified, and reproached in the world, yet if they have faith, if they are true believers, they are accepted with God, and he will give them a good report.

(3) The foundation of faith, v. 3.

“By faith we understand [νοοῦμεν, nooumen] that the ages/worlds [τοὺς αἰῶνας, tous aionas] were outfitted/framed/established [καταρτίζω, katartizo, cf. 10:5; 13:21] by the word/utterance [ῥῆμα, rhema] of God, to the intent that from that which is not visible has been made/has came about that which we see.” Thus the visible, tangible universe was not manufactured from existing tangible substance, nor did it evolve from visible, tangible substance, but rather its origin was ex nihilo, from the invisible nothing, according to the utterance of God (Gen. 1:1-3; cf. Ps. 33:6, 9; II Cor. 4:6; II Pet. 3:5). In the Apocrypha is an interesting expression by a Jewish mother of seven martyrs who reminds her youngest son: “I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being” (II Maccabees, 7:28). Thus in 1:2, “God has spoken to us in His Son ... through whom also He made the world” (cf. Rom. 1:20).

But what is the object that such faith here looks toward and attaches to and rests upon, the result being the conclusion of creation ex nihilo? Of necessity faith must lay hold of revelation by God, even as defined in 1:1-2, that surely is rooted in Genesis 1, especially the fact that God spoke and thus brought into being (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29. Thus “God ... calls into being that which does not exist” (Rom. 4:17). The exact expression “by faith,” πιστεῖ, pistei, is used eighteen times in this chapter, with three further variations, though every instance presupposes linkage to some body of truth. All of the subsequent nominated faithful are those who are known about only through Scripture. Faith then, is rooted in the objective, concrete, historical, verbal, propositional revelation of the Word of God that declares of Him, as Isaac Watts has written:

104 Bruce, Hebrews, p. 278.
b. The exponents of faith leading to the formation of Israel, vs. 4-12.

Having established the foundation of faith, that is God who creates something out of nothing, but particularly “the worlds/ages,” that is the universe, we now zero in on the founding forefathers of faith who span human history from the fall up to the call of Abraham and the promise of, “descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore,” v. 12.

(1) Abel, v. 4.

“By faith Abel offered [προσφέρω, prospherō] to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he was testified to as being righteous, God testifying on the basis of his gifts [bloody offerings], and through it [faith], in having died he still speaks.” In commencing with faithful Abel, in contrast with faithless Cain (Gen. 4:1-8; cf. Heb. 12:24), we consider the first biblically explicit acts of significant, sacrificial worship that immediately followed the record of man’s expulsion from the garden of Eden. It is well to remember that Abel was a congenital sinner, in spite of the fact that “his [Cain’s] deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous” (I John 3:12).

(a) The act of Abel’s faith, obedience to the Word God.

Of vital importance is the reason as to why God esteemed the animal sacrifices offered by Abel and rejected the produce sacrifices offered by Cain. The implicit answer is surely revealed in God’s response to Cain’s anger at being spurned: “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Gen. 4:6-7). Whatever the meaning of, “If you do well,” it indicates that Cain had revelation of that which God required for acceptance, surely a life that manifested the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). The lives of Abel and Cain appear to have considerable contrast in terms of godliness and ungodliness. Cain well knew that a bloody offering was required; further, he was able to offer it. However he was governed by expediency, not earnest faith in the will of God. Thus by faith in God, Abel responded with heartfelt obedience to His redemptive purpose; by way of contrast, Cain responded with faith in human religious formulation and convenience. So Delitzsch comments:

Abel offered his first and best; . . . Cain offered only that which first came to hand. . . . Abel’s sacrifice was an expression of heartfelt thankfulness, or, as our author says, tracing the disposition of his mind to its root, an expression of his faith. But inasmuch as the relationship between God and man had been disturbed by sin, Abel’s faith exhibited itself in recognizing and laying hold of the divine mercy in the midst of
wrath and judgment,—an aspect of his personal standing with regard to sacrifice, which had its correlative in his offering being of a life and of blood.\textsuperscript{106}

(b) The object of Abel’s faith, the revelation of the Word of God.

It is important here that when we read, “By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice,” the exact object of this faith should be identified, especially as the verse ends, “and through it [faith], in having died he still speaks.” Clearly, as in the whole thrust of 10:38-11:40, “faith” and not “works” is of fundamental importance here even if the faith of Abel manifested distinguishing righteousness. Thus connection with 10:38-39; cf. Habakkuk 2:4, leads to the conclusion that Abel’s faith was rooted in the revelation of the will of God, the pleasing character of bloody sacrifice to God (8:20-21). Such was the \textit{sola fide} of Abel that he heartily obeyed the Word of God, even as it had surely been communicated to him by his father Adam.

(c) The outcome of Abel’s faith, the acceptance of the God of the Word.

God bore witness, He testified to and welcomed the obedience in sacrificial worship that indicated Abel’s \textit{bone fide} faith (Jas. 2:18, 26). Without the explicit support of Scripture, some have suggested that God signified His pleasure by way of consuming fire from heaven.\textsuperscript{107} Thus Abel was justified, accepted of God through obedience vindicated faith. Hence he did not die in vain since, even as “the voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground” (Gen. 4:10), so now “in having died he still speaks” of the “righteousness . . . through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil. 3:9; cf. Rom. 1:17; 3:21-22; 9:30; 10:6; I Cor. 1:30). Likewise Noah was also “an heir of the righteousness which is according to [obedient, ark building] faith” (Heb. 11:7; cf. Ezek. 14:14, 20).

(2) Enoch, vs. 5-6.

Not to be confused with Enoch, Cain’s first son (Gen. 4:17-18), this Enoch, meaning “dedicated, initiated,” was the son of Jared (Gen. 5:18). “Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5:22-24).

(a) The pleasure of God in Enoch’s faith, v. 5.

“By faith Enoch, having been translated/ transferred/ removed \textit{[μεταταξθημι, metatithēmi]}, by which he did not see death, he was not

\textsuperscript{106} Delitzsch, \textit{Hebrews}, II, p. 225.

\textsuperscript{107} So Jerome, Chrysostom, Luther, Owen, Delitzsch, in view of subsequent explicit instances (Lev. 9:24; II Kgs. 18:38; II Chron. 7:1).
found because God took him. For before the translation he had testified to being approved by God.” Here was the prototype of the rapture (I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thess. 4:17), replicated in Elijah (II Kings 2:1-12), which climaxed three hundred years of faithfulness following the birth of Methuselah who lived 969 years and died in the year of the flood. Hence Enoch was taken, while only Adam had yet died; Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, and Jared were still alive. Edersheim comments here.

Enoch, who seems to have walked nearest to God, only lived on earth altogether three hundred and sixty-five years—less than half the time of those who had preceded and who succeeded him. An extraordinary length of life may be a blessing, as affording space for repentance and grace; but in reference to those most dear to God, it may be shortened as a relief from the work and toil which sin has brought upon this world.¹⁰⁸

The piety of this man, assumed to be on a par with that of Elijah, has also led to both saints being identified, even according to patristic writings, as the two witnesses of Revelation 11:1-13. However, of significance for the author is the *sola fide* that was productive of a godly life that received God’s approval. Thus the LXX translates, “And Enoch was well-pleasing to God, and was not found, because God translated him” (Gen. 24:24). So in the *Apocrypha* we read:

There was one who pleased God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners he was taken up. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul. For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind. Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he took him quickly from the midst of wickedness. Yet the peoples saw and did not understand, nor take such a thing to heart, that God’s grace and mercy are with his elect, and he watches over his holy ones.²⁰⁹

Thus God’s pleasure in Enoch was grounded in this child of God’s faith, which fundamental principle is explained in v. 6. In particular Jude 14-15 describes Enoch’s pleasing ministry as a prophet when he declared, “Behold the Lord came with many thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” Thus the intimation is that Enoch faithfully preached the Word of God in a sinful environment, becoming ripe for judgment, not unlike our own.


¹⁰⁹ Bruce M. Mezger, ed., *The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha*, Wisdom 4:10-15. Metzger explains that this “Wisdom of Solomon,” although alleged to have been written by King Solomon, was more likely “composed in Greek by an unknown Hellenistic Jew, probably at Alexandria during the latter part of the first century B.C.” p. 102.
(b) The pleasure of God in whoever has faith, v. 6.

“For apart from faith [in God] it is impossible to please [God]. For it is necessary, for the one coming to God, to believe that He is [ἐστιν, estin] and that He is a rewarder [μισθοδοτὴς, misthapodotēs] of those who search for Him.” The author now focuses, not so much on the evident consistent virtue of Enoch’s life as the vital role of his faith in God. As Bruce rightly declares: “It is not belief in the existence of a God that is meant, but belief in the existence of the God who once declared his will to the fathers through the prophets and in these last days has spoken in his Son.” [1:1-2]

God’s pleasure in Enoch was his gracious acceptance of the content and heartfelt intent of his faith, in which case there was “not so much a moral obligation as a logical necessity” for Enoch to have specific faith in the God of Adam, even as with Abel.

The specificity here, so far removed from mere cognitive patronage, firstly concerns the being of God, that “He is,” according to Exodus 3:13-15); surely this also includes a basic appreciation of God’s essential attributes; His solitariness, holiness, immutability, sovereignty, personality, etc. Thus saving faith must have a definitive object, He who is central to “hoped for things, . . . not seen things,” v. 1. Thus faith is extraspective rather than introspective. As John Murray writes: “It is not by looking within, in the attempt to discover the movements of God’s regenerative grace, that faith is evoked. It is preoccupation with the glories of the Savior that constrains faith.”

While being open to misunderstanding, also note that works pleasing to God are not described as being a primary necessity here, though they are a consequent necessity.

Secondly, specificity concerning the content of genuine saving faith is with regard to the doing of God, that is His being “a rewarder of those who search for Him.” This was evident with regard to not only God’s revelation of who He is (Exod. 3:13-15), but also concerning what He does for His people (Exod. 6:2-8). Thus God must be appreciated as good, morally admirable, Who communicates Himself, especially with particular providence lavished on the faithful, such as “rapture,” v. 5, “the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God,” v. 10, “conception for Sarah,” v. 11, “a better country, that is a heavenly one,” v. 16, “the exodus of the sons of Israel,” v. 22, “the greater reward” of Moses, v. 26, “something better for us,” v. 40. Enoch was a “searcher,” for three hundred years, it would seem; but so was Noah for one hundred and twenty years while building the ark (Gen. 6:3; II Pet. 2:5), and Abraham and Moses, all of whom were rewarded.

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110 Bruce, Hebrews, pp. 286-287.
112 John Murray, Collected Writings, II, p. 259.
(3) Noah, v. 7.

“By faith Noah, having been warned \(\chiρ\eta\mu\alpha\tau\iota\zeta\omicron\alpha\), \(\text{chrēmatizomai}, \) cf. 8:5; 12:25] concerning things which he did not see, with reverence constructed an ark for the salvation of his household by which he condemned \(\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\kappa\rho\iota\nu\omicron\), \(\text{katakrinō}\) the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

(a) The content of Noah’s faith.

By means of God’s divine revelation, “God said to Noah” (Gen. 6:13; the word of Christ?), that incorporated distinctive authority and His holy revulsion with regard to degenerating mankind, the patriarch received specific details concerning prospective judgment and his participation in it (Gen. 6:13-21). The uniqueness, magnitude, and horror of what was revealed, in no way discouraged Noah because of his conviction of the truth of the revelation concerning the future. With such strength of faith he was able to convince his wife and children of the truth of God and thus draw forth their obedient faith and participation that resulted in their salvation (Ezek. 14:20).

(b) The obedience of Noah’s faith.

The belief that what God revealed would certainly come to pass led to the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; cf. John 3:21). “Thus Noah did according to all that God had commanded him, so he did” (Gen. 6:22), which commission surely included his being a “preacher/herald of righteousness” (II Pet. 2:5). His attitude was influenced by that of God in his deporting himself with “circumspection” and “reverence/holy piety” (ἐὐλαβέομαι, eulabeomai, cf. 5:7; 12:28). Such was Noah’s life of consecration and faithful devotion to his vocation that, by means of stark contrast and reflection, it inevitably brought judgment to a faithless, unholy generation (Prov. 25:21-22; Luke 11:31; Rom. 12:20).

(c) The inheritance of Noah’s faith.

The inheritance as an heir (κληρονόμος, klēronomos) of “the righteousness which is according to faith” is Noah’s reward (10:35-36; 11:6, 26) which may be understood from two perspectives. Is it a righteous regard by God through faith, that is the righteousness of Christ imputed (Rom. 1:17; 3:21-22; 4:13; Phil. 3:9), or is it a righteous character that results from faith, that is righteousness imparted (Ezek. 14:14)? Either perspective is biblical in that they perceive of sola fide as being the root of either category of righteousness. However, the context demands the latter understanding, that is a righteousness which faith produces (Gen. 7:1; Heb. 11:33). So Delitzsch explains:

Noah’s righteousness found its special manifestation in consequence of the faith which received both the divine warning of approaching danger
and the divine promise of ultimate safety, and inspired a corresponding
course of action.\footnote{Delitzsch, Hebrews, II, p. 233.}

Recall James 2:21, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works
when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?” As Abraham here was
evidently justified having previously been judicially justified through
faith (Gen. 15:6), so Noah here is evidently justified by means of his
obedience having also been previously justified by faith (Gen. 6:8).

(4) Abraham, vs. 8-10.

While Abel, Enoch, and Noah are a prelude, now follows the main
movement or theme. As with Paul in Romans 4:1-5, 9-25, cf. Galatians 3:7,
9, so here in vs. 8-10, 17-19, Abraham is presented as the supreme exponent
of “the obedience of faith” or “the righteousness which is according to
faith.” Within both Judaism (John 8:39, 56) and Christianity (Rom. 4:16;
Gal. 3:29) Abraham has been recognized as the father of the faithful who at
the same time, but particularly through the exposition of Paul, most clearly
magnifies the saving grace of God in contrast with the law that brings wrath
and condemnation (Rom. 4:15-16).

(a) The content of Abraham’s faith, v. 8a.

“By faith Abraham, having been called.” The same voice of God that
addressed Noah subsequently addressed Abraham in Ur and Haran.
This call of God’s elect Abram was particular, effectual and revelatory.
It came to this Gentile pagan in Ur of the Chaldeans even as Stephen
describes: “The glory of God [literally, the God of the glory] appeared
[ὁρᾷω, horaō] to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia
[Ur], before he lived in Haran” (Acts 7:2; cf. Gen. 11:31; 15:7). Perhaps
we have described here the quarry from which Abraham was dug (Isa.
51:1). Furthermore, the call was again specified in Haran, at which,
following the death of his idolatrous father (Josh. 24:2), Abram then
departed for Canaan (Gen. 11:31; 12:1-5; Acts 7:4). Hence it would
seem that God visibly manifested Himself to Abram, probably as a
Christophany (cf. John 8:56), in which case the patriarch received the
objective, verbal truth of God, made very personal, the very soil from
which faith sprouts (Rom. 10:17).

(b) The obedience of Abraham’s faith, vs. 8b-9.

Following the death of Terah, at the age of seventy-five (Gen. 12:4
Abraham seems to have followed specific yet limited journeying
instructions spoken to him by the Lord, that is the presence of “the
glory of God” (Acts 7:2), concerning “the land which I will show you”
(Gen. 12:1). Accompanied by Lot who appears to have believed the
revelation given to his uncle, though not other unbelieving relatives,
Abraham’s faith was evident according to the direction of his pilgrimage.

1) The journey of faith, v. 8b.

“[Abraham] obeyed by going out to a place which he was about to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.” The relocation instructions involved a holy calling (II Tim. 1:9), that is aspects both negative, “leave behind Haran,” its paganism, and positive, “go forward to Canaan,” the inheritance of promise and blessing (Gen. 12:1). Thus Abraham’s faith had feet to it (Matt. 21:30)! However, as Edersheim well states: “It should be distinctly marked out, that on this, as on every other occasion in Abraham’s life, his faith determined his obedience.”

The ignorance of Abraham expressed here may well indicate that Christ, as the visitation of “the God of the glory,” led the way southward, as a prelude to the leading of Israel in the wilderness, and Abraham merely followed (I Cor. 10:4).

2) The residence of faith, v. 9.

“By faith he dwelt in the land of the promise [not immediate fulfillment], as a foreigner/alien [ἀλλότριος, allotrios] having resided in tents, with Isaac and Jacob being fellow heirs [along with their seed] of the same promise.” When Abraham arrived in Canaan, it is well to consider the decadent, pagan cultural environment that he encountered. Sodom and Gomorrah are explicit representations, even though the Jordan valley was as “the garden of the Lord” (Gen. 13:10). Nevertheless, he faithfully worshipped God in the midst of this spiritual wilderness (Gen. 12:6-8). Thus the promise concerned the future, being what God determined for the seed of Abraham, that is the possession and glorification of “the land” by means of the faithful worship of Jehovah. Hence Acts 7:5 explains: “But He [God] gave him [Abraham] no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him” (Gen. 12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:18; 17:8). Later Abraham found it necessary to purchase some of the land for Sarah’s burial (Gen. 23:1-20). However, note that by the time when Joshua commences his conquest of Canaan, the land is described as a present possession (Josh. 1:1-6, 10-11; 21:43; 24:13).

(c) The inheritance of Abraham’s faith, v. 10.

“For he was waiting expectantly for the city having foundations whose designer/architect and builder is God.” To be sure, as Abraham initially

\[114\] Alfred Edersheim, *Old Testament Bible History*, I, p. 76.
“walked about the land through its length and breadth” (Gen. 13:17), he found no city that was characterized by godliness; every city was of man’s fabrication. Rather he sought a radically different city of God that was believed to be essential to the promise of God. However, note that this new holy metropolis is contrasted with that “from which they went out,” v. 15, and not that which would characterize Canaan. The intimation is therefore that the city of God would come to Canaan and contrast with that which was left behind in Haran and Ur. However, those who follow an Augustinian perspective have suggested that this verse, and other references (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:15-16; 12:22; 13:14; Rev. 21:2), indicate that the earthly ha´aretz is a former early hope that has been superceded by a more universal and heavenly hope.\(^{115}\) However, while Abraham’s hope was eschatological, yet it was not in the sense of the superior location of heaven above compared with earth below, of the superiority of the spiritual over the material. Rather, in accord with the Hebrew outlook of the author here, Abraham’s hope was in the future messianic age, the millennial kingdom in which the righteousness of heaven would be manifest on an unrighteous earth and residence there would be gloriously holy, permanent, under the absolute dominion of Messiah. This was the city of God that the patriarch eagerly looked for, its underpinning being of God’s design and construction. Explanation from this more Hebrew perspective will be dealt with in detail in v. 16.

(5) Sarah, vs. 11-12.

“By faith, even/also sterile [στειρα, steira] Sarah herself,” may suggest a lesser stature in the realm of faith for the wife of Abraham, in the light of her earlier weakness when she laughed at the promise of God (Gen. 18:12; 21:2; Rom. 4:19). However, is faith catching? It is probable that the faith of Abraham, by means of instruction, stimulated the faith of Sarah, in the same way that the weak and young become strong and mature (Rom. 1:17; 15:1-2; Heb. 5:12-14).\(^{116}\)

(a) The content of Sarah’s faith, v. 11b.

“Since she reckoned/considered faithful the one/Him who had promised.” From whence came the content of Sarah’s faith? From her

\(^{115}\) Owen explains: “Of this city it is said that Abraham by faith ‘looked for it;’ that is, he believed [in] eternal rest with God in heaven, whereon he comfortably and constantly sustained the trouble of his pilgrimage in this world.” \textit{Hebrews}, IV, p. 72. John Gill sees this as a possibility, though his first mentioned option is, “the city of the new Jerusalem, said to have twelve foundations (Revelation 21:14), and in which glorious state, Abraham, with the rest of the saints, being raised from the dead, will in person possess the promised land.” \textit{Collected Writings}, Baptist Standard CD.

\(^{116}\) While the NIV, with support from F. F. Bruce, translates: “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise,” we follow the NASB. The \textit{English Standard Bible} similarly translates, “By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.”
husband who, “being fully assured that what God had promised He was able also to perform” (Gen. 11:21). Perhaps Abraham, in being shocked at Sarah’s blatant and disrespectful unbelief, committed himself to instructing his wife in the truth of God. There is no subsequent similar outburst by Sarah until the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21:1-2).

(b) The consequence of Sarah’s faith, v. 11a.

“Received power [δύναμις, dunamis, bringing conception] unto seed laid down/implanted even beyond the seasonable time.” As a result of faith, Sarah was visited by the Spirit of God by means of which her barren womb, “the deadness of Sarah’s womb” (Rom. 4:19), received a viable zygote, the fusion of two gametes. Being aged 90, this was an acknowledged miracle, that is according to both the husband and wife since, it is “God, who gives life to the dead [womb] and calls into being that which does not exist” (Rom. 4:17). Thus the embrace of the correct understanding of the Word of God, notwithstanding seeming impossible natural circumstances, resulted in the fruit of faith, the “reward” of faith (10:35; 11:26). We do not deny Abraham’s necessary participation here; however, whereas Sarah earlier believed such a union to be fruitless, later her faith bloomed into confident expectation.

(c) The inheritance of Sarah’s faith, v. 12.

“Therefore even of one man, and this [one] as if having been dead, was born [seed], just as the stars of heaven in number and as the sand along the shore beside the sea without number/beyond counting.” Abraham was aged 100 at the birth of Isaac so that, “in hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations” (Rom. 4:18). Certainly the birth of Isaac by means of one old father was a wondrous event, even as Sarah acknowledged (Gen. 21:6-7), yet the surpassing expectation was of something far greater, the resultant redeemed people of God, they being a populous progeny, “a great nation” by means of which would come “a blessing upon all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:2-3; cf. 15:5; 22:17; 32:12). Thus, “Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain; when he was but one I called him, then I blessed him and multiplied him” (Isa. 51:1-2). Here the faith in Jehovah of one man Abraham results in fruit of international proportions.

c. The collective vision of faith, vs. 13-16.

Here, as we shall see, Abraham, Sarah, and their seed are considered as a corporate body, united according the essential qualification of true faith, yet distinguished as excluded from the realization of those promises that God had specifically declared. Here also we are faced with the necessity of determining whether we will interpret the language of this significant passage according to Hebrew of Gentile categories.
(1) They died not having received the promises, v. 13.

“According to [the principle of] faith, [nevertheless] all these died not having received the promises, but from a long distance [πόρρωθεν, porrōthen] having seen and welcomed them and having confessed that they were strangers/foreigners [ξένος, xenos] and aliens/pilgrims/sojourners [παρεπιδημος, parepidemos] on the earth [I Chron. 29:15].” Specifically, were “all these,” to be identified as all the faithful listed in vs. 4-12, of course excluding Enoch? Owen disagrees since “all these” are those only who left their own country on the especial command of God, living as pilgrims in the land of Canaan, and elsewhere,—that is Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. This is evident from what is affirmed of them in the ensuing verses, 13-15.117

To begin with, notice these faithful saints were nevertheless not excluded from death, though their faith transported them through it, they being confident “that God is able to raise people even from the dead,” v. 19 (cf. Rom. 4:21).

(a) They did not receive the promises, cf. v. 39.

What were these promises, especially in the light of the fact that in v. 17 we are old that Abraham “had received the promises,” cf. v. 33? They were the promises of God, the details having been received by Abraham, that were nevertheless not realized and appropriated according to those same details. So Westcott explains:

They died in faith inasmuch as they had not received the outward fullness of the promises—the possession of Canaan, the growth of the nation, universal blessing through their race—but had realized them while they were still unseen and future.118

We might add here that, in harmony with the thought of v. 16, these patriarchs of promise were looking for the heavenly, Messianic manifestation of these promises on earth, that God alone would assuredly instigate. It is for this reason that the initial, patriarchal saints of faith, although traversing the land of promise, so presently defiled, thus remained “strangers and exiles” in it, indeed in “the [whole faithless] earth” (Acts 7:5).

(b) The promises seen from a distance, cf. v. 27.

Delitzsch explains: “The promise is defined with increasing clearness in its relation to Israel. It concerns a land in which the patriarchs are still strangers, a Son that is not yet born, a people that hereafter is to come into existence.”119 Concerning “a land,” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob anticipated it as a national possession. Brown comments: “Abraham did

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117 Owen, Works, IV, p. 84. Bruce, Delitzsch, and Westcott, agree.
118 Westcott, Hebrews, p. 362.
not obtain possession of it, nor did his posterity, till nearly five centuries after”¹²⁰ (cf. Deut. 1:10). They could envision this through the eye of faith. Concerning “a Son,” they had met Him (so Abraham, Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-8; 18:1-33; cf. John 8:56; Isaac, Gen. 26:1-4, 23-25; Jacob, Gen. 28:10-17; 32:1-12; 24-32; 35:6-7, 9-15; 48:3-4), and anticipated His consummate reign that would be established in the land (Zech. 14:9-11). They could envision “a people” (Neh. 9:7-8; Isa. 14:1) who Jehovah saved, “for the sake of His name, that He might make His power known,” that they might “sing His praise” (Ps. 106:8, 12; cf. I Sam. 12:22; Ezek. 20:5-9, 14, 22, 44; 36:22-32).

(2) They were seeking a promised country, v. 14.

“For those saying such things make it clear that they seek after [a] fatherland [πατρίδα, patrida].” Although Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob traversed the land that God directed them to inhabit, they were looking for more than mere territory; a kingdom has little significance unless it is under the resident dominion of the king who owns that particular realm. They had fleetingly met the King in person, and doubtless been instructed in the features of His kingdom’s consummate appearing; hence they anticipated that glorious time when He would take up permanent residence and administer a holy reign. So the patriarchs believed that the fatherland required the character of the holy Father, His administration of the new nation, which rule would radically distinguish it from the godless paganism of Canaan that was similar to that of Mesopotamia. The patriarchal attitude is that of Asaph: “Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth” Ps. 73:25).

(3) They repudiated their former country, v. 15.

“And if, on the one hand, they were remembering that [land/country] from which they went forth, they would have had time/opportunity to return [to Haran in Mesopotamia].” Simply put, the family contingent of Abraham did not become homesick for Haran in Mesopotamia. In sojourning there was plenty of time for reflection on the options of either returning to Mesopotamia or remaining in Canaan. It seems implicit that Abraham’s family reminisced concerning their former homeland, yet concluded that the divine prospects were much to be preferred to retrospective recollections of former idolatry and carnality. Certainly the new surrounding paganism was just as depraved and revolting as the old. However it was faith in the holy Messianic vision embodied in the promises of God that caused Abraham to live in tents in the land as a nomad (I Chron. 29:15). Thus when his servant was sent to seek out a wife for Isaac in Mesopotamia, upon the supposition that a suitable woman was not willing to return to Canaan, the servant was warned, “that you do not take my son back there” (Gen. 24:8-9).

(4) They were desiring a heavenly country, v. 16.

“But now, on the other hand, they desire/yearn for a better/morally superior [κρείττων, kreittōn, land/country] that is a heavenly [ἐπουράνιος,

¹²⁰ Brown, Hebrews, II, p. 57.
epouranios] [land/country]. Therefore [the] God is not ashamed [ἐπαίσχομαι, epaischunomai, cf. 2:11] to be called their God, since He has prepared a city [πόλις, polis] for them.” Many commentators understand the language here geographically, such as F. F. Bruce:

The truth is, their [the father’s] true homeland was not on earth at all. The better country on which they had set their hearts was the heavenly country. The earthly Canaan and the earthly Jerusalem were but temporary object-lessons pointing to the saints’ everlasting rest, the well-founded city of God.121

However, the vital matter here concerns not how a Gentile world view comprehends this expression, but the Hebrew perspective of the author. Franz Delitzsch makes a significant comment on Hebrews 11:16 at this point.

It must be confessed that we nowhere read of the patriarchs, that they expressed a conscious desire for a home in heaven. The nearest approach to anything of the kind is in Jacob’s vision of the angel-ladder, and his wondering exclamation (Gen. 28:17), הלחם, but even there no desire is expressed for an entrance into the heavenly land, but the promise renewed of future possession of the earthly Canaan; “The land whereon thou sleepest will I give to thee.”

Then he adds further concerning Hebrews 11:10.

[H]ere the heavenly Jerusalem is not contrasted with the earthly city, but with the frail and moveable dwellings of the patriarchs in their nomad life.123

Thus Abraham’s hope was eschatological, but certainly not in the sense of the superiority of heaven above compared with earth below, of the superiority of the spiritual over the material. Rather his hope was of the future messianic age, the millennial kingdom in which heaven would be manifest on earth and residence there would be gloriously holy, permanent. Such would be the parallel meaning of Hebrews 11:10; 12:22; Gal. 4:25-26. Consequently George Peters explains this perspective as follows.

Evidently that which misleads the multitude in this matter is the statement of the apostle (Heb. 11:16), that “they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly.” Commentators, as Barnes, Bloomfield, etc., overlooking entirely the Theocratic relationship that this country (i.e. Palestine) is to occupy in the Kingdom of God, at once conclude that this “heavenly” country is the third heaven. They forget that this phraseology would not mislead a Hebrew, who

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121 F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 299. He also footnotes, “According to Philo (*Confusion of Tongues* 78-82), the heavenly country is the patriarch’s domicile of origin, and therefore in seeking it they do aim at returning to the place from which they set out,” ibid. This would confirm such an understanding as being rightly understood as essentially Hellenistic rather than Hebrew. Similarly refer to Peter Walker, “The Land in the Apostles’ Writings,” *The Land of Promise*, eds. Johnston and Walker, p. 90, and Palmer Robertson’s agreement with Walker, ibid., p. 126. Many amillennialists have used this line of reasoning as the basis for repudiation of an earthly millennium in which saved Israel experiences territorial glory under the reign of Messiah.


123 Ibid., p. 238.
was accustomed to designate the restored Davidic Kingdom a heavenly Kingdom, and the country enjoying its restoration and Theocratic blessings, a heavenly country. The expression does not mean “the third heaven,” but something that pertains to, or partakes of, the heavenly, as heavenly vision, body, calling, etc.  

Hence the hope of a “heavenly Jerusalem” was not a matter of a superior, exclusively spiritual extraterrestrial, even supraterrestrial location, but rather a fulfilled, holy, spiritually substantial regeneration of that which was formerly polluted and imperfect. James Calvin De Young explains such a Hebrew hope.

This eschatological liberation [of Jerusalem] is the antitype of the liberation of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt, but is, of course, far greater and more glorious. Israel will at this time be gathered and re-established; Jerusalem will be rebuilt and her glory will last forever. Of all the apocalyptic literature, Tobit 13:8-18 paints the clearest and best picture of the future restored Jerusalem. . . . The clearest evidence that this renewed city is the earthly Jerusalem of Palestine is found in the numerous passages in Jewish literature where this renewal demands a great expansion in the city’s territory.

The problem then concerns, as was stated earlier, the necessity of a hermeneutical approach to these passages under consideration, especially in Hebrews, that gives weighty consideration to Hebrew perception. It is granted that rabbinical embellishment must be considered. Nevertheless C. K. Barrett, in making such an allowance, nevertheless concludes that such eschatological language, as represented in Hebrews, looked forward to holy earthly glory, that is a both/and rather than an either/or resolution which would take us out of this world.

The Rabbinic literature in general looks forward to a restored Jerusalem under earthly conditions. The new city is described in detail in terms which are often fantastic, but the weler of imagination bestowed upon the subject does not alter the fact that what the Rabbis hoped for, and described as כָּלָה עַל יְהֹוָה יְהֹוָה רְמַשׁל, “the Jerusalem of the age to come”, was essentially the material capital of a material state.

The heavenly tabernacle in Hebrews is not the product of Platonic idealism, but the eschatological temple of apocalyptic Judaism, the temple which is in heaven primarily in order that it may be manifested on earth.

Thus the fathers anticipated the New Jerusalem on earth (Rev. 21:1-4; cf. 5:10) where “the Alpha and the Omega” will reign upon His throne (Rev. 21:5-6) over Jew and Gentile (Rev. 21:10-14). This will be a time when God’s name is hallowed, His will is done, and His kingdom comes, “on earth

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as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9-10). Because of such a hope, on the part of the faithful, God is not ashamed to receive the acknowledgment of their worship. Further, He not only delights to declare Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 3:6; I Sam. 2:30; Heb. 2:11), but also is pleased to build the New Jerusalem for them.

d. The fathers of the faithful in Israel up to the Judges, vs. 17-31.

Emphasis upon “the promises” to this point has concentrated upon “an inheritance,” v. 8, “the land of promise,” v. 9. “the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God,” v. 10, “a country of their own,” v. 14, “a better country, that is a heavenly one, . . . a city,” v. 16. But now the focus is upon “descendants,” v. 18, “the people of God,” v. 25, “they [who] passed through the Red Sea,” v. 29, without any further mention of the land or a city. With this thought in mind, we return to the original seed of Abraham.

(1) Abraham, vs. 17-19.

Whereas the faith of Abraham in vs. 8-10 deals with the early stages of his conversion and arrival in Canaan, his offering of Isaac indicates the obedience of his faith when “God tested Abraham” (Gen. 22:1), his only son of promise, he now being, according to Josephus, twenty-five years of age. Concerning this reckoning, Abraham has been a child of God for over fifty-five years. This truth is equally relevant to James’ reference to Abraham’s justification by his works (Jas. 2:21-24). Here also Abraham’s well established faith “was tested,” that is vindicated, justified by his actions.

(a) His faith believed in the offering of Isaac, v. 17.

“By faith Abraham, having offered up [προσφέρω, prospherō] Isaac, being tested [πειράζω, peirazō], also his only begotten he offered, [it was] he who received the promises.” As with the faithful that follow, Abraham’s faith was dynamic, cf. vs. 32-38. As he believed God’s verbal revelation, without any qualification, that is the covenant promises of God that were as certain as the character of the God of the promises, so he acted in obedience to God’s command. Thus Abraham passed God’s test which only all the more validated his genuine and substantial faithfulness (I Pet. 1:7). Assuming that the divine command given to Abraham was the result of personal encounter (Gen. 22:1), and not mere spiritual intuition, even as “the angel of the Lord [twice] called to him from heaven” by way of intervention (Gen. 22:11, 15), so the obedience was according to objective command and revelation, as clear as any previous promise he had received, that in no way could be confused with a strong religious impression.

(b) His faith believed in the promised descendants, v. 18.

“[It was he] to whom it was said, ‘In Isaac shall be called your seed.’” The works of faith always have a particular vision in mind, not only the object of faith but also that which the object of faith covenanted to
fulfill, which in this case is the promised establishment of the nation of Israel, under Messiah, in the land that God would constitute as holy. For the child of God there is great delight, not only in the promises of God in which he participates, but also the outworking of the promises over time. Abraham rejoiced in the initial revelation of the promises some fifty-five years ago; however, in Isaac’s birth and his growth into adulthood over the past approximate twenty-five years, there has been living proof of this outworking which no temporal, unexpected circumstance can thwart. Imagine as well how Abraham had thoroughly instructed his son of promise over these years concerning not only the covenant that God had established, but also the divine revelation that had come to him through the Angel of Jehovah and caused him to rejoice (John 8:56).

(c) His faith believed in the resurrection of the dead, v. 19.

“Having reckoned [λογίζομαι, logizomai] that God is able to raise [Isaac/people] even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type/parable [παραβολή, parabolē].” Abraham was not in doubt as to Isaac’s survival; two factors guaranteed this, namely the promises of God (Gen. 21:12), and his confidence that, even if Isaac died, God was able and willing to raise the dead. We might well consider if the Angel of Jehovah, having sought Abraham’s sacrificial obedience, also offered the assurance that He would indeed raise Isaac from the dead. Further, quite possibly faithful Isaac, in learning of the Angel’s command, agreed to be put to death by his father since he also believed the Angels promise that He would resurrect him. Hence Isaac yielded to the binding of Abraham. Thus, even if Abraham should offer up Isaac according to clear divine command of the only living and true God, as distinct from similar pagan practices that offered sacrifices to dead and counterfeit gods, the integrity and omnipotence of God would guarantee fulfillment of the unilateral promises through a risen Isaac. This is suggested by Abraham when, on leaving his servants behind while he and Isaac went on alone, he explains that, “I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you” (Gen. 22:5). Resurrection was regarded by both father and son as a certainty. The divine intervention at this juncture, including the provision of a substitute ram (Gen. 22:11-13) would, even for Abraham, appear as a representation of the resurrection he steadfastly believed in. Though the author of Hebrews surely has a more glorious Messianic resurrection in mind. And in the light of John 8:56, is it not a real possibility that Abraham, having been instructed by “the Angel of Jehovah,” did indeed believe in and rejoice concerning Messiah’s resurrection, as well as Isaac’s?

(2) Isaac, v. 20.

“By faith, even concerning coming [things], Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau.” Isaac first blessed the deceitful Jacob concerning “coming things” rooted in the more heavenly promises made with Abraham (Gen. 27:27-29), then he
blessed aggrieved Esau concerning “coming things” rooted in more nomadic earthly promises “away from the dew of heaven from above” (Gen. 27:39-40). Having learned the promises from his father Abraham, and their confirmation from the Lord (Gen. 26:1-4, 23-25), and having joined with his father in the exercise of identical faith (Gen. 22:1-19), Isaac consequently instructed his sons concerning the same promises, though it would seem he expected Esau to inherit them (Gen. 27:1-4). However his expectations were divinely reversed (Gen. 27:30-33), nevertheless he believed God concerning “coming things,” namely the bigger Messianic picture of “the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God, . . . a better country, that is, a heavenly one,” vs. 10, 16.

(3) Jacob, v. 21.

“By faith Jacob, while dying [ἀποθνῄσκω, apothnēskō], blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshiped [leaning] on the top of his staff [ῥαβδός, rhabdos].” Close proximity to death will certainly reveal the hopes of our soul, even as is the case with Jacob, now being one hundred and forty-seven years of age. Having declared to Pharaoh at the age of one hundred and thirty years, “few and unpleasant have been the years of my life” (Gen. 47:9), now when dying his only hope is faith in God’s “redemption from all evil” (Gen. 48:16; cf. 32:30) and thus personal participation in the Abrahamic covenant. Having learned of this promise from his father Isaac, and also received confirmation from the Lord (Gen. 28:10-17; 32:1-12; 24-32; 35:6-7, 9-15; 48:3-4), Jacob especially desired to bless his favorite Joseph, and his grandsons in particular, Ephraim and Manasseh, so that they might be incorporated, with distinctive honor, into the same promise (Gen. 48:1-22). This was a final bedside act of worship signified by Jacob’s use of his staff. 127 Hence, as with Isaac, Jacob’s faith was focused upon the bigger Messianic picture which he described to Joseph: “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and He said to me, ‘Behold I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession’” (Gen. 48:3-4).

(4) Joseph, v. 22.

“By faith Joseph, while expiring [τελευτάω, teleutaō], was mindful/remembered concerning the exodus [ἐξόδος, exodos] of the sons of Israel and instructed concerning [the final burial of?] his bones.” Again we focus on the hopes of a dying man, Joseph, aged one hundred and ten years, who had been personally commend by his dying father, Jacob, to “the Mighty One of Jacob, . . . the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel” (Gen. 49:24). Joseph, as a mere lad, may well have remembered the instruction of his father Jacob that described the covenant promise of God given to his grandfather Isaac and great-grandfather Abraham. Following Joseph’s more recent reunion (Gen.

127 The thought here is drawn from the LXX translation of Genesis 47:31, “And Israel worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.” Cf. the death of David (I Kgs. 1:47).
46:29), Jacob his father must surely have reviewed with him the same promise of God with greater passion and confidence than ever. Hence Joseph now instructs his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land [of Egypt] to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. . . . God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here” (Gen. 50:24-25). Yet again, it was surely the bigger Messianic picture that the faith of Joseph finally professed, even as was certainly the case with Moses, whose testimony now follows, cf. v. 26.

(5) Moses, vs. 23-28.

In the Bible, Moses is second only to Abraham in terms of reference to any human person. However, in the New Testament, while Abraham is the most commonly acknowledged embodiment of faithfulness (Rom. 4:1-5, 9-23; Gal. 3:6-9; Heb. 11:8-10, 17-19; Jas. 2:21-23), yet only in Hebrews does Moses receive any similar recognition (Heb. 3:2-5; 11:23-28). Nevertheless, for the Jewish addressees here who frequently identified their champion over Pharaoh as the great “law-giver” (John 1:17; 7:19), it was necessary that Moses be identified, according to the whole course of his life, as being a man of faith in its most essential sense.

(a) His birth, v. 23.

“By faith [of Amram and Jochabed] Moses, having been born, was hidden three months by his parents, the reason being they saw him to be a beautiful/handsome [ἀστείος, asteiós, “lovely in the sight of God,” Acts 7:20 NASB] child, and they did not fear the command/edict [διατάγμα, diatagma] of the king [Pharaoh].” Moses belonged to the tribe of Levi, being the son of Amram and Jochebed his wife, so that he was reared, though surreptitiously, to learn that he was of the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Surely Amram and Jochebed had also been well instructed in the promises of God, even concerning the prospect of a great nation that would inherit Canaan (Gen. 50:24). Thus Moses’ subsequent faithfulness is rooted in his lineage that is one of racial identification, and parental example and instruction. Hence Stephen’s description of baby Moses (Acts 7:20) indicates that the parental faith here saw some distinctive divine purpose in the countenance of their son, perhaps like Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:19, 51), that was later indicated through instruction (Acts 7:23-25). Thus the faith of Moses’ parents, from the child’s very birth, actively manifested the obedience of faith in the face of severe pagan opposition. Surely throughout Moses’ life he adoringly reflected upon and gave thanks to God for the faith of his father and mother.

(b) His personal exodus, vs. 24-27.

From the faith of Amram and Jochabed, Moses’ parents, we turn to the consequent faith of Moses himself. John Owen is of the opinion that this section culminates in the Passover exodus, not the prior flight of
Moses to Midian.\textsuperscript{128} However Hughes provides a cautious response in which he rejects this proposal,\textsuperscript{129} which course we take, especially since this forty year sojourn in Midian is a significant part of Moses’ faithfulness. There is a principle here that those who would lead an exodus should first profoundly appreciate what that exodus is all about.

1) He repudiates the world of Egypt, v. 24.

“By faith Moses, having become great/[μέγας, idiomatically] reached responsible, privileged adulthood, he declined to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Having been “educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, [and now] approaching the age of forty” (Acts 7:22-23), Moses repudiated an adopted royal lineage, in spite of being commonly recognized as “the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Such a relationship was established under duress and at the same time insulted his real beloved patrimony. Further, the education of Amram and Jochabed, surely behind the scenes, was now shown to be more effectual than that of Pharaoh; also the glitter of Egyptian culture proved to be tawdry when compared with the “reward” of God’s covenantal promises. Thus faith was triumphantly evident early in Moses’ life of one hundred and twenty years, though Josephus’ account of his trampling upon Pharaoh’s crown, as an infant, is surely fantastic.\textsuperscript{130}

2) He identifies with the people of God, v. 25.

“Having chosen rather to join in suffering [συγκακουχέομαι, sunkakoucheomai] with the people of God than for a time to have pleasure/enjoyment [ἀπολαυσίς, apolaisis] in sin.” It seems that prior to Moses’ slaughter of the Egyptian taskmaster, he had been frequently visiting the sites where the Hebrews were harshly employed, as well as their lowly residences along with that of his parents (Exod. 2:11-14). He knew that a decision had to be made that entailed either the repudiation of the God of his fathers or exclusive alignment with the suffering Hebrews; there was no possibility of middle ground. The seductive, transient Egyptian option was before him (Job 20:5), like Potipher’s wife, though also “the diseases of Egypt” (Deut. 7:15). However like Joseph, he would “flee” and thus repudiate “great evil and sin against God” (Gen. 39:9). What a godly heritage resulted from this steadfastness of faith (I Pet. 5:9).

\textsuperscript{128} Owen, Hebrews, pp. 160-164. Similarly Brown, Calvin, Farar, Pink, Westcott, mainly due to a supposed conflict with Moses’ fear in Exodus 2:14-15, and lack here in v. 27.

\textsuperscript{129} Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 498-500. Similarly Alford, Bruce, Dods, and Delitzsch who makes the significant comment, “that none of the ancients, Greek and Latin, ever seem to have thought of any other [than the flight to Midian],” Hebrews, II, p. 266.

\textsuperscript{130} Josephus, Antiquities, II, IX, 7.

“Having considered [ἡγέομαι, ἥγεομαι] greater riches/wealth the reproach [ὀνείδομός, oneidismo] of Christ [τοῦ Χριστοῦ, tou Christou] than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking toward [ἀποβλέπο, apoblepô] the reward [μισθαποδοσία, misthapodosia].” Thus suffering “the reproach of Christ” more precisely parallels “suffering with the people of God,” v. 25. While a theophany would later confront Moses at the burning bush encounter (Exod. 3:1-22), what was his earlier perception of “the Christ,” cf. 3:14; 5:5; 6:1; 9:14; 9:28, that resulted in his repudiation of “the treasures of Egypt for the sake of suffering identification with Christ? Some understand the author of Hebrews as importing Christ into the experience of Moses, in a typical manner, for the instruction of his readers who are similarly tested and ought to be “bearing His [Christ’s] reproach” (13:12-13). In other words Moses himself did not have any actual comprehension of Christ, though for the readers he mirrors loyal witness to Christ in the face of persecution, as it ought to be. However, we know that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were each personally confronted with a Christophany (cf. vs. 17-21; John 8:56), concerning which surely Moses had been instructed about in detail, even the prophesies of Messiah’s suffering and glory. Thus he had learned about “the hope of Israel, . . . the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:20), but more specifically, Jacob’s “redeeming angel” (Gen. 48:16). Once this meaning has been established, it does not preclude the incorporation of a more mystical meaning that draws upon the details of the New Testament (Rom. 15:3; II Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:7-11; Col. 1:24; I Pet. 1:11; 2:21).

4) He retreats to a wilderness existence, v. 27.

“By faith he left Egypt, not having feared the anger/wrath [θωμός, thumos] of the king, for he endured [καρτέρεω, kartereô] as seeing the One not seen.” Following Moses’ slaying of an Egyptian in defense of a Hebrew, and his initial “fear” after discovery, such was the fury of Pharaoh that he attempted to kill him (Exod. 2:11-15). However, Moses’ resultant flight was not born of fear, especially since the current Pharaoh would die before his eventual return, but a more basic consideration, namely at the age of forty a radical breach with all that Egypt represented, especially its conflicting paganism. This course was directed “by faith,” that is

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131 Bruce, Hebrews, p. 312. Astonishingly, David Stern writes: “Moses did not know of Yeshua, nor is there evidence that he had specific knowledge of a coming Messiah, Savior or Son of God, although he did refer to a Star that would come out of Jacob (Num. 24:17-19) and to a future prophet like himself (Deut. 18:15, 18-19). But Yn [John] 5:46 says that Moses nevertheless wrote about Yeshua. Jewish New Testament Commentary, 712.

the maturing knowledge of God and a general hope in the deliverance of his people, even their eventual inhabitation of Canaan as promised to Abraham. Following marriage to Jethro’s daughter in Midian of Arabia, Moses is commissioned at Mount Horeb by the angel of the Lord who appears in the midst of a flaming bush that was not consumed (Exod. 3:1-4:17). It may well be that this encounter is referenced here as when he “saw the invisible Jehovah.”

(c) His Passover exodus, vs. 28.

“By faith he kept the Passover [τὸ πᾶσχα, to pascha] and the sprinkling/pouring/affusion [πρόσχυσις, proschusis] of the blood, so that the one destroying the firstborn might not touch them.” According to specific revelation of prospective redemption (Exod. 12:1-27), Moses and the sons of Israel evidenced the obedience of faith, for “the sons of Israel went and did so; just as the L ORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did” (Exod. 12:28). As Moses by faith “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,” v. 24, “endured ill-treatment with the people of God,” v. 25, “left Egypt [and] endured,” v. 27, so here this same active faith is evident since he “kept the Passover,” all of it. Concerning the obedience of this faith Owen well remarks:

Though a man had been really an Israelite, and had with others made himself ready that night for a departure, which was a high profession of faith, yet if the lintel and posts of his door had not been sprinkled with blood, he would have been destroyed.133

Especially through this redemptive feast Moses esteemed “the reproach of Christ,” mediated through Pharaoh upon the Hebrew people, since he was “looking to the reward,” v. 26, all that Christ had redemptively obtained for him.

(6) Israel, vs. 29-30.

As the faith of Abraham leads to the faith of Isaac, the faith of Isaac leads to the faith of Jacob, the faith of Jacob leads to the faith of Joseph, the faith of Joseph, through his redeemed brethren and sons, leads to the faith of Amram and Jochebed, the faith of Amram and Jochebed leads to the faith of Moses, the faith of Moses leads to the faith of Israel. The significance of instruction in this lineage of faith must not be under-estimated.

(a) Through the Red Sea deliverance, v. 29.

“By faith, they passed through the Red Sea [Ἐρυθρὰν Θάλασσαν, Eruthran Thalassan, cf. Acts 7:36] as [passing through] dry land; and the Egyptians taking opportunity [to similarly pass through], they were swallowed down/engulfed [καταπίνω, katapinō] [in the Sea].” The

133 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 169.
primary object of Israel’s faith was God in all of His omnipotence (Exod. 14:13-14; Isa. 43:15-16; 51:9-10), though in a secondary sense their faith was also in Moses and his mediation of the truth of God as His appointed deliverer. The Egyptians perished because they were faithless, even though they looked ahead and saw a dry passageway.

(b) Through the Jericho deliverance, v. 30.

“Our faith, the walls of Jericho fell, having been encircled \(\kappaυκλόω\), \(\kappaυκλο\) for seven days.” The primary object of Israel’s faith was God and secondarily Joshua and his mediation of the truth of God as His appointed deliverer (Josh. 6:1-20). However, as Richard Sibbes well points out:

It was by faith in the use of means that the walls of Jericho fell down. If they had not depended upon God in their going about seven days, the walls had stood still. It was by faith they did it; and it was a great faith that, using such a ridiculous stratagem as this, to go about the walls with rams’ horns, they should think the walls would fall. It might shake their faith, and likewise expose them to the scorn of those of Jericho within, therefore it was a great faith in them. Not that all had faith, for certainly divers of them were unbelieving persons; but Joshua their captain, and some others of them, had faith, and all of them had hope of the best. It was faith that believed this in this unlikelihood of second causes, for there is the strength of faith; when second causes are weak, then faith is strong.

There has been significant archaeological effort expended in attempting to discover evidence of the collapse of the walls of Jericho, as well as consideration of the power of resonance and resulting vibration that might bring about a result such as Scripture describes occurred at Jericho. However the fundamental cause behind such a disaster can only be ascertained by revelation of the Word of God, even if the ruins of fallen walls are discovered.

(7) Rahab, v. 31.

“By faith, Rahab the prostitute \(\πόρνη\), \(\πορν\) was not destroyed with those who were disobedient/unpersuaded \(\απειθεω\), \(\απειθε\), having received the spies \(\κατσκοπος\), \(\κατσκοπω\) with peace.” The two spies, while finding accommodation in Jericho at a location that would not arouse suspicion, witnessed to Rahab of the saving exploits of Jehovah that she had already heard about (Josh. 2:11). Fearing, Rahab seriously listened and believed with expressive faith (Jas. 2:25), so that she not only refused to betray her visitors, but also engineered, with detail, their escape. As a result of her faith came the promise of deliverance (Josh 2:14-16). Thus, as her faith proved to be genuine, the moment the spies departed she was continually “looking to the reward,” cf. v. 26, which found immediate (Josh. 6:22-25) and later

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fulfillment in her privileged participation in the lineage of David and the Lord Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:21; Matt. 1:5).

e. The ongoing faithful in Israel from the Judges onward, vs. 32-40.

From the close of Torah and the initial inhabitation of the promised land under Joshua we are brought to the commencement of the reign of the judges, which ended with the era of Samuel and the appointment of Saul as king. Thus with Samuel begins the era of the seers, hence prophets, in conjunction with the kings of Israel, all of these being citizens of the old covenant dispensation.

(1) The exploits of the faithful, vs. 32-38.

Thus far the faith of the faithful has resulted in dynamic expression, vs. 4, 7, 8-10, 17, 23-25, 27-31. Now the fruit of authentic faith, focused on God alone as a unique, mighty, revelatory, and trustworthy object, is described in even more dramatic terms.

(a) The leading champions of the faithful, v. 32.

“And what yet shall I say? For time shall fail me if I narrate/give an account [dihgšomai, di¯egeomai] of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David, also Samuel and the prophets.” Owen comments on common traits amongst these heroes of faith:

(1) They all, or most of them, had especial calls from God for and unto the works which they wrought. So had Gideon by an angel (Judg. 6); Barak by the prophecy of Deborah (Judg. 4); Samson by the direction of an angel unto his parents (Judg. 13). So was it also, as is known, with Samuel and David; they had their calls immediately from God. And as for Jephthah, he was at first called and chosen by the people unto his office and work (Judg. 11:11); which God approved of, in giving him his Spirit in an extraordinary manner (Judg. 11:29). Herein lay the foundation of their acting what they did in faith: They were satisfied in their call from God, and so trusted in him for his aid and assistance. (2) The work which they had to do was the work of God. . . . (3) There was a promise annexed unto their works, when undertaken according to the mind of God; yea, many promises unto this purpose were left on record for their encouragement (Deut. 32:30), etc. (4) Some of them, as Gideon, Barak, and David, had particular promises of success in what they were called unto. And although at first they might be slow in the believing of them, as Gideon was, who insisted on multiplied miraculous signs for the confirmation of his faith; or might be shaken in their minds as unto their accomplishment, through the dangers and difficulties which they had to conflict withal, as David was, when he said “all men were liars” [Ps. 116:11], and that he should “one day fall by the hand of Saul” [I Sam. 27:1]; yet in the issue of their faith was victorious, and they “obtained the promises,” as is in the next verse.”

135 Owen, Works, IV, p. 185.
1) Gideon (Judg. 6-8). Following his victory over the Midianites, Israel asked of him, “Rule over us, both you and your son,” to which Gideon replied, “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son; the L ORD shall rule over you” (Judg. 8:22-23). Here faith is exposed as the root of conquest, and it does not wilt under temptation.

2) Barak (Judg. 4-5). Following the deliverance of Israel from Canaanites through the militant leadership of Deborah and Barak, in victory they sang: “Thus let all Your enemies perish, O L ORD; but let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might.” And the land was undisturbed for forty years” (Judg. 5:31). This was singing in faith that resulted in peace (Luke 7:50).

3) Samson (Judg. 13-16). Though blinded, just prior to his destruction of the house of the Philistines and death, he “called to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord G OD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at one be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes” (Judg. 16:28). Thus he “died in faith” (Heb. 11:13).

4) Jephthah (Judg. 11-12). Following the tragic loss of his daughter to celibacy, Jephthah was left to fight the Ammonites alone, being deserted by the men of Ephraim. He explained to them that, “when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. When I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hand and crossed over against the sons of Ammon, and the Lord gave them into my hand” (Judg. 12:1-3). Here faith “conquered kingdoms” (Heb. 11:33).

5) David (I Sam. 16:1, 13; 17:34-35). At the end of his life, just prior to the ascension of Solomon to the throne of Israel, David’s faith is singular in focus: “[O]ur God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given to You. . . . O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You” (I Chron. 29:13-14, 18).

6) Samuel (I Sam. 1-25). Born according to the faith of his mother, Hannah (I Sam. 1:20), prior to Samuel’s death David fled from Saul to this seer, he who had earlier anointed the lad and declared that he would be God’s replacement for King Saul. Hence at that time Samuel presided over the visitation of the Spirit of God so that David was preserved (I Sam. 19:18-24). Here faith “escaped the edge of the sword” (Heb. 11:34).

7) The prophets (I Sam. 19:18-24). These seers were the immediate successors to Samuel who probably founded the first “school of
the prophets.” This “school” subsequently found further expression under Elijah and Elisha, attended by the “sons of the prophets” (II Kgs. 2:5-7, 15). Since the Lord was a “faithful witness” (Jer. 42:3, 5), His prophet would faithfully “tell you the whole message which the Lord will answer you. I will not keep back a word from you, ... whether it is pleasant or unpleasant” (Jer. 42:4, 6). This faithfulness was even unto death (Heb. 11:37).

(b) The leading accomplishments of the faithful, vs. 33-34.

“For who through faith victoriously overcame/conquered [κατηγονίζομαι, katégónizomai] kingdoms, effectively instituted [ἐργάζομαι, ergazomai] righteousness/justice, obtained/encountered [ἐπιτυγχάνω, epituchanô] promises, closed shut [ἐφραζόμα, ephraxon] the mouths of lions, quenched [σβένωμι, sbenumi] the power of fire, fled/escaped the mouth/edge [στόμα, stoma] of the sword [μάχαιρα, machaira], were made strong [δυναμοῦμαι, dunamoomai] from weakness, became mighty in war [πόλεμος, polemus], turned to flight [κλίνω, klinô] foreign encampments/ armies.” Here is a dramatic representation of that which genuine faith achieves.

Joshua, the judges and David especially “conquered kingdoms” (II Sam. 5:17-25; 21:15). Judges, kings, especially Solomon, also the princes of Israel, “performed [governed with] righteousness” (I Sam. 12:3-5; II Sam. 8:15; I Kgs. 10:9; I Chron. 18:14; Ps. 15:2; Ezek. 45:9). In the light of vs. 13, 39, in the main, earthly “promises were obtained,” as with inhabitation of Canaan and victory over the Cananites (Josh. 1:5; 21:43-45; Judg. 6:14; 7:7). Yet these saints received the Messianic promises without fulfillment. It was Daniel (Dan. 6:22) and Samson (Judg. 14:5-6) and David (I Sam. 17:34-35) and Benaiah (II Sam. 23:20) who “shut the mouths of lions,” although only the latter three employed physical prowess in these encounters.

Daniel’s three companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, “quenched the power of fire” (Dan. 3:25). David (I Sam. 18:11; 19:10), Elijah (I Kgs. 19:2), and Elisha (II Kgs. 612-17; Jer. 26:24) “escaped the edge of the sword.” Hezekiah (II Kgs. 20:5), Samson (Judg. 15:15; 16:28-30), and David (I Sam. 17:42, 51) “from weakness were made strong” (cf. II Cor. 12:8-10). “Became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight” may refer not only to the numerous triumphs of Joshua, the judges, David, Hezekiah, and Jehosaphat, but also the victories of the Maccabees over the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes, indeed in several elements of vs. 33-34. Thus Charles Wesley writes:

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done!
(c) The anonymous champions of the faithful, vs. 35-38.

Whereas vs. 33-34 have a military emphasis that is mainly offensive, but also defensive, here the focus is more upon faith that passively perseveres in the face of militant assault. With this in mind, the particular address here to “women” is appropriate insofar as their non-military role is concerned.

1) Faith results in resurrection, torture, a better resurrection, v. 35.

“Women received from resurrection their dead ones. Others were tortured/beaten like a taught drum, timpani [τυμπανίζω, tumpanízō], not receiving/accepting [προσδέχομαι, prosdechomai] release/redemption by payment [ἀπολύτρωσις, apolutrōsis, cf. Rom. 3:24], in order that they might [τυγχάνω, tugchanō] receive a greater resurrection [than that previously mentioned].” Both the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:8-24) and the Shunammite woman (II Kings 4:18-37) received their sons back to life, that is by resurrection, more akin to resuscitation, according to their faith in the God of Elijah mediated through his faithful prophetic ministry. Yet their hope was in a resurrection even better than that of Lazarus, also resuscitation.

2) Faith results in mockery, scourging, imprisonment, v. 36.

“And others [by] mockings [ἐμπαγμός, empaigmos] and scourgings [μαστίξ, mastix] received/experienced trial/testing, also bonds/ chains [δεσμός, desmos] and imprisonment [φυλακή, phulakē].” As with v. 35, there may continue allusion to the torture of the seven brothers and their godly mother (II Macc. 6:18-7:42). Concerning imprisonment in chains refer to Joseph (Gen. 39:20), Micaiah (I Kgs. 22:26-27), Jeremiah (Jer. 20:2), Hanani (II Chron. 16:10). However faith here was concerning the promises given to the fathers about Messiah to come, not His fulfilled ministry. In no way less severe, consider the persecution of the Anabaptists, the Inquisition, the record of Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, the purge of bloody Queen Mary, the massacre of Huguenots on St. Bartholomew’s Day in France, etc., of the Christian dispensation, in which faith laid hold of “something better,” v. 40.

3) Faith results in stoning, dismemberment, destitution, v. 37.

“They were stoned [λιθάζω, lithazō], they were sawn in two [πρίω, priō], in murder by sword they died, they went around in sheep-

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136 “The tympanum as an instrument of ‘torture’ seems to have been a wheel-shaped frame upon which criminals were stretched and beaten with clubs or thongs.” Vine, Unger, White, Vine’s Expository Dictionary, p. 637. The reference here may allude to the tortures of Eleazer the Scribe, and of the seven brothers and their godly mother (II Macc. 6:18-7:42).
skins, in goat-skins, lacking sustenance, afflicted, badly treated.” Zechariah the priest was stoned (II Chron. 24:20-21; cf. Luke 11:49-51). Several traditions describe Isaiah being sawn in two (cf. II Sam. 12:31, and David’s treatment of the Ammonites). The prophets were killed with the sword (I Kgs. 19:10). King Jehoiakim slew Uriah the prophet with the sword (Jer. 26:23). Hence prophets such as Elijah wore clothing appropriate to where they, of necessity, dwelt (II Kgs. 1:8). Again, this faith, although anchored only upon shadows and unrealized promises, nevertheless held firm unto death. There was no expectation of present prosperity, only future glory. So New Covenant believers have similarly suffered (I Cor. 4:11-13).

4) Faith results in repudiation by the world while esteemed in heaven, v. 38.

“[Men] of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and the holes/ravines of the earth/land.” Here was accommodation fitting for the clothing, v. 37, even concerning Israelites in general (Judg. 6:2). So it was with the prophets of the Lord (I Kgs. 18:4, 13), Elijah (I Kgs. 19:9), and the Maccabees in “mountains,” the “wilderness,” “caves,” “like beasts” (I Macc. 2:28-29; II Macc. 5:27; 6:11; 10:6). They were like Abraham when he first wandered throughout the hostile environment of Canaan, as “an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents, . . . looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (11:9-10). Even then, Abraham trusted in unrealized promises, though he and his seed were the salt of the earth, enemies of the world, yet beloved of the Father (Rom. 11:28).

(2) The hope of the faithful, vs. 39-40.

From the faithful of the past who viewed the promises as unfulfilled, we consider the faithful of the present who view the promises as fulfilled, at least in an inaugural sense. However, as Hughes well points out: “There is no suggestion that these believers of the pre-Christian era were in any sense barred from the full enjoyment of the promised reality.”

We are dealing with the clarity of faith vision rather than its object.

(a) The old covenant faithful, v. 39-40a.

“And all these, having gained a testimony/a good report through faith, did not obtain [κομιζο, komizô, cf. v. 13] the [actualized] promise of God.” “These,” although outcasts of the world, were attested to as faithful by God and Scripture, who therefore accounted them as inheritors of the promises. However “these” were all citizens of the old

137 Hughes, Hebrews, p. 516.
covenant. Hence, upon what ground was their faith found to be acceptable? Keeping in mind that “the promise” here involves “a better covenant” (8:6); “the promise of the eternal inheritance” (9:15), “the life of faith” leading to “the preserving of the soul” (10:36-39), the author yet again obliquely focuses upon the only effectual ground of faith, that is the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

By way of illustration, the old covenant saint took hold of and obtained security through God’s promissory notes that could only be cashed in upon the offering of the Lamb of God. Some even met the Bank of Grace manager before He opened for actual grace transactions. The New Testament saint obtained immediate currency since at Calvary the doors of the Bank of Grace were opened. When those doors opened, then the Old Testament saints, according to the promissory notes received, could lay claim to the tangible currency of grace that had been promised (II Cor. 1:20). However, in either instance, the actual grace bestowed and received was the same, minted by that one Manager of Grace, the Lord Jesus Christ!

(b) The new covenant faithful, v. 40b.

“[Who] concerning having foreseen/provided [προβλέπω, problepomai] for us something better, in order that apart from us they were not made perfect [τελειώ, teleioo].” During the time of the old covenant, God had promised a superior covenant that could be foreseen in the distance through the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Jer. 31:31-34; John 8:56). The addressees of this Epistle were the objects of those promises; thus the prophets also “were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (I Pet. 1:12). Thus, as Owen explains, “God’s prevision is his provision, . . . his foresight with his decree.”

Hence, they, the old covenant faithful, were not to be “made perfect . . . apart from us,” the new covenant faithful, but as it were “with us.” In other words, the faithful of the Old Testament were to be “made perfect” prospectively with the faithful of the New Covenant community retrospectively, at “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4), according to “the blood of the eternal covenant” (13:20; cf. 7:19). There is only one gospel for any sinful, believing child of Adam.


The extensive representation of faithful Old Covenant saints now leads to the implications for New Covenant saints, according to retrospective clarity, yet with greater expectations and responsibility (2:3; 12:28-29). Furthermore, we return to explicit exaltation of Jesus Christ, not mentioned since 10:11-14, 19-22.

138 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 216.
1. Encouragement to compete faithfully, vs. 1-11.

The language is very picturesque with many seeming allusions to participation in athletic contests concerning running and boxing, which Paul elsewhere references also concerning running and boxing (I Cor. 9:24-27; cf. Gal. 2:2; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29-2:1; I Tim. 6:12; Acts 20:24). In such events, we always consider the arena, the spectators, the competitors, the terms of the competition, and the prize to be won by the winner. Thus the Christian life is a contest with many more onlookers than contestants, a pilgrimage so well portrayed by John Bunyan, a voyage through many a storm and calm to a safe harbor, a progression from earth to either heaven or hell. We are in transition in the event of life and the great question concerns either arrival or disqualification (3:12; 4:11; 10:26-27; 12:25)! For Paul, he would “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14), that is “the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (II Tim. 4:8).

a. The analogy of running, vs. 1-2.

To “run” is to move with urgency and great purpose, as distinct from dawdling, sauntering along with a casual air. Both types of contestants may seem to be heading in the same direction, but only the former will satisfactorily cross the line by means of “strength . . . speed.”139 So Saphir further explains:

It is a race; hence constancy, steadfastness, perseverance are absolutely necessary. He that endureth to the end shall be saved. Many, like the Galatians [3:1-4], run well at first, rejoicing in the liberty of the gospel, and with enthusiastic love receiving the messenger of peace; but they are soon hindered and turned aside. Many who at first and immediately rejoice, and perhaps owing to the very absence of sorrow, contrition, and self-distrust, soon fall away, because they have no root. It is a race, and therefore requires concentration of purpose, singleness of aim, and self-restraint.140

(1) Run with endurance toward Jesus, v. 1.

“Therefore [τοιγαροῦν, toigaroun, I Thess. 4:8], also we having the surrounding [περίκειμαι, perikeimai] of so great a cloud [νήφος, nephos] of witnesses, every weight [ὀγκος, onkos] laying aside and sin that easily encumbers [ὑπεριστατος, euperistatos], let us run [τρέχω, trecho] with endurance the race [ἀγών, agon] that is set before us.” The transition or “therefore” here, which Delitzsch calls an “energetic therefore,”141 is very emphatic.

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139 Ibid., p. 235.
140 Saphir, Hebrews, II, p. 806.
141 Delitzsch, Hebrews, II, p. 295.
(a) The former contestants, “so great a cloud of witnesses.”

In classical language, a “cloud” described a mobile group closely knit together, such as a company of soldiers. It is as if those who have run before during the Old Testament dispensation, and acceptably completed the course through the obedience of faith, now look down with empathy upon the present contest and surround us, as it were in the arena of heaven, with their encouraging gaze. They are enabled to do this since the Lord Jesus has now provided that which they had not earlier obtained, 11:13, 39.

(b) The opposition forces.

Athletic contestants would strip to near nakedness and thus display their fitness to compete before all spectators. A flabby, obese, dandy competitor would be scorned by the watching crowd. Hence serious entrants indicate their willingness to discard anything that would detract from winning the contest. Two particularly debilitating problems for entrants in this race are as follows:

1) The sizeable kind, every “weight” of sin. There is probably a reference here to being over-weight, that is having an excess of flesh. Hence the clawing proximity of sin in the flesh calls for every effort in reducing its influence to a minimum. As Paul puts it, “I discipline my body and make it my slave” (I Cor. 9:27). Reduction of weight comes about by exercise and diet, namely the regulated use of means of grace. Too much flesh retards progress for the pilgrim, especially if the metaphorical meaning of pride re the strictures of Judaism is included here. Delitzsch explains:

[Classically “weight” describes] the sense of stoutness or obesity, with reference to gymnastic exercises, as an approved method of countering it. Here, then, it is the slowness and dullness of his readers’ minds (the νηφότης, nèphrotètēs of 5:11; 6:12), the encumbering weight of Judaic notions, rites, and observances, and all that is hindering their apprehension of the joyous liberty of the gospel, that he bids them lay aside.¹⁴²

2) The enveloping kind, every “encumbering” sin. This is the hindrance of that which “well surrounds” us and probably alludes to the putting on of items of clothing and bodily comfort, in contrast with the stripping of the body of all restrictive items. Thus the sin of acquisitiveness in relation to personal comfort and pleasure is in mind with regard to Christians, especially in the light of soliciting society. This problem is well illustrated in The Pilgrim’s Progress when Christian and Faithful, in passing through Vanity Fair and resisting every sort of cry from the worldly hucksters, declare, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity,”

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 299.
and “We buy [only] the truth.” It is further represented by By-ends who, although claiming to be a pilgrim, yet would only travel in comfortable circumstances. He confesses:

It is true we somewhat differ in religion from those of the stricter sort, yet but in two small points; first, we never strive against win and tide; secondly, we are always most zealous when religion goes in his silver slippers; we love much to walk with him in the street, if the sun shines, and the people applaud him.

There is a beguiling subtlety indicated here, a gradual overwhelming, that does not have a particular sin in mind. It is the character of sin that it mesmerizes, bewitches, renders unconscious like the insidious, incapacitating effect of carbon monoxide.

(c) The imperative of speeding, “running the appointed race [αγόν, ἀγόν].”

John Bunyan aptly addresses us here from his The Heavenly Footman:

Well then, sinner, what sayest thou? Where is thy heart? Wilt thou run? Art thou resolved to strip? Or art thou not? Think quickly, man, it is no dallying in this matter. Confer not with flesh and blood; look up to heaven, and see how thou likest it; also to hell. . . . If thou dost not know the way, inquire at the Word of God. If thou wantest company, cry for God’s Spirit. If thou wantest encouragement, entertain the promises. But be sure thou begin by times; get into the way; run apace and hold out to the end; and the Lord give thee a prosperous journey. Farewell.

The layout of the track is of God’s decree, even every obstacle, as with a steeplechase. There will be wayside places for refreshment, however the journey is not intended to be smooth all along the way. The successful contestant or “footman,” as Bunyan puts it, needs not only fitness but also vision, that is focus upon the end of the race, the struggle, the ἀγόν, where the Judge beckons with overtures of mercy and grace and open arms and invites, “let the one who is thirsty come” (Rev. 22:17).

(1) Fix your eyes on Jesus, v. 2.

“Focusing your attention on/zooming in upon [ἀφοράω, aphoraο] the pioneering leader [ἀρχηγός, archēgos] and perfecter [τελιότες, teleiōtes] of faith, Jesus, who, for the sake of the joy spread before [περικειματιν, perikeimai, v. 1] Him, patiently endured [ὑπομένω, hupomenô] the cross, regarded the shame [of the cross] with contempt [καταφρονέω, kataphroneo]; [thence] He has [triumphantly] sat down at the right of the throne of God.” The course here is evidently strewn with obstacles, and quite unlike some manicured Olympic track. The looking that is exhorted means literally “to look away from,” so that the wandering gaze that easily falls prey to the

143 Bunyan, Works, III, p. 128.
144 Ibid., p. 211.
145 Ibid., p. 394.
beguiling character of sin, v. 1, is to turn and focus exclusively upon Jesus after the manner of the hymn:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face;  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace.

However the character of this Jesus is described in specific terms concerning his qualifications as a spiritual, proven, victorious Champion; He is no mere ideal, no ordinary competitor, but rather the humiliated and exalted Son of God. Whereas the look of John 3:14-16 and the “turn to Me and be saved” of Isaiah 45:2 concern initial justifying faith, here the ongoing look, resulting in progressive sanctification, is intended.

(a) He has run the course as our pioneer.

This Jesus was the “forerunner.” He has run the same course that we travel along, as its architect and inaugural participant. However no one has encountered, with such intensity of conflict, the hindrances that He endured (4:14-15; 5:7-8).

1) He endured suffering with the incentive of future joy.

What specifically was this “joy”? It was the “well done” of the Father, at the completion of His appointed task of redemption (10:5-10; John 4:34), when He “breasted the tape” in triumphantly reentering heaven (Eph. 4:8). But further, it was the task of gathering the Father’s elect, whereby Jesus did not lose one in the process (John 17:12), that became a stimulus to joy of which the redeemed became partakers (John 17:13). With such rapturous prospects, the Son of God was enabled to sustain the agony of the crucifixion (Luke 22:42), for “the sufferings of Christ” did not compare with “the glories to follow” (I Pet. 1:11). So the child of God endures for the sake of the reward (Heb. 11:24-26)).

2) He endured shame with the incentive of exaltation.

The esteem of Christ for the future benediction of His Father was so great that He could regard the humiliation of the cross with utter contempt.

He did not succumb under it; he did not faint because of it; he valued it not, in comparison of the blessed and glorious effect of his sufferings, which was always in his eye. . . . We have the highest instance that faith can conquer both pain and shame.  

Rather than being conquered by the depths of anguish associated with the ugliness, horror and unspeakable misery of crucifixion, it

146 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 242.
very much drawing forth from onlookers utter human disdain and contempt, Jesus Christ confronted it, endured it, and overcame it. Because “In the days of His flesh, he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety” (5:7), this supreme manifestation of faith resulted is a glorious climax.

(b) He is anticipated at the end of the course.

Having been raised from the dead, He ascended to heaven and “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” As we run then in this race of the redeemed, looking to *this* Jesus obtains not only the joyous accolade of earlier arrivals, but also session with Him in heaven (Eph. 1:20; 2:6). This means that with the Son of God reigning over this universe, seated on His Father’s throne, the Christian anticipates his eventual participation in this heavenly economy. As a result he presently “runs with endurance” (12:1) in anticipation of being with Christ as he eagerly looks toward Christ (Rev. 5:10). Thus, “if we endure, we will also reign with Him” (Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:12).

b. The analogy of bloody athletics, vs. 3-4.

Since the reference to bloody conflict in v. 4 appears to continue the athletic scenario, then a reference to pugilism (cf. I Cor. 9:26-27) or close physical contest is most likely, not martyrdom, especially with reference to “your struggling [present tense of ἀνταγωνίζομαι, antagōnizomai] against sin.” Thus v. 3. also continues to envisage the preceding athletic motif.

(1) Consider the conflict of Jesus with sinners, v. 3.

“For consider/reckon [ἀναλογίζομαι, analogizomai] with such a one [Him] having endured by sinners [so leading to] His own [suffering of] hostility, in order that you might not become weak/weary in faith obedience [καμνω, kamnō], your souls become slack/fainting in well-doing [ἐκλυομαι, ekluomai].” Jesus Christ was a great contestant when opposed by a multitude of sinners; he went the full twelve rounds, never buckling in the knees, landing a knockout punch in the final round. Thus those who follow in His steps (I Pet. 2:21) have wonderful encouragement not to waver under trial (10:39); Jesus provides an example of endurance that never fainted under the onslaught of satanic assaults. This is what we are to focus upon in our faith apprehension of Jesus Christ, v. 2. Owen explains:

When we begin to be heartless, desponding, and weary of our sufferings, it is a dangerous disposition of mind, towards a defection from the gospel. So it hath been with many, who at first vigorously engaged in profession, but have been wrought over unto a conformity with the world, by weariness of their trials. And we ought to watch against nothing more diligently than the insensible,
gradual prevailing of such a frame in us, if we intend to be faithful unto the end.\textsuperscript{147}

(2) Consider your conflict with sin, v. 4.

“Not yet unto blood have you steadfastly resisted/stood in opposition \([\text{ἀντικαθιστήμι, antikathistēmi}]\) concerning your struggling against \([\text{πρὸς, pros}]\) \([\text{the} \ sin \ [\text{ἀνταγωνιζόμαι, antagōnizomai}].]\) Assuming that the scenario of an athletic contest continues, especially boxing, then the shedding of blood is not unto death, but rather the bloody results of severe, abusive pounding by the enemy. Here the Christian contestants, that is addressees, although “struggling with considerable resistance” [present tense], have not been hammered to their knees, so to speak. The terrifying, aggressive opponent here involves “face to face” encounter with “the sin” personified. But again we recollect that our forerunner has battled “the sin” prior to our entrance into this race, vs. 2-3. He is our victorious Champion! Thus Owen encourages us.

It is an honorable warfare, to be engaged against such an enemy as sin is.—This is all the enemy that Christians have, as such. It works in devils, in other men, in themselves; yet nothing but sin, and that as sin, is their enemy. And this being the only contrariety that is to the nature and will of God himself, it is highly honorable to be engaged against it.\textsuperscript{148}

c. The analogy of disciplined athletics, vs. 5-11.

A common misunderstanding with regard to the following admonition, concerning discipline, is that it is disassociated from the preceding context of progress in an athletic contest. However, instead of being transported to the seemingly detached concept of chastisement imposed by a loving father on his son according to western culture, in fact the continuity of thought is with regard to “discipline/to discipline,” that of \(\text{παιδεία, paideia, vs. 5, 7-9, 11, παιδεύω, paideuō, v. 6-7, 10,}\) being better translated as “strict training” in the more athletic sphere that nevertheless bears some association with the severe paternal tutoring of a son who has not attained to adult privileges (Gal. 3:23-26; 4:1-7).\textsuperscript{149} This perspective would support the preceding understanding of the “shedding of blood” in v. 4, in which the trials of Christian pilgrimage involve “blood, sweat, and tears,” these being correlative to Christian training.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., p. 245.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., p. 251.

\textsuperscript{149} Farrar prefers “the training” rather than “the chastening” here. \textit{Hebrews}, p. 176. Hughes also makes reference to C. Spicq’s comment that the root of “discipline . . . means strictly, the rearing or training of a child. ‘Sonship and fatherly discipline are correlative,’ he writes. Whether our author had this association in mind is, however, another question—probably not, seeing that the noun he uses for ‘son’ is \textit{uίος, huios, not παῖς, paiō.}” \textit{Hebrews}, p. 528n.
The fatherly exhortation, vs. 5-8.

Many an athletic coach has been misunderstood in the training of his pupils in much the same way as a father is misunderstood in the training of his children. The young athlete has his heart set on the prize well enough, though he is often oblivious to the necessary strict process for the attaining of this goal. The athlete does not set the rules of the contest, nor can he modify them; they have been established by a higher authority. If he wants to “win,” he must “exercise self-control in all things,” and he will “discipline his body and make it his slave” (I Cor. 9:24-27). However, the “Higher Authority” also imposes discipline in the process as well. In this contest, He wants certain, consecrated participants to “win,” and He will go to great lengths, even the employment of stringent means, to ensure their eventual triumph.

(a) His inscripturated words, vs. 5-6.

A serious athlete will know the rules of the contest he enters, otherwise he may in fact be deluding himself. Here Christian contestants set for heaven are reminded of those rules which, being the Word of God, in the flurry of their running, wrestling, and boxing, they can neglect. So in Christian’s terrifying confrontation with Apollyon in The Pilgrim’s Progress, in the heat of the battle the book of God slipped from his hand, at which the fiend immediately responded, “I am sure of thee now.”

1) Discipline is a serious divine process, v. 5.

“And you have entirely forgotten [ἐκλανθάνω, eklanthanō] the exhortation which is addressed [διαλεγόμαι, dialegomai] to you as sons. ‘My son, do not think in a small way/lightly/disdainfully [of the] strict training of [the] Lord, nor slacken/faint [ἐκλάω] when being reproved [ἐλέγχω, elenchō] by Him.’” Spiritual amnesia involves a loss of perspective according to the divine point of view; the focus is wholly upon self and self-analysis. In ignoring the necessity of discipline, in regarding it disrespectfully, God receives the blame rather than repentant submission. Of course the assumption here is that His strict training is ever appropriate. Hence instruction in the Word of God is required, even that which has been formerly taught, which here includes Proverbs 3:11-12, cf. Job 5:17. Thus the child of God needs to listen rather than complain; this will cause him not to despair since he will again appreciate that his good, his purification is in the mind of God, not his distress. Hence at the same time, God most tenderly addresses His children in fatherly terms such as “My son” (Gen. 22:7-8), which are intended to awaken more serious regard. Thus Owen explains:

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2) Discipline is a loving divine process, v. 6.

“For whom the Lord loves, he strictly trains [παιδεύω, paideuō], and He whips [μαστιγώ, mastigō] the son whom He receives/accepts.” Whereas v. 11 of Proverbs 3 has raised the matter of inappropriate regard for the strict training that God imposes on His beloved children, in negative terms, now v. 12 declares positive aspects of His mode of correction. As the regard of a father for his son, a coach/trainer for his trainee, is one of intimate relationship, so the stringent demands that are employed must be understood as being motivated by love, and the design of “blessedness” (Ps. 94:12; cf. Ps. 119:75; Jas. 1:12; Rev. 3:19), refinement (1 Pet. 1:6-7; 4:12-14), not vindictiveness. Yes, God “whips” or employs the rod when necessary (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14), that is when the trainee loses sight of his relationship with his Trainer, wanders, and thus forgets,” v. 5, previously taught principles of competitiveness. However it must also be appreciated that the Trainor has not taken on His role lightly; He initially “receives/accepts” or “delights” in (Prov. 3:12) His candidate according to gracious deliberation, and certainly He has not done this with the prospect of failure in mind, any more than a father contemplates the total repudiation of his son. Thus the divine enrollment unto adoption, according to elective conscription rather than voluntary solicitation, includes certain disciplinary means that will preclude the possibility of ultimate failure.

(b) His paternal concern, vs. 7-8.

Now the author expounds Proverbs 3:11-12 in such a way that appreciation is stimulated concerning spiritual camaraderie which ought to exist amongst contestants, that is sons of God, especially when under the severe hand of their common Trainer. Such ought to be the tenor of local church fellowship whereby we “bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

1) Discipline unto enduring sonship, v. 7.

“Unto/for the purpose of discipline you endure [ὑπομόνη, hupomone], as God deals with you as sons; for what son does not [his] father discipline/strictly train?” It is the right understanding

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151 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 255.
152 While the KJV commences, “If ye endure chastening, . . .”, the NASV, ESV, translate “εἰς παιδείαν ὑπομένετε, εἰς παιδείαν ὑπομόνετε,” “It is for the purpose of discipline” as the correct reading. The NIV gives the less likely imperative reading, “Endure hardship as discipline.”
of this rigid sanctifying process that enables the pilgrim to endure. In other words, when the Christian contestant appreciates the source and end purpose of the strict training he receives, then he finds encouragement to “endure,” that is to “bear up under,” ὑπό, hupo + μένω, μένω, the load of divinely imposed hardship. Consider in The Pilgrim’s Progress how Christian, having scaled the Hill Difficulty, is approached by Timorous and Mistrust who attempt to persuade the lone pilgrim to retreat due to the prospect of Apollyon and other terrifying dangers that are ahead. So Christians weighs the pros and cons of either returning to the City of Destruction or pressing on toward the Celestial City. Then he responds:

If I go back to mine own country, that is prepared for fire and brimstone, and I shall certainly perish there. I must venture. To go back is nothing but death; to go forward is fear of death, and life everlasting beyond it. I will yet go forward.¹⁵³

In other words, unlike Timorous and Mistrust who esteem the way as essentially destructive, Christian determines to endure because the way, though difficult, is yet transitional.

2) Discipline for legitimate sonship, v. 8.

“For if you are without discipline/strict training [hypothetically speaking],¹⁵⁴ of which all [true pilgrim’s] have become sharers/partners [μέτοχος, metochos] [as v.7 indicates], then illegitimate children [νοθος, nothos] you are and not sons.” In other words, the marks of strict training are not optional, but inevitable as the sufferings of the faithful of 11:32-38 indicate. In the same way, strict training of a child or soldier or athlete is not optional; its absence indicates illegitimacy as a bastard, a phony combatant, or a pretender. In such cases, not only is there the absence of concerned oversight according to an appointed relationship, but also the absence of a prospective inheritance, spoils, and prize. Thus:

[T]here are no sons of God, no real partakers of adoption, that are without some crosses or chastisements in this world.—They deceive themselves, who expect to live in God’s family and not to be under his chastening discipline. And this should make every one of us well contented with our own lot and portion, whatever it be.¹⁵⁵

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¹⁵⁵ Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 266.
An earthly athletic trainer has in mind an end product; he knows the stature that must be achieved if there is to be successful accomplishment of the prospective goal, and often this vision is not so easily understood by the young recruit. So the Christian trainee often lacks perception of his Trainer’s real motivation, and thus here we are led to better comprehend the divine intent, notwithstanding the travail that transition involves.

(a) That His sons should experience spiritual life, v. 9.

“For furthermore/after all, on the one hand we had fathers of our flesh for discipline/strict training and we feared/respected [ἐντερπομαι, entrepomai] [them]; [on the other hand] much more shall we not be subject [ὑποτεσσομαι, hupotassomai] to the Father of the spirits and live?” The literal translation here makes clearer the contrast between “the fathers of our flesh” and “the Father of the [our human] spirits” (cf. Num. 16:22; 27:16). Thus God is in the business of strictly training the spirits/souls of Christians according to their appointed subjection to His dominion. So, “before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. . . . It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn your statutes” (Ps. 119:67, 71). As in the earthly realm we feared/respected our father in understanding his wise plan for our adult lives, that we should prosper in all of our living being, so the good intent of our heavenly Father is to be appreciated, but especially that we should live! Surely this focuses on the divine enlivening of the soul in the blessedness/happiness of serving sanctification. At the completion of his course, a triumphant athletic contestant showers gratitude upon his coach; so at mature adulthood, an earthly son reflects on his father’s training and praises him; so the Christian will live to the fullest when he later reflects on his Father’s coaching and lives to honor and exalt in Him. Surely, in his having become a “partaker of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4), this is the supreme end for which he was created and redeemed.

(b) That His sons should participate in communicated holiness, v. 10.

“For on the one hand they disciplined for a few days [a short while] as seemed good to them; but on the other hand He [disciplines us] for [our] good/advantage for the purpose that we share His holiness [ἁγιότης, hagiotés].” From contrast between a carnal and a spiritual filial relationship, we now consider the temporal in contrast with the implicit eternal. Childhood is short compared with the span of a normal adult life; the rigors of athletic training are brief compared with the enduring glory that results once we have successfully run the race before us. In The Pilgrim’s Progress, when Christian fights Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, this foul fiend offers the following discouragement: “Thou knowest that, for the most part, his [Christ’s] servants come to an ill end, because they are transgressors against me
and my ways. How many of them have been put to shameful deaths!”

To this Christian responds:

His forbearing at present to deliver them is on purpose to try their love, whether they will cleave to him to the end; and as for the ill end thou sayest they come to, that is most glorious in their account; for, for present deliverance, they do not much expect it, for they stay for their glory, and then they shall have it, when their Prince comes in his and the glory of the angels.\footnote{Bunyan, Works, III, p. 112.}

So the encouragement here is to have a perspective of future completion, that is the Father’s design for “our good,” the glory of participation in His holiness. This is a fundamental vision in Hebrews, being maturity obtained by Jesus Christ’s superior priesthood (2:11; 6:1; 7:11, 19; 9:14; 10:22), with holiness also modeled in Him since, “for the joy set before Him [He] endured the cross” (12:2). Here is an indispensable, qualifying attainment for those who would “cross the line” (12:14) as triumphant contestants. So John Brown explains:

The great transforming process, in which chastisement holds an important place, will go on till it is completed in our being made “partakers of His holiness”—till, according to our measure, we be holy as He is holy, and perfect as He is perfect. And then, the end of chastisement being gained, it will cease for ever; and as the mature, the fully grown, the thoroughly educated children of God, we shall live for ever in our Father’s house above, in the eternal enjoyment of that happiness which He has secured for us by the obedience to the death of His own Son, and for which He has prepared us by the influence of His Spirit and the discipline of His providence. Oh! Who would not submit patiently, thankfully, to discipline, necessary, fitted, intended, certain—if endured in a childlike spirit—to produce so glorious a result?\footnote{Brown, Hebrews, II, p. 177.}

(c) That His sons should evidence righteousness, v. 11.

“There is a clarifying explanation of v. 10. Negatively, the Lord’s prescription did not have a good taste to it, the pruning was painful, the diet was austere, the regimented learning seemed dreary, the denial of indulgence was unpalatable, the long hours of marching were tedious. The Lord’s gymnasium, in His spiritual health spa, is both demanding and productive. However, the Coach or Trainer has His eye upon the goal; contestants must progress as children on to adulthood and ripening maturity (I John 2:12-14; cf. Acts 14:21-22; Rom. 5:2-5; 8:18; II Cor. 4:17), so that all will graduate in received holiness, v. 10, and cultivated righteousness, v. 11. In suffering and deprivation (Isa. 32:9-
14) Israel was to learn that when “the Spirit is poured out from on high, . . . [then] the wilderness becomes a fertile field, . . . then justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness will abide in the fertile field. And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever” (Isa. 32:15-17).

2. Encouragement to compete strictly, vs. 12-17.

The gymnastic scenario continues, except that it now focuses upon rectifying a spirit of weariness that impedes progress (ἐγκακέω, egkakeō, Gal. 6:9; II Thess. 3:13), especially when the analogy more concerns a marathon event rather a short sprint. Over the long haul endurance becomes a vital and necessary characteristic (II Tim. 2:3), and not simply an occasional ecstatic experience.

a. The exercise of faith, vs. 12-13.

Whereas Jesus Christ (Luke 12:35), Paul (Eph. 6:14) and Peter (I Pet. 1:13) employ the “girding up of the loins” as a figurative call for alertness, here the author of Hebrews employs more specific athletic representations. The earlier declaration of 10:39 concerning the necessity of unflagging, persistent, growing faith, its subsequent representation in 11:1-40, and focus upon Christ, 12:1-2, continues to be at the heart of what is now recommended, notwithstanding the illustrative form.

(1) Training in spiritual calisthenics, v. 12.

“Therefore, set straight/lift up [ἀνορθόω, anorthōō, cf. Acts 15:16] the weak/drooping hands and the loose/slack/feeble knees [Ezek. 21:7].” A fit athlete, a soldier at the ready, is taut in all of his body; when weariness sets in, flabbiness and poor posture become evident (Isa. 35:3). When physically weary, sometimes our sight becomes blurry; then, in arousing ourselves, our focus immediately sharpens. So here faith, in having become somewhat droopy, is to be kindled afresh. What is it for the Christian to have weak hands and feeble knees? These are probably symptomatic of a reduction of strength due to a lack of disciplined exercise. In other words, we neglect both means of grace and consecration in their employment. To use Cowper’s expression, we lose “that blessedness when first we knew the Lord.” Furthermore, as Pink points out:

For the hands to hang down and the knees to become feeble are figurative expressions, denoting the tendency to abandon the discharge of our duty because of the opposition encountered. For the hands of a boxer or fencer to hang down means that his arms are become weary to the point of exhaustion; for the knees to be feeble signifies that through the protracted exertions of the runner his legs have become debilitated by their nervous energy being spent. The spiritual reference is to a decay in the Christian’s courage and resolution. Two evils produce this: despondency as to success—when hope is gone effort ceases; weariness in the performance of duty.

We would add that in such forlorn circumstances, Satan is eager to attack in anticipation of assured victory!

(2) Training in spiritual strategy, v. 13.

“And make straight tracks/lanes [τροχία, trochia] for your feet, in order that [what is] lame [χωλός, chōlos] may not be dislocated [ἐκτρέπομαι, ektrepomai], but rather be healed.” Not only is the condition of the athlete or soldier of great importance in terms of conquest and victory, but also the strategy of following the straight and narrow winning course established by the Lord of heaven and earth according to Proverbs 4:26. However lame the pilgrim might feel, any other route will lead to being disabled, in much the same way that Christian and Hopeful became ensnared in Doubting Castle when, in deviating from the narrow way, they explored By-path Meadow and heeded Vain-confidence. They had become discouraged because of the harshness of the way. Foolishness led to their lameness becoming dislocation!159 On an earlier occasion, alert Christian “made straight tracks for his feet” and would wander neither to the left nor to the right when confronted with the Hill Difficulty. However his former acquaintances, Timorous and Mistrust, being confronted with the same challenge, took the alternative routes of Danger and Destruction and consequently suffered eternal loss.160 Keeping to the appointed straight path, even when lame as was the case with Little-faith,161 yet exposes the pilgrim to means of healing grace at such agencies as the House of Interpreter, the Palace Beautiful, the shepherds at the Delectable Mountains, and Beulah Land. Thus Christians are to, “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23).

b. The goal of faith, vs. 14-17.

Assuming the continuance of the athletic analogy of vs. 1-2, 12-13, the strengthened hands and knees, and straightened paths, the divine Coach sets achievable targets before His revived trainees, and also warns concerning undesirable distractions.

(1) Positively, the attainment of sanctification, v. 14.

“Pursue/press after [διώκω, diōkō] peace with all [men/people] and the sanctification [τὸν ἁγιασμὸν, to hagiasmon] apart from which no one shall see the Lord.” As a runner stretches forth with every muscle of his body, always desirous of being ahead of where he is and closer to the end of the race, so the earnest Christian strenuously exerts himself with two particular

159 Bunyan, Works, III, pp. 138-139.
160 Ibid., p. 104.
161 We are told that following the assault of Little-faith at Dead Man’s Lane by Faint-heart, Mistrust, and Guilt, he “made shift to scrabble on his way” toward the Celestial City. Ibid., p. 147.
achievements in mind. Here is goal orientation, not so easily charted, that is infrequently designated in the modern church growth movement.

(a) Peace with all people (duty toward man).

Thus hard-core separatism is renounced since surely “all [men/people]” envisages the world at large (Rom. 12:18), though the subsequent goal of “sanctification” and v. 15 then narrow the focus to that of the Christian community (Rom. 14:19). So Owen explains that the inclusion here is of,

all sorts of men, according as we stand in relation unto them, or have occasion to converse with them. The worst of men are not excepted out of this rule;—not our enemies, not our persecutors; we are still, by all the ways mentioned, to follow peace with them all. Let this alone be fixed, that we are not obliged unto anything that is inconsistent with holiness, that is contrary to the word of God, that is adverse to the principles and light of our own minds and consciences, for the obtaining of peace with any or all the men in the world, and this rule is absolute and universal. 162

The “peace” commended then is an ongoing Christian preference in a sordid, provocative, and violent world, though peace is also desirable amongst the children of God (Eph. 4:31-32; Phil. 4:2-3). In The Pilgrim’s Progress, at the Palace Beautiful after fellowship around the Lord’s Table, Christian was “laid in a large upper chamber, whose window opened towards the sun-rising; the name of the chamber was Peace, where he slept till the break of day.” 163

(b) The sanctification (duty toward God).

That the “sanctification” here is progressive rather than definitive alone, 9:13; 10:10, is born out by the context of vs. 10-11, 15-16. Here is prescribed a vital affection of the genuine child of God, that is a heart affection and yearning for holiness even as God is holy (I Pet. 1:15-16). This pursuit is also accompanied with “groaning” (Rom. 8:23; II Cor. 5:2-4) because of the strictures of the contest. In other words, such striving is not a casual or easy matter. Nevertheless, without this sanctification, there is exclusion from residence in heaven and the beatific vision (Matt. 5:8; Jude 24). Hence definitive sanctification is not excluded here, cf. Phil. 3:9-10. 164 Thus Ryle wisely exhorts:

Whatever we may think fit to say, we must be holy, if we would see the Lord. Where is our Christianity if we are not? We must not merely have a Christian name, and Christian knowledge, we must have a Christian character also. We must be saints on earth, if ever we mean to be saints in heaven. . . . I fear it sometimes forgotten that God has married together justification and sanctification. They are distinct and different

162 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 286.
164 Owen rightly concludes: “It is universal holiness which is here prescribed unto us.” Hebrews, IV, p. 287.
things, beyond question, but one is never found without the other. All justified people are sanctified, and all sanctified are justified. What God has joined together let no man dare to put asunder. Tell me not of your justification, unless you have some marks of sanctification. Boast not of Christ’s work for you, unless you can show us the Spirit’s work in you. Think not that Christ and the Spirit can be divided.165

(2) Negatively, the avoidance of disqualification, vs. 15-17.

The goals of a contest, or the course of a pilgrimage, are often clouded by the siren-like calls of intruding, non-participating spectators and vendors, such as at Vanity Fair in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, where merchants attempt to waylay those in transition who are set for the Celestial City. There one cried out, “What will ye buy? But they [Christian and Faithful], looking gravely upon him, answered, ‘We buy the truth.’” 166 So here two particular hindrances are described that will detract from the quest for peace with men and holiness before God.

(a) Avoidance of entrenched, defiling bitterness, v. 15.

“Be watching out [ἐπισκοπέω, episkopeō] for any one coming short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness [ῥίζα πικρίας, riza pikrias] springs up that it might cause trouble and through it defile [μιαίνω, miaînô] many.” The Old Testament context is Deuteronomy 29:18 with regard to “a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood [bitter herb]” that will grow in “a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of the nations.” Here is a flagrant turning from the pursuit of holiness. First, what is the purpose of “watching out” here? It is not so much with the recovery of the apostate in mind as the preservation of the people of God from defilement. Second, what is this “coming short of the grace of God”? It is represented by Esau who had a favored earthly religious lineage without true saving faith. This then is not a falling away from the experience of authentic saving grace, but rather the close natural environment of that grace in Isaac, Esau’s father. Third, what is the disruptive “root of bitterness”? It is the consequence of turning from a place of close proximity, privilege, and exposure to the grace of God, as with Judas (Matt. 27:3-5); it is the repudiation of a godly family upbringing that yet cannot escape the gnawing memory of this rich heritage; it is the opposite of the “peace” of v. 14, that is arrogant attachment to mere religious form that boasts, “I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart in order to destroy the watered land” (Deut. 29:19). Esau was such a person whose “peace,” sought through a “mess of potage [lentil stew],” resulted in despair, vs. 16-17.

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(b) Avoidance of tragic, despairing ungodliness, vs. 16-17.

Here the “root of bitterness” is vividly illustrated from Old Testament life. It is significant that, concerning the source of this expression in Deuteronomy 29:18-19, there is a subsequent, sobering divine response to any party that is guilty of such flagrant apostasy: “The LORD shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven” (Deut. 29:20). Every contest has rules, both positive and negative, though many contestants flagrantly disregard them whereby they come under the threat of not only disqualification, but also forfeiture of any hope of receiving a prize. Such was Judas (Matt. 27:3-5), and here Esau.

It is important to notice the reference in v. 16 to Esau’s utter disregard for his birthright, repudiating it with an oath (Gen. 25:27-34), then in v. 17, at least forty years later, his plea for the blessing of the firstborn that was spurned by his father Isaac (Gen. 27:30-40).

1) The carnality of Esau, v. 16.

“That there not be any immoral/promiscuous [πόρνος, pornos] or profane/godless [βεβηλος, bebèlos] person, like Esau who, for a single meal [βροσις, brôsis], sold [αποδομεω, apodómi] his own birthright/firstborn right [τα πρωτοτοκια, ta prototokia].” Technically, there is no record of fornication by Esau, though he wed heathen wives (Gen. 26:34; 28:8). He was fundamentally sensual, carnal; his profanity was contemptuous regard for the spiritual inheritance of God, a lineage of promise through Abraham and Isaac. Bunyan suggests Esau was content with his material prosperity over the ensuing years (Gen. 33:9).167 Here was a young man, with a privileged godly environment, who regarded it with contempt. “Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright for me?” (Gen. 25”32). So Owen exhorts us:

> And this should warn all men not to trust unto the outward privileges of the church. He was the first-born of Isaac, circumcised according to the law of that ordinance, and partaker in all the worship of God in that holy family; yet an outcast from the covenant of grace and the promise thereof.168

2) The despair of Esau, v. 17.

“For you know that also afterward, desiring to inherit [κληρονομεω, klêronomeō] the blessing, he was rejected/dismissed [αποδοκιμαζω, apodokimazo], for he did not find place for repent-

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167 Bunyan, Works, I, § 225, p. 35.
168 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 298.
ance [μετάνοια, metanoia], even as he sought it with tears.” It may seem strange that, much later in life, there remained a total absence of remorse for his shameful, youthful slighting of his inheritance. Nevertheless, in presuming that he would inherit the chief blessing, Esau pleaded for that which was lost and never appreciated. So Owen explains:

[Esau] had, no doubt, an apprehension that there were many excellent things contained in it [his right to blessing as the firstborn]; especially, a flourishing state and condition in this world, in a multiplication of posterity, and power over enemies, which were express in the promise made unto Abraham (Gen. 22:17). This made him put in his claim for the blessing, without the least sense of the spiritual privileges of it; for he was a “profane person.” . . . And it is not unusual, that men should earnestly desire the outward privileges of the church, who value not the inward grace and power of them; but they are profane persons.  

Thus Esau sought repentance from Isaac, not himself! It was not as if he wanted to abhor his sin, but could not. His tears were born, not of heartfelt remorse for his callous brushing aside of that which his father treasured, but regret at the consequences rather than the cause of his attitude. In other words, Esau had never evidenced true conversion. Nevertheless, flagrant, persistent rejection of privilege placed him beyond the reception of his father’s blessing, as with Deuteronomy 29:18-20 above. Esau was the unbelieving child of believing parents who “came short of the grace of God,” v. 15. However, it must also be born in mind that Rebecca had been told forty years before that, “two peoples are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and the older shall serve the younger. When Isaac refused to repent at the pleading of Esau, he must have not only had in mind the persistent carnality of his firstborn, but also this divine revelation, to which he eventually acceded.

Following John Bunyan’s conversion, he recounts in his spiritual testimony *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, of how he was tempted to believe that he had sinned after the manner of Esau, in repudiating Christ, and thus had forfeited the blessings of salvation. In agony of soul for a while, he then relates how he called for a “showdown,” so to speak, between apparent conflict concerning the grace of God and the despairing state of Esau.

[T]hey bolted both upon me at a time, and did work and struggle strangely in me for a while; at last, that about Esau’s birthright began to wax weak, and withdraw, and vanish; and this about the sufficiency of grace prevailed with peace and joy. And as I was in a muse about this thing, that Scripture came home upon me, “Mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (Jas. 2:13). This was a wonderment to me; yet truly I am apt to think it was of God; for the word of the law and wrath must give place to the word of life and grace;
because, though the word of condemnation be glorious, yet the word of life and salvation doth far exceed in glory (II Cor. 3:8-12; Mark 9:5-7). Also, that Moses and Elias must both vanish, and leave Christ and his saints alone.\textsuperscript{170}

In \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress}, Bunyan further deals with the Esau’s hopeless plight when, in making a contrast between regenerate Little-faith and unregenerate Esau, we read of Christian instructing his less informed companion, Hopeful:

Esau’s belly was his god, but Little-faith’s belly was not so; Esau’s want [lack] lay in his fleshly appetite, Little-faith’s did not so. Besides, Esau could see no further than to the fulfilling of his lusts... But Little-faith, though it was his lot to have but a little faith, was by his little faith kept from such extravagances, and made to see and prize his jewels [the riches of grace in Christ] more than to sell them, as Esau did his birthright [having no grace in his heart]. You read not anywhere that Esau had faith, no, not so much as a little.\textsuperscript{171}

3. Encouragement to compete reverently, 12:18-29.

Assuming continuance of the athletic analogy of 12:1, that is “running with perseverance the race set before us,” we are nevertheless faced with a major change of emphasis that brings us back to the fundamental thrust of Hebrews. Having moved aside somewhat, with regard to the nature of enduring faith, from the explicit terms of Jesus Christ’s superiority, especially His more effectual new covenant priesthood, now we revert back to this foundation, in particular renewed contrast between the old and new covenants. Two aspects of the Mosaic covenant are drawn upon that are set in contrast with the transcendent characteristics of the new covenant of Christ’s sprinkled blood. In vs. 18-24, the earthly, fear inducing features of Mount Sinai are overwhelmed by the heavenly, salvation accomplishing features of Mount Zion. Then in vs. 25-29, the same Old Testament scenario is portrayed as a trembling, insecure, transient foundation that is replaced by the New Covenant which is immovable, steadfast, never to be removed.

a. The pursuit of Mount Zion rather than Mount Sinai, vs. 18-24.

Here it seems as though Christian contestants have been faced with an alternative track, that which is a detour leading to Mount Sinai, whereas the course of the narrow way has been heading toward Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. In \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress} Bunyan has graphically portrayed such a parting of the ways by means of the deceitful proposition of Mr. Worldly-Wiseman. He seductively convinced Christian to head toward the alternative of Mount Sinai, the result being that this pilgrim finds himself transfixed with the terrors of the Law, that is until rescued by Evangelist who offers safe redirection back to the new covenant course, as well as appropriate exhortation. This concerns,

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., III, p. 148.
three things in this man’s counsel, that thou must utterly abhor. 1. His turning thee out of the way. 2. His laboring to render the cross odious to thee. And, 3. His setting thy feet in that way that leadeth unto the administration of death. Then said Evangelist, “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they [Israel] escaped not who refused him [Moses] that spake on earth, much more shall not we [Christians] escape, if we turn away from him [Christ] that speaketh from heaven” (Heb. 12:25).

As with the language of 9:13-14, here is upheld not merely new covenant improvement over the old, but stark antithesis with the old, not simply new covenant development of the old, but supercession of the old. Here also the old covenant’s efficient purpose is clearly stated, it being exclusively described as a ministry of guilt-inducing terror and condemnation (II Cor. 3:9), not sanctification.

(1) The condemnation of Mount Sinai with justice, vs. 18-21.

The Hebrew character of the readers of this epistle is all the more indicated by this further radical exposure of the annulment of the Mosaic order (3:1-6; 7:11-14; 19, 28; 8:7-9, 13; 10:1-4, 9). Surely Gentile readers would not need such emphatic persuasion.

(a) There is fire, darkness, and gloom, v. 18.

“For you have not come near [to a mountain] that can be touched [://\, ps\ll\p\w\o\o\], and to a blazing [\k\a\i\o, kai\o] fire [\r\p, pur], and to pitch darkness [\g\n\f\o\o, gnophos], and to deep gloom [\z\p\o\o, zophos], and to raging wind/tempest [\\o\e\l\a, thuella].” There is the suggestion here of Israel’s awesome, fearful encounter with God, early in its pilgrimage from Egypt to Canaan. The apex of this experience was the thunderous, flaming giving of the law through Moses: “there were thunder and lightening flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled; ” thus God spoke in the midst “of fire, of the cloud and of the thick gloom, with a great voice” (Exod. 19:16-19; Deut. 4:11; 5:22-27). There is not the slightest suggestion of grace and mercy here from heaven, especially in the light of the purpose of the law (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19). But the Christian makes a different pilgrimage, “to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” v. 22; he is not detoured along a pathway that can only result in Christian’s experience as a result of Mr. Worldly-Wiseman’s subterfuge.

[T]he hill [Mount Sinai], it seemed so high, and also that side of it that was next the wayside, did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture further, lest the hill should fall on his head; wherefore there he stood still, and wotted not what to do. Also his burden now seemed heavier to him, than while he was in his way. There came also flashes of fire out of the hill, that made Christian afraid that he should be burned

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172 Bunyan, Works, III, p. 95.
(Exod. 19:16, 18). Here, therefore, he sweat and did quake for fear (Heb. 12:21).  

(b) There is fear of judgment, v. 19.

“And to a trumpet [σάλπιγξ, salpinx] sound, and to a voice of words, which those, having heard, implored [παρατεύομαι, paraiteomai] that no further word be spoken to them.” The music here was not entertaining; it was a summons, not a symphony; the message did not make its hearers happy! Here was the full force of God’s holy proclamation that spoke of infinite demand and punishment at the slightest infraction. The more the people listened, the more hopeless their condition appeared. Their sin rose up to proportions never before envisaged, with the solution being thought to be the cessation of the message rather than a cry for mercy. The whole populace of Israel heard in such a paralyzing manner that the people seemed incapable of making a retreat. Thus Owen explains: “When God calls sinners to answer the law, there is no avoiding of an appearance; the terrible summons and citation will draw them out, whether they will or no.”

(c) There is holy condemnation, v. 20.

“For they could not endure [φερῶ, pherō] the command [διαστέλλω, diastellō], ‘If even a beast [θηρίον, th panèguris rion] touch [θύγανω, thingano] the mountain, it will be stoned [λιθοβολῶ, lithoboleō].’” It was not that the holy glory of God was so delightful that the people could not endure such pleasure; rather it was that their unholiness could not tolerate the detail of His holiness, even the strictness of a common animal wandering into God’s presence (Exod. 19:12-13). If such a seeming minimal transgression could not escape the full weight of God’s judgment, then what would be the consequence of a man or woman being sifted by His relentless examination? Here then, as Owen well points out, is indicated the utter “inaccessibleness of God, in and by the law... And it showeth also at what distance we ought to keep ourselves from every thing that falls under the curse of the law.”

(d) There is quaking terror, v. 21.

“And thus [so] frightening [φοβερός, phoberos] was the appearance [φανταζομαι, phantazomai, that] Moses said, ‘I am full of fear [ἐκφοβοῦσα, ekphobos] and with trembling [ἐντρομος, entromos].’” Moses had also earlier trembled at Mt. Horeb (Sinai) before God at His revelation in the burning bush (Exod. 3:6; cf. Acts 7:32. The only other instance of Moses indicating such extreme anxiety upon his encounter with God’s holy display was also at Mount Sinai. This was immediately

173 Ibid., p. 94.
174 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 319.
175 Ibid., p. 326.
following his smashing of the two tablets of the covenant on account of Israel’s corruption under Aaron. Falling down before God, he declared to Israel that, “I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the Lord listened to me” (Deut. 9:19). 32. Here, the Siniatic Covenant is characteristically fear inducing. It is significant that in Ernest Kevan’s The Grace Of Law, A Study Of Puritan Theology, his sympathetic representation of the sanctifying effect of the Decalogue nevertheless makes no reference to the thrust of this whole depiction, in vs. 18-34, of the law’s terror. Rather John Bunyan, in The Pilgrim’s Progress, relates the meeting of Faithful with Adam the First and the pilgrim’s inclination for his three daughters, Lust of the Flesh, Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life. He then depicts his resultant encounter with Moses who constantly beats down the guilty pilgrim. When Faithful cries out for mercy, Moses responds: “I know not how to show mercy; and with that knocked [Faithful] . . . down again.” Then another comes by who causes Moses to retreat. Faithful then explains, “I perceived the holes in his hands, and in his side” (John 1:17). 176 This then is not an encouraging and comforting camping place for the Christian.

(2) The comfort of Mount Zion with justification, vs. 22-24.

It is obvious that for the Christian, Mount Sinai is not to be understood as a companion with Mount Zion, even as an appendage of secondary importance. “It was only temporary. God touched it, but did not abide there.” Rather the child of God comes to Mount Zion as that singular pinnacle, that gospel refuge according to ten superior representations, which transcendentally supercedes and leaves behind Mount Sinai. The “But,” ἀλλά, here in v. 22 is emphatic. Thus Delitzsch rightly comments:

The antithesis is, not that of drawing near under one covenant, and a remaining afar off under the other; . . . but that of the heaven-wide difference between the objects to which approach is made. Those objects were, on the one hand, things dark and terrible, to which those who drew nigh feared to come nearer; on the other, they are things glorious and lovely, with a gracious and attractive charm. 178

(a) There is residency, life, heaven, and holy angels, v. 22.

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, to the heavenly [ἐπουράνιος, epouranios] Jerusalem above, and to ten thousand/myriads [μυρίως, murias] of angels.” Recollection should be made of the commentary on 11:10 where Abraham is described as “looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God,” as well as 11:16; cf. Gal. 4:25-26, where the faithful patriarchs are said to “desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.

178 Delitzsch, Hebrews, II, p. 343.
Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.” The founding patriarch’s initial arrival in Canaan discovered only gross paganism and much famine. The promise of the land was future and not realized until Israel crossed over Jordan under Joshua. Thus Abraham was looking for the holy visitation of heaven upon an unholy earth. The same heavenly, holy, gospel, Messianic benediction upon an unholy earth is now envisaged. So the Christian has come to:

1) **Mount Zion.** This is the mount where King David placed the Ark of the Covenant (II Sam. 6:2); thus it became God’s dwelling place (Ps. 9:11). It is the place where God lays His promised foundation, His Messiah, a “tested stone, a costly corner stone for the foundation firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed” (Isa. 28:16; cf. Rom. 9:3). Here is the location where God finally deals with Israel’s sin (Rom. 11:26-27; cf. Isa. 51:1-3). Here is where the Lamb of God stands and is worshipped (Rev. 14:1) by those who come to Him. Mount Sinai had no comparable ministry; it stimulated fear, not blessed adoration.

2) **The city of the living God.** Mount Sinai was not a city, a place for permanent residence. Rather, “the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. ‘This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her needy with bread. Her priests also I will clothe with salvation, and her godly ones will sing aloud for joy. There I will cause the horn of David to spring forth; I have prepared a lamp for Mine anointed [מָשִּׁיח, mashiach, Messiah]. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon himself his crown will shine’” (Ps. 132:13-18).

3) **The heavenly Jerusalem above.** The good news is that heaven has come to earth in the person of the Lord’s Anointed (John 3:13; 6:38; I Cor. 15:47). Indeed, He has come to Zion, and every Christian, in having come to Christ, has come, as a present rather than a future reality, to Zion’s true sovereign, notwithstanding that His reign is not yet consummated. The believer has not gone to heaven; rather heaven has come to the believer; he is not aligned with “Mount Sinai, [that is] . . . the present [Christ rejecting] Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children” (Gal. 4:25). The believer has come to David’s Zion where God now dwells by way of incarnation.

4) **Myriads of angels.** There were “ten thousand holy angels” at Mount Sinai while at the same time “there was flashing lightning for them” (Deut. 33:2; cf. Ps. 68:17; Dan. 7:9-10). There these messengers were involved in the mediation of the law (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19), that is with regard to its designated purpose (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19). Hence, the emphasis concerned the law’s
uncompromising demands indicated by God’s fiery indignation. Here was a ministry of unremitting severity. But here now is angelic ministry associated with Zion, “a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace [not condemnation] among men with whom He is pleased’” (Luke 2:13-14).

(b) There is fellowship with the Judge and the justified, v. 23.

“To the festive gathering [πανηγυρις, paneguris], and to the church of the firstborn/privileged heirs [πρωτότοκος, prototokos], having been enrolled [ἀπογράφω, apographo] in the heavens, and to God the judge of all and to the spirits of the righteous [δικαιος, dikaios] having been made perfect [τελειω, teleio].”

1) The festive gathering. The Hebrew mind would think of joyous annual celebrations, such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, rather than Greek sports festivals as the word paneguris can describe. Hence the contrast is with the fearful solemnity of the assembly at Mount Sinai, whereas the new covenant citizen participates in the happy exaltation of God’s saving, keeping, benevolent grace, in company with the “myriads of angels.” There was no glad sacred music at Mount Sinai, whereas the Christian has a new song to sing (Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:9; 14:1-3). Mount Zion was to be and shall be a place of such rejoicing (Isa. 35:10; cf. Ps. 137:1-3; 149:1-4).

2) The church of the firstborn. The church, ἐκκλησια, ekklesia here is the assembly of those redeemed by Christ’s blood of the new covenant; they are like the firstborn (Deut. 21:17) or favored, such as Joseph (Gen. 48:8-22) or Elisha (II Kgs. 2:9-10), all of whom were the privileged heirs of a double-portion, through pure grace. That is, the emphasis of the “firstborn,” prōtotokos, concerned rank according to sovereign appointment rather than time or sequence. Esau, as referenced in vs. 16-17, was the firstborn in time (Gen. 25:24-25), but Jacob was decreed by Isaac to be the firstborn according to promised blessing (Gen. 27:27-29, 38-40). Jacob having received the new name of Israel (Gen. 32:28), Moses was later instructed to say of him to Pharaoh, “Israel [the nation under his headship] is My Son, My firstborn” (Exod. 4:22). Hence, as a present reality on earth, this one invisible church comprises the growing body of Christ (Matt. 16:18) that is yet founded upon divine enrollment in heaven. Those who came to Mount Sinai could only maintain a bilateral covenant relationship by means of perfect personal performance; it was very short-lived, the result being God’s anger and judgment (Exod. 32:1-35). Here the church is founded upon a better, more effectual, unilateral covenant (9:11-14; 10:1, 14).
3) *God the judge of all.* A further note of encouragement seems intimated here. But what is it? Judges gather reputations so that a defendant desires to be heard in court by a magistrate who is not only known to be fair, but also merciful. The Hebrew Christian might have recollection of God’s Old Covenant revelation and reputation which could cause fear and hesitancy in making an approach. However, the New Covenant has revealed not only the same unchanging God who is the impartial “judge of all” (Heb. 4:13; 10:30; cf. Matt. 16:27; II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 6:15-17; 20:11), but also that new aspect of His being in which He will especially hearken to the advocacy of His only beloved Son (Heb. 4:16; 10:22). Man in general fears to come to God; the dread causes him to attempt to retreat as far away as he can go. But the Christian, in having a real appreciation of the saving justice of God, declares, as did the Psalmist: “Besides You, I desire nothing on earth. . . . As for me, the nearness of God is my good” (Ps. 73:25, 28).

4) *The spirits of the righteous.* On the one hand, we on earth have come to the “church of the firstborn” in its earthly manifestation, since we have heavenly enrollment. But on the other hand, we have also come to identify with all the saints who, since the Fall, on account of New Covenant mediation, have been received by “the Judge of all.” In other words, those coming to Mount Sinai could only be discouraged on account of revealed guilt and qualification for condemnation; the thought of future fellowship with departed saints would be farthest from the mind. But through Christ, there is assurance of present identification with deceased believers and the hope of eventual translation into the very presence of “the righteous having been made perfect.” So the hope of the righteous on earth at the present is that they also will eventually be made perfect. Farrar sums up concerning the clauses here. They, “give us a beautiful conception of ‘the Communion of Saints above and the Church below’ with myriads of Angels united in a Festal throng, in a Heaven now ideally existent and soon to be actually realized.”

(c) There is Jesus, mediator of a new covenant, v. 24.

“And to Jesus, Mediator of a new [νέος, neos] covenant [διαθήκη, diathēkē], and to the sprinkled [ραντίσμος, rantsimos] blood, which speaks greater/better than that [blood sprinkled/shed] by Abel.” Whereas vs. 18-21 concluded with Moses declaring, “I am full of fear and trembling,” by way of stark contrast vs. 22-24 conclude with the exaltation of “Jesus,” the accomplisher of something transcendently greater and wondrous.

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179 Farrar, Hebrews, p. 182.

180 Note the more common use of καινός, kainos, in 8:8, 13 LXX; 9:15. Consider the use of both in Colossians 3:10, also Lightfoot here. Refer to Trench, *Synonyms Of The New Testament*, pp. 219-225, where a distinction is upheld, especially pp. 224-225 concerning Hebrews 12:24, with regard to comparative newness over Moses. Contra is Hughes, Hebrews, p. 551n.
1) The more effectual new covenant mediator.

Thus the Hebrew Christian in particular, along with the Gentile Christian, has come exclusively to “Jesus,” whose new covenant administration surpasses the old in that His shed blood is incomparably more effectual, in essence and efficacy, than the blood of bulls and goats (9:11-14). Thus, “the Covenant was in relation to the Hebrews ‘new’ in time and not only ‘new’ in substance.”

Whereas God at Mount Sinai was only approachable on pain of death, and no means of access was provided, God at Mount Zion is approachable through the mediation of His Son, whose very name is descriptive of His saving, mediatorial office. For this reason, “He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (3:3).

2) The more effectual sprinkled blood.

In Genesis 4:10, following the murder of Abel, the Lord declares to guilty Cain, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.” This was a plea from earth to heaven for justice, vengeance, satisfaction, and certainly not mercy for Cain. This was a pre-Mosaic voice, not unlike the tone of the voice that caused God’s people to cringe at Mount Sinai, v. 19 (cf. Exod. 19:19, 24; 20:19; Deut. 5:25; 18:16). By way of contrast, the speaking of the shed blood of Jesus Christ is not only essentially superior to that of Abel in its divinity, but more significantly here superior in terms of justice that at the same time provides grace for the guilty. John Brown further adds:

The voice of Abel’s blood drove Cain away from God; but the voice of Jesus’ blood invites us, and, when sprinkled on the conscience, constrains us, to come near. . . . Such is the contrast between the former and the latter dispensation. There, all is awful, terrible, and threatening; here, all is gracious, alluring, and animating. What folly to adhere to the former! What absolute madness to renounce the latter!

b. The pursuit of the unshakable kingdom rather than the shakable, vs. 25-29.

From the analogy of contrasting biblical mountains we turn to a further related comparison concerning the temporal, unstable foundation of Mount Sinai in contrast with the abiding unshakeable character of Mount Zion. Further, in this regard, again a distinction is made between God’s former speaking on earth and His latter speaking from heaven. Yet once more the surpassing greatness of the New Covenant continues to be driven home with cumulative force.

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181 Westcott, Hebrews, p. 417.
182 Brown, Hebrews, II, p. 204.
(1) The voice from heaven rather than the voice from earth, v. 25.

“See that you do not refuse [παραίτεομαι, paraiteomai] Him who is speaking [λαλέω, laleō]. For if those did not fleeing [ἐκφευγω, ekpheugō] having refused [paraiteomai] Him having given instruction/warning [χρηματίζω, chrematizō] on earth, how much less [will we escape] who turn away from [ἀποστρέφω, apostrepho] Him [who warns/instructs] from heaven.” Recollect the fundamental truth of Hebrews in 1:1-2, namely that God, having spoken to the Old Testament dispensation, “in these last days has spoken [λαλέω, laleō] to us in His Son.” The same point is now emphasized, except that the contrast is with both the condemning voice of Abel’s blood, v. 24, then the fear inducing voice that thundered from Mount Sinai, and the New Covenant revelation from heaven. The point of warning is that the Christian is not to be responding to God’s New Covenant revelation in a manner similar to that of Israel’s negative response to God’s Old Covenant voice and revelation, v. 19, especially when one considers the old note of terror and the new tone of mercy and grace. The Messenger is the same, but the new message and its mediation is a radical advance from shadow to substance, from just justice to justifying justice. Hence, if the new blessing is so much greater, then so is the responsibility to heed its voice and camp exclusively on the slopes of Mount Zion offering worship to its King (Ps. 12:6; Joel 3:17), after the manner of the previous athletic exhortation (12:1-2).

(2) The shaking from heaven rather than the shaking from earth, v. 26.

“Of whose voice then shook [σαλέω, saleuō] the earth, but now has promised saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake [σείσω, seisō] not only the earth but also the heaven.” Under the Mosaic dispensation, God’s speaking caused trembling (Exod. 19:18; Judg. 5:4; Ps. 68:7-8; 114:7); but the post-exilic prophecy of Haggai 2:6 promised that the Lord would, “once more in a little while, . . . shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.” Further, “I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Hag. 2:7; also vs. 21-22). Here is that “shaking” which the two comings of Jesus Christ will introduce, but in the light of the “kingdom [being] received” of v. 28, the emphasis is upon Messiah’s second coming (I Cor. 15:28; Heb. 2:8). Horatius Bonar comments concerning Haggai 2:21:

This prophecy has never yet been fulfilled. It was not so at the First Advent, because that period, instead of being one of shakings, was a time of universal peace. The kingdoms of the earth underwent no change at all. The heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land have suffered as yet no convulsion, but continue firm and stable. Peace, not war, calm, not commotion, heralded the Savior’s Advent.183

Whereas the economy of Moses shook the earth in a restricted sense in the regions of Sinai and Canaan (Exod. 19:18; Judg. 5:5; Ps. 68:7-9), the

183 Horatius Bonar, *Prophetic Landmarks*, p. 89.
supplanting New Covenant shakes earth and heaven, its influence being that much more comprehensive and effectual.184

(3) The establishment of heavenly things and removal of earthly things, v. 27.

“But the [expression], ‘Yet once more,’ makes clear the taking away [μεταθέσις, metathesis] of things which are shaken [σαλεύω, saleuō], as [things] having been made/created, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” The expression of Haggai, “Yet once more,” is built upon a former time of shaking. Hence the former shaking is to be done away with by both the “removal” of the Old Covenant, and all of its failed components, and the installation of the New Covenant, a truly unshakable kingdom of far more comprehensive, superior, effectual and abiding proportions. The former shaking was localized at Mount Sinai; it comprised an earthy mound that shuddered with thunder; it could shake but not heal what was shattered. At the same time the surrounding nations were not effected. But further, this covenant was broken at the outset (Exod. 32:19-35) because of a fundamental, inherent weakness, an impotence to dynamically sanctify; the shaking in this sphere proved the Mosaic covenant to be an instrument of condemnation that was morally perfect yet unsatisfactory. Thus, “the Law made nothing perfect, . . . on the other hand there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God” (7:19), and there is a dynamic sanctifying of the soul, which makes “the worshiper perfect in conscience” (9:9) and “cleanses your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14, cf. 10:22). This kingdom, in displacing both the Mosaic and the Gentile kingdoms (Dan. 2:44;), designated as the “new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:1-2; cf. 11:15), will have steadfast permanence and renovate the heavens and the earth, the kingdoms and nations of the world (Hag. 2:6-7, 21-22).

(4) The offering of gratitude, vs. 28-29.

“Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken [ἀσάλευτος, asaleutos], let us have/show grace/gratitude [χάρις] by which we may serve God acceptably/in a pleasing manner [εὐαρεστῶς, euarestōs with reverence/godly fear [εὐλογεῖα, eulabeia, cf. 5:7] and awe [δέος, deos], for our God is an utterly consuming/devouring [καταναλίσκω, katanaliskō] fire.” The one imperative here is a strong exhortation, in the light of such a triumphant, stable prospect. Hence, “Let us express thankfulness [to God],” and the Hebrew mind here would include a prayerful psalm. Isaac Watts has written:

184 We strongly reject the emphasis of Arthur Pink when he titles successive chapters at this juncture, “The Passing of Judaism” and “The Establishing of Christianity.” He further comments that “Judaism had been set aside by God and that he [the Jew] must turn his own back upon it, . . . Hebrew believers were no longer connected with Judaism, but were come to the antitypical Zion.” Hebrews, II, pp. 163, 168. If this were true, how could Paul continue to regard himself as a “Jew” (Acts 21:39; 22:3; Rom. 9:3-5; 11:1). Judaism is rooted in the abiding Abrahamic Covenant, not the intervening, abrogated Mosaic economy.
Adore and tremble, for our God
   Is a consuming fire!
His jealous eyes his wrath inflame,
   And raise his vengeance higher.
At his approach the mountains flee,
   And seek a wat’ry grave;
The frightened sea makes haste away,
   And shrinks up ev’ry wave.
Yet, mighty God, thy sovereign grace
   Sits regent on the throne;
The refuge of thy chosen race
   When wrath comes rushing down.

(a) For an unshakable kingdom, v. 28a.

Here is the hope of our worship. Those tossed to and fro in a storm for
days delight to have their feet set upon solid, stable ground. When
earthly kingdoms rise to boastful heights, and then come crashing down
to humiliation in the dust, being trodden under foot by other aspiring
kingdoms, the conquering kingdom of Jesus Christ is refreshingly unique because it promises indestructibility and holy permanence (Matt.
16:18). This kingdom, which was certainly promised to Abraham (Gen.
12:1-3), is certainly fulfilled in Christ (Gal. 3:14, 29; Eph. 3:6) and no
intervening covenant designed for a temporary purpose (Gal. 3:19, 23-
25) can detract from this certainty. When religious charlatans leave a
trail of wreckage and legal promises disappoint, the authenticity of
Jesus Christ proves dependable since in coming to Him, a person “will
never thirst again” (John 4:14), for, “He who believes in Him will not
be disappointed” (Rom. 9:33; 10:11; I Pet. 2:6; cf. Ps. 28:16).

(b) With acceptable worship, v. 28b.

Here is the means of our worship. “To serve,” λατρεύω, latreuō, is to
worship with submissive labor that is “well-pleasing” to God. The
thought is that of delighting God, not only with our grateful attitude
and prayerful song, but also devoted practical service that is designated
in 13:1-19. However it is a loving rather than a legal response. The
greatness and glory of the kingdom of Christ, our participation in it,
ought to constrain the citizen of that kingdom to offer appreciative
service. Thus true Christian worship is not merely a Sunday affair. And
further, the character of our approach to God, as we serve, is not with
a casual air, but “reverent piety,” as with Jesus (5:7; cf. John 17:11, 25),
and “wondrous, trembling awe” at being able to acceptably approach
the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 6:1-7; Dan. 10:4-10, 15; Rev. 1:17).

(c) Because of the holiness of God, v. 29.

Here is the motivation of our worship. The reference is to Deuteronomy
4:24. However v. 23 reads: “So watch yourselves, that you do not
forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which He made with you.” Hence: “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” In other words, God destroys the dross of ungodliness so that He might produce a holy residue (Isa. 1:21-26; Ezek. 22:17-22). While the Mosaic order is taken away, the holy character of God abides, even as He dwells in Mount Zion. The New Covenant in no way lessens God’s righteous demands, although it does at the same time offer satisfaction for violation of His holiness. Thus we are to remember the holy terms of God’s New Covenant and the holy God of the New Covenant; He is no less inclined to be angry with and judge those who presume upon His new gracious administration. For the unrelenting rebellious sinner who brazenly scorns “the knowledge [ἐπιγνώσις, epignōsis] of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries” (10:26-27). Thus Owen gives a balanced exhortation.

[How great our care and diligence about the serving of God ought to be, which are pressed on us by the Holy Ghost from the consideration of the greatness of our privileges on the one hand, namely our receiving the kingdom; with the dreadful destruction from God on the other, in case of our neglect herein.]


The stark change of emphasis at this juncture has led to a multitude of speculations concerning the connectedness of this chapter with what has preceded, especially concerning its distinctive authorship. Here is the most Pauline section of the Epistle. Though it needs to be stressed that there is no manuscript evidence for any disjunction here. Thus Westcott comments:

The thirteenth chapter is a kind of appendix to the Epistle, like Romans 15-16. The first twelve chapters form a complete treatise; and now for the first time distinct personal traits appear. A difference of style corresponds with the difference of subject; but the central portion brings back with fresh power some of the main thoughts on which the writer has before insisted.

Thus the exhortation to devoted practical service, 12:28, now finds explicit clarification. Indeed what follows indicates how a right perception of God as a “consuming fire” ought to be manifest as down-to-earth love amongst the brethren. Furthermore, it remains unnecessary to now disassociate from the athletic pilgrimage analogy, 12:1-4, 9-13, 18, 22, 28, which surely would incorporate the following competitive, authenticating characteristics. Here is how a serious understanding of the New Covenant ought to work itself out in local church life while surrounded by an antagonistic world.

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185 Owen, Hebrews, IV, p. 378.
186 Westcott, Hebrews, p. 428.
a. Advocacy of love of the brethren, vs. 1-3.

Whereas in 6:10; 10:24, love [ἀγάπη, agapē] of God within Christian fellowship is described, as well as avoidance of the love of money [ἀφιλαργυρός, aphilarguros] in 13:5, here is the singular yet most prominent reference in this Epistle to “brotherly love” (cf. Rom. 12:10; I Thess. 4:9; I Pet. 1:22; II Pet. 1:7). Amongst God’s people, as we encounter them, there are many that we are quickly and easily drawn to. However, it is sometimes necessary for us to be reminded of other Christians that we ought to give just as much loving attention to, such as strangers and visitors, or suffering prisoners and distant friends who are alienated from us.

(1) Let it continue, v. 1.

“Let brotherly love [φιλάδελφια, philadelphia] continue.” In other words, do not let fade that which had so zealously bloomed in the past (6:10; 10:32-33), that is, “Let us not lose heart in doing good” (Gal. 6:9; II Thess. 3:13). Here is a primary concern, perhaps not unconnected with the falling away from fellowship on the part of some (10:25). However this quality of genuine, practical mercy, should not be limited here only to love amongst the brethren, but also simply he who is my neighbor (Luke 10:30-37). The stimulus to such devoted interest is to be He who became intimately sympathetic with our weaknesses (4:14). For this reason “He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted,” that is “His brethren” (2:17-18, cf. vs. 11-12), and thus so should we, according to repeated exhortations (John 13:34; 15:12, 17; I John 3:11, 14, 16-18; 4:7-12; II John 5). So Charles Wesley has written:

Sweetly may we all agree,
Touched with loving sympathy:
Kindly for each other care;
Every member feel its share.
Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names, and sects, and parties fall:
Thou, O Christ, art all in all.

(2) Let it be hospitable, v. 2.

“Do not neglect to show hospitality [ἐπιλευκάνομαι, epilanthanomai] to strangers [φιλοξενία, philoxenia], for on account of this some have entertained angels [ἀγέλους, angelos] without knowing it.” There may be allusion here to the hospitality of Abraham (Gen. 18:2-22), Lot (Gen. 19:1-2), Gideon (Judg. 6:11-20), Manoah (Judg. 13:2-14), even the teaching of Jesus concerning unconscious service of Christ through the conscious service of “these brothers of Mine, even the least of them” (Matt. 25:35-40). Dangers of the night, oppression from the world, the absence of safe accommodation, and the maintenance of the faith, made hospitality to be a major concern amongst early Christianity, and of course abuse of kindness remained a possibility (I Pet. 4:9; Rom. 12:13; I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). So the
very early Didaché records: “Let every apostle that cometh to you be received as the Lord; and he shall stay but one day, and, if need be the next day also; but if he stay three days he is a false prophet. . . . if he ask money he is a false prophet.” Nevertheless, Christian entertaining has its spiritual rewards and insights for the hosts as well as the guests.

(3) Let it be merciful, v. 3.

“Remember the prisoners [δὲσμιος, desmios] as if imprisoned with them [συνδεομαι, sündeomai], and those who are mistreated/badly handled [κακουχεο, kakoucheo], as also yourselves being in body [σωμα, soma, potentially a prospect for suffering].” The call for empathy here suggests that the author is drawing from harrowing personal experience, in company with other incarcerated Christians (Col. 4:18). Further, he has specific friends in mind who the addressees readily identify, that is “the prisoners.” John Bunyan was well qualified to appreciate this exhortation, for he wrote in his Prison Meditations:

I am, indeed in prison now
In body, but my mind
Is free to study Christ, and how
Unto me he is kind.

For though men keep my outward man
Within their locks and bars,
Yet by the faith of Christ I can
Mount higher than the stars.

Their fetters cannot spirits tame,
Nor tie up God from me;
My faith and hope they cannot lame,
Above them I shall be.

Here we can see how all men play
Their parts as on a stage,
How good men suffer for God’s way,
And bad men at them rage.

Here then is probably the context for the preceding call for hospitality, namely that which should be lavished on newly released prisoners who have been mistreated. Here is where true brotherly love shows itself, that is sensitivity to another’s suffering as if it were our own. Thus Wesley has described this as being, “Touched with loving sympathy.”

b. Advocacy of marital fidelity, v. 4.

“The marital union [ὁ γαμος, ho gamos] is honorable among all and the sexual union/bed [ἡ κοιτη, he koitē] is undefiled/not unclean [ἀμιαντος, amiantos]; for

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187 Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church, pp. 91-92.
188 Bunyan, Works, I, p. 64-65
God will judge the sexually immoral [πόρνος, pornos] and adulterous [μοίχος, moichos].” Clearly some false teaching is addressed here, such as in I Timothy 4:3a where certain gnostic, ascetic apostates falsely “forbid marriage.” That is, they celebrate virginity and celibacy, probably on the grounds that sexual relations in marriage represent a carnal lifestyle unworthy of those who rise to a more spiritual existence. However, the result is often a mere outward appearance of high chastity that hypocritically covers hidden immorality. In a world of widespread sexual promiscuity, biblical Christianity, following on from God’s call for Israel’s moral fidelity (Hos. 2:19-20; 4:1-2), established an uncommon regard for purity in marriage (Gal. 5:19, 21; I Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5-6; Rev. 22:15). Today, Roman Catholicism has been particularly guilty in this regard, with catastrophic results. There have been other perfectionist, communal and higher life attempts to transcend the natural desires of the flesh, such as with the tragic end to Robert Pearsall Smith’s itinerant conference ministry, he being the husband of Hannah Whitall Smith, author of The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life.¹⁸⁹ However Paul continues to explain that marriage, being that which “God has created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer” (I Tim. 4:3b-5).

c. Advocacy of spiritual content, vs. 5-6.

The value system of the Christian is radically different from that of the citizen of this world, no matter what century he lives in. In particular, his desires, interests, and hopes are of a different world. Strangely he best appreciates and enjoys this world because he does not presume upon it, whereas the wordling becomes increasingly frustrated with the fact of his inevitable severance from his possessions and worldly attainments.

(1) Content that renounces love of money, v. 5-6.

“Turn from/do not be occupied with a love of money manner of life [ἀψιλόγυρος, aphilarguros], being content [ἀρκεομαι, arkeomai] with what you have; for He himself has said, ‘I will never depart/desert [ἀνα, anα] you; I will never leave/forsake [ἐνκαταλείπω, enkataleipō] you.’ “So that being confident/bold [θαρρεω, thareo], we say, ‘The Lord is my helper [βοηθος, boethos], I will not be afraid; what will man do to me?’” Here are two contrary attitudes, concerning the condition and treasure of a Christian’s soul, that are determined by the presence or absence of a true knowledge of the LORD God.

(a) A “love of money” lifestyle, v. 5a.

It is distinctively avarice, or focused greed,¹⁹⁰ and therefore it is especially necessary for church leaders to eschew this quality (I Tim. 3:3). This is the snare here of Christians, not those who are uncompromisingly of this world. In The Pilgrim’s Progress, By-ends and

¹⁸⁹ Ray Strachey, Group Movements Of The Past, pp. 11-21.
his friends, Mr. Hold-the-World, Mr. Money-love, and Mr. Save-all, are religious under the ministry of Parson Two-tongues. Nevertheless, By ends, having married Lady Faining’s high-bred daughter, goes on pilgrimage in silver slippers, though mainly when the sun shines and people applaud. Here is represented an acquisitive society, a Vanity Fair through which all pilgrims must pass, that is especially promoted by the media and advertising.

(b) A “contented” lifestyle, vs. 5b-6.

In a land of plenty, this is a distinguishing characteristic that is pictured by Christian and Hopeful in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* who are solicited by Demas, a professing “son of Abraham.” He tempts pilgrims with a beguiling tour of the Silver-Mine at the Hill Lucre, yet although Hopeful is momentarily enticed, he and warning Christian pass by. When By-ends and his friends approach the Silver-mine, they quickly yield to the seductive prompting and are never seen again. The antidote to the siren-like calls of this world is that evidenced by Christian and Faithful when solicited at Vanity Fair. They prayed, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;” to the invitation to trade, they responded, “We buy the truth.” So here, it is the truth of God that sanctifies (John 17:17).

1) The promise of God to satisfy, v. 5b.

The quotation of Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5 (cf. Gen. 28:15; I Chron 28:20; Isa. 41:17) indicates a familiar promise that was given by God to Israel when leadership transferred from Moses to Joshua. This is not the assurance of luxury, a bed of ease (Prov. 30:8-9), nor a recommendation to neglect industrious, productive labor, but rather the promised wealth of God’s unfailing presence, even when passing through “the waters, . . . the rivers, . . . the fire, . . . the flame,” since, “I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! . . . I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isa. 43:2, 1, 3). It is the world view of faith that “God will provide” (Gen. 22:8); the world view of unbelief is: “I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry’” (Luke 12:18-19).

2) The proclamation of the believer’s satisfaction, v. 6.

The quotation of Psalm 118:6 is based upon the testimony: “From my distress I called upon the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me in a large place,” v. 5. Although “all nations surrounded me; . . . they surrounded me like bees; . . . but the LORD helped me,” vs. 10, 12-13. Consequently the proof of God leads to the praise of His deliverance. However everything hinges on knowing this
“LORD.” It is both as the only Jehovah of Israel, the great I Am, and as “my Helper,” He who gives succour, sustenance at the hour of trial (Heb. 4:16). So John Newton has written:

Why should I fear the darkest hour,  
Or tremble at the tempter’s power?  
Jesus vouchsafes to be my tower.  

Though hot the fight, why quit the field?  
Why must I either fly or yield,  
Since Jesus is my mighty shield?  

When creature comforts fade and die,  
Worldlings may weep, but why should I?  
Jesus still lives and still is nigh.  

I know not what may soon betide,  
Or how my wants shall be supplied;  
But Jesus knows and will provide.  

Thou sin would fill me with distress,  
The throne of grace I dare address,  
For Jesus is my righteousness.  

Though faint my prayers and cold my love,  
My steadfast hope shall not remove,  
While Jesus intercedes above.  

Against me earth and hell combine;  
But on my side is power divine;  
Jesus is all, and He is mine.  

Thus, “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom. 8:31). Our steadfast confidence in God at the same time provides us with a boldness concerning whatever man may attempt to do against us. The fearless man is he who is truly fearful of God.

d. Advocacy of pastoral interests, vs. 7-19.

From personal, ethical matters of the heart we turn to pastoral concerns that are yet seasoned with New Covenant teaching, especially the role of sacrifice as it is effectual “through His [Jesus] own blood,” v. 12. The emphasis is upon the responsibilities of sheep in relation to their under-shepherds.

(1) Faithful leadership recalled, vs. 7-8.

The essence of local church leadership, by implication elders and deacons, in relation to those who are led and the food that is provided by the shepherd for the sheep, is now summed up. The assumption is that the custody here was faithful, spiritually nourishing.

(a) The conduct of their faith, v. 7.

“Remember/bring to mind [μνημονεύω, mnêmoneuó] those leading [ἡγεμονάω, hêgeomai] you, who spoke [aorist] to you the word of God,
and considering [ἀναθεωρέω, anatheōreō] whose resultant [ἐκβασίς, ek-basis] lifestyle behavior [ἀναστροφή, anastrophe], imitate [μιμομαί, mimeomai] their faith.” The inference is that a Christian will be under local church leadership (cf. v. 24); independence is not an option. Hence here is exhortation that is vital for those today who profess to be Christians and yet wander from church to church as religious vagabonds, without accountability. Though at the time of this Epistle, an implicit rebuke is more likely intended of those who stay at home as spiritual hermits; fellowship and love of the brethren does not rank very high with them (I John 1:3; 2:7-11; 3:11-23; 4:7-5:2). Explicit here is the dependence of sheep upon faithful under-shepherds (I Pet. 5:1-4), who are to be esteemed according to two crucial areas of responsibility.

However it is the initial or founding leadership here that should be remembered, and probably this is a gentle indictment of the present leadership. They were pillars of the church, princes in Israel so to speak. Thus we should be able to look back with a sense of spiritual indebtedness to the likes of John Bunyan, John Newton, C. H. Spurgeon, J. C. Ryle, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, but especially because they were faithful in two complementary realms. Ryle was said to be, “A man of granite with the heart of a little child,” that is faithful in ministry and manner, and so it was with all of these stalwart leaders. So we are to give attention to Christian biography for the purpose of spiritual modeling regarding doctrine and duty (6:12; I Cor. 4:15-16; 11:1; I Thess. 1:5-6). Thus we are to imitate the faith of the faithful, namely both their doctrine and duty (11:1-38), perhaps a seeming tall order.

1) They were faithful in doctrine, v. 7a.

In the spoken, taught, preached, expounded word of God they were solid, balanced, judicious, reliable, effecting, never rash or easily attracted to novel doctrine. This ministry was their priority, among many things (Acts 2:42; 4:31; 6:2-4, 7; 12:24; 19:20). They were never distracted by lesser concerns; they never sought approbation; they never yielded to the temptation to display their learning; they had a sense of the burden of the prophet.

2) They were faithful in duty, v. 7b.

Their lifestyle, being a consequence of their belief, was evident as harmonious, consistent, attractive, holy, never sanctimonious or professional. Their lives were persuasive. They heeded Paul’s admonition, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock,” after his manner of “declaring the whole purpose of God, . . . admonishing with tears, working hard with his hands . . . in order to help the weak” (Acts 20:28, 31, 34-35).
(b) The Conductor of their faith, v. 8.

“Jesus Christ, [is the same] yesterday and the same [today] and for ever.” Here is a verse frequently abused on account of it being divorced from its preceding context to which it is best attached. Many have used this text to vindicate apostolic signs and wonders in the present. Others have declared that here we have a strong, even creedal affirmation of Jesus Christ’s eternality and deity. However, the exhortation of v. 7 is the key here; it could easily be thought of as presenting a daunting challenge, for who could possibly achieve anywhere near the stature of such spiritual giants of the past? But the author here gives good reason as to why such examples in the past are not impossible in the present. For the Jesus Christ who was the root and ground of the saints of the past is identically present with the Christian right now. His living power is not in the slightest diminished. So Jonathan Edwards comments concerning the addressees:

If they still professed to be Christians of the followers of Jesus Christ, then they should still cleave to the same doctrines that they were taught in their first conversion; they should still follow the faith of them, who had first indoctrinated them in Christianity; for Jesus Christ was the same now that he was then, and therefore, Christianity was obviously the same thing.  

Here then is good reason why the Christian should “not be carried away by varied and strange teachings,” v. 9. As Charles Wesley encourages us:

Jesus, thou sovereign Lord of all,  
The same through one eternal day,  
Attend Thy feeblest follower’s call,  
And O instruct us how to pray!  
Pour out the supplicating grace,  
And stir us up to seek Thy face.

(2) Deviant teaching repudiated, vs. 9-10.

Having considered the athletic analogy concerning Christian pilgrimage since 12:1, it may still be a valid representation of a progressing believer, especially since right nourishment of the participant is such a vital matter. Here we consider the best dietary elements that a child of God should both ingest and digest, after the manner of the Chief Dietician (John 4:31-34). Of necessity, a contrast is made between religious junk food that is bad for the heart, and heavenly manna that “strengthens the heart,” v. 9.

(a) The invalidity of unhealthy teachings, v. 9a.

“Do not be carried away/led astray [παραφέρομαι, parapheromai] by varied/numerous and strange [ξένος, xenos] teachings.” It is probably

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also appropriate to identify religious junk food as fast food, manufactured food, and cheap food that is available on every street corner. On the other hand heavenly manna is of infinite worth, is lovingly prepared, it requires extended meditation, is produced at great cost, and is only encountered by those with a serious palate. Here a sort of Jewish kosher religious buffet is envisaged, that has probably accumulated Rabbinic editing of the Mosaic menu. Farrar references the minutae of the Jewish Halachah [Law and Talmud] with its endless refinements upon, and inferences from, the letter of the law. This is the sort of teaching of which the Talmud is full, and most of it has no real connection with true Mosaism.\footnote{Farrar, Hebrews, p. 188.}

However, spiritual benefit from physical ingestion, of whatever sort, is explicitly denied by Paul in I Corinthians 8:7-8. The end result here is a form of Galatianism that insults the sanctifying power of the blood of the New Covenant upon the conscience (Gal. 3:1-3; Col. 2:16-23).

(b) The nutrition of the food of grace, v. 9b.

“For it is good for the heart to be strengthened/fortified \(\text{	extbeta\textbeta\textomicron\textomega, bebaio\\ddot{o}}\) by grace.” Here the stability of the pilgrim is in mind, steadfastness, standing firm, by means of spiritual food that strengthens the soul, and even the body in a resultant sense. The vital ingredient is “grace,” cf. 2:9; 4:16; 10:29; 12:15, 29; 13:25, that is the inward renewal of the soul mediated through those “who led you, who spoke the word of God to you,” v. 7, in contrast with mere outward priestly form, carnal nourishment, religious performance. Of course this “grace” is bestowed through faith alone as 11:1-38 makes clear.

(c) The invalidity of food for spirituality, v. 9c.

“Not by foods \(\text{\beta\textomicron\textalpha, br\textomicron\textalpha}\), in which those [thus] walking \(\text{\pi\textomicron\textrho\textomicron\textomicron\textomicron\textomicron\textepsilon\textomicron\textomicron\ominus, peripate\\ddot{o}}\) did not profit/gain.” This Hebrew bill of fare may additionally have in mind the Passover lamb (Exod. 12:8-11; Lev. 19:5-8; 22:29-30), the consumption of which was erroneously supposed to aid in spiritual growth, the “strengthening of the heart”! Here priestly activity was vigorous, revered, and considered necessary. Whereas New Covenant gospel truth proclaims the once-and-for-all, completed sanctifying priestly activity of the Lord Jesus, 1:3; 10:11-12. However, as Toplady has written:

\begin{verbatim}
Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and Thou alone.
\end{verbatim}
(d) The nutrition of New Covenant food, v. 10.

“We have an altar/place of sacrifice [θυσιαστήριον, thusiastérion] from which those serving [λατρεύω, latreuō] the tabernacle do not have authority to eat.” According to the Mosaic economy, the priests, along with their family members and servants, were allowed to retain certain meat and grain offerings for their own consumption (Lev. 7:1-14; 16:27; Deut. 12:15--; I Cor. 9:13; 10:18). However, concerning the most solemn sacrifices in the Jewish year, such as sin offerings including those offered on the Day of Atonement that were burned outside the camp, cf. v. 11, not even the priests or high priest could partake of them (Lev. 6:23, 30). Here was selectivity and restriction. Though in becoming a Christian, any Jew was also under a ban that would prohibit any participation whatsoever in the sacrificial system. However, he ought not to be concerned since, as with all Christians, he “has an altar/place of sacrifice at which he is authorized to eat.” Here the priesthood of all true believers is forcefully stated in both inclusive and exclusive term (I Pet. 2:5). It is inclusive of all true believers who, by faith, partake of Christ in their hearts (Eph. 3:17); it is exclusive in that it denies participation to those who trust in the carnal, works efficacy of the Mosaic sacrifices (10:1-4, 11). Thus the “altar” here is the atonement of Jesus Christ, “the blood of the eternal covenant,” v. 20, at which the Christian spiritually partakes (John 6:51-63). John Brown explains:

[W]e, in faith of the truth, are permitted to feast on the whole sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We not only eat His flesh, but we do what none of the priests durst do with regard to any of the sacrifices, we drink His blood. We enjoy the full measure of benefit which his sacrifice was designed to secure. We are allowed to feed freely on the highest and holiest of all sacrifices. Our reconciliation with God is complete, our fellowship with Him intimate and delightful.

(3) New covenant teaching recommended, vs. 11-16.

This author has a fertile mind that continually reflects upon aspects of the old covenant with which he was intimately acquainted. Upon contemplation of an aspect of the Mosaic economy, he is immediately prompted to contrast it with the superiority of the new covenant. So the tabernacle altar, and the limitations of priestly participation, referenced in v. 10, leads his thinking to yet another specific feature of that system which the sacrifice of Jesus Christ so wondrously excels.

(a) The commendation of Jesus’ suffering high-priesthood, vs. 11-14.

As v. 10 has intimated, certain sacrificial offerings could not be eaten by the priesthood and their families. So what was the procedure for their disposal, and what typical significance did this represent? The setting is the Day of Atonement whereby the high priest alone presented a sin

offering for the people. But what happened to the bodies of these sacrifices after the blood was taken from them and offered to God?

1) The offering of the Old Covenant high priest, v. 11.

“For the bodies of these animals [living creatures] whose blood is brought into the holy place through the high priest, are being [completely] consumed by fire [κατακαίω, katakaiō] as an offering for sin outside the camp/formation of God’s people [παρεμβολή, parembolē].” Thus, “the bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp, and they shall burn their hides, their flesh, and their refuse in the fire” (Lev. 16:27). Thus that which represented the sin of God’s people was to be distanced from them so that they might be disassociated from former defilement. The same principle applied to the preceding description of the two goats. The scapegoat, with the hands of the high priest having been laid upon its head, having born “all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins,” was led outside the camp “into the wilderness, . . . to a solitary land” and released (Lev. 6-22). Similarly the remains of the slain goat at that time would also have been burned outside the camp. One goat, as a substitutionary sin offering, represented the satisfactory atonement price, life laid down in death; the other goat, as a substitutionary offering, represented the accomplishment of this atonement, namely the vanquishing and disposal of sin. This leads us to anticipate the conclusion that what two sacrifices represented, the one sacrifice of Christ actually accomplished.

2) The offering of the New Covenant high priest, vs. 12-14.

The ministry of Jesus is again described, by way of contrast, in terms of its real sanctifying activity and power (cf. 9:13-14). However, the practical purpose here is that the believer, presently living in a corrupt world, especially in the religious realm of Mosaic Judaism, is to similarly identify with Jesus’ holy consecration; this was sacred devotion designed to conquer sin in the city, and ultimately become alienated from it. Thus Jesus disassociated Himself from the religious status quo of Jerusalem, and so should His disciple.

a) Jesus, the sanctifier who suffered outside the gate, v. 12.

“Therefore Jesus also, in order that He might sanctify [αγιάζω, hagiazō] the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate [πολη, pulē].” Here is the purpose of Jesus Christ’s coming is succinctly stated (Tit. 2:14). His people are the elect Jew and Gentile given to Him by His Father (John 17:2, 6, 9, 24), the “descendant [seed] of
Abraham” (2:16). Whereas Jerusalem was regarded as sacred, and the territory immediately outside, the Valley of Kidron, or the Valley of Jehoshapat, Gehenna, the valley of the dead, and likewise Golgotha, the place of a “skull,” were unholy, Jesus, God’s Holy One, suffered outside unholy Jerusalem and established this unholy location as holy! As Jesus’ Christ’s priesthood was of Judah, not Levi (7:11-14), so His redemption was necessarily disassociated from the temple precincts. But further such consecration was costly; it was not applauded, but mocked; it resulted, not in relief, but agony of soul, destitution, loneliness.

b) Jesus, the sanctifier who receives the sanctified, v. 13.

“Therefore, let us go out to him outside the camp bearing His reproach/rebuke/chastisement [ὀνειδίσμος, oneidismos].” Thus the Jewish Christian is to depart from the Mosaic order, such as represented by Jerusalem and reflected in v. 9, since, because of its “weakness and uselessness,” it demonstrably “made nothing perfect” (7:18-19). Thus, “You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you [outside the camp], leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (I Pet. 2:21). In more broad terms of separation, Spurgeon comments:

Jesus, bearing His cross, went forth to suffer without the gate. The Christian’s reason for leaving the camp of the world’s sin and religion is not because he loves to be singular, but because Jesus did so; and the disciple must follow his Master. Christ was “not of the world.” His life and His testimony were a constant protest against conformity with the world. Never was such overflowing affection for men as you find in Him; but still He was separate from sinners. In like manner Christ’s people must “go forth unto Him.” They must take their position “without the camp,” as witness-bearers for the truth. They must be prepared to tread the straight and narrow path. They must have bold, unflinching, lion-like hearts, loving Christ first, and His truth next, and Christ and His truth beyond all the world. Jesus would have His people “go forth without the camp” for their own sanctification. You cannot grow in grace to any high degree while you are conformed to the world. The life of separation may be a path of sorrow, but it is the highway of safety; and though the separated life may cost you many pangs, and make every day a battle, yet it is a happy life after all. No joy can excel that of the soldier of Christ: Jesus reveals Himself so graciously, and gives such sweet refreshment, that the warrior feels more calm and peace in his daily strife than others in their hours of rest. The highway of holiness is the highway of communion. It is thus we shall hope to win the crown if we are enabled by divine grace faithfully to follow Christ “without the camp.” The crown of glory will follow the cross of separation. A
moment’s shame will be well recompensed by eternal honor; a little while of witness-bearing will seem nothing when we are “for ever with the Lord.”

Adolph Saphir further explains that,

The “cross” of Christ will always be “outside the camp.” True faith in Jesus will never, in this dispensation, be according to the spirit and taste of the world. Spiritual worship will always be an enigma to the world, and its aversion.

c) Jesus, the sanctifier who builds a lasting city, v. 14.

“For here we do not have an abiding/lasting city [μένουσαν πόλιν, menousan polin], but we are seeking the one [city] coming.” It follows that those who identify with Jesus crucified outside Jerusalem, and thus have departed from Jerusalem in its present spiritually decadent state, are declaring their allegiance to a “New Jerusalem,” where Jesus Christ will reign with a holy dominion (11:10, 16). Thus we have intimated the future demise of the temple of Herod, which is apparently still standing. Indeed, in view of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and all of the corruption that it represents, abandonment of the old Jerusalem is prudent (Luke 21:20-24). But the spiritual materiality and glory of the Jerusalem to come is something to enthuse about with unfailing hope (Zech. 8:2-3; Luke 21:24; Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10). Then it will be Jerusalem the Golden:

There is the throne of David;
And there from care released,
The shout of them that triumph,
The song of them that feast;
And they, who with their Leader
Have conquered in the fight,
For ever and for ever
Are clad in robes of white.
O sweet and blessed country,
The home of God’s elect!
O sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect!
Jesus in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest,
Who art, with God the Father
And Spirit, ever blest!

\[194\text{ C. H. Spurgeon, \textit{Morning and Evening}, April 6.}\]

\[195\text{ Saphir, \textit{Hebrews}, II, p. 872.}\]
(b) The commendation of Jesus’ mediatory high-priesthood, vs. 15-16.

Of the many exhortations that are based upon the new covenant sacrifice of Jesus Christ (cf. 2:1; 3:12-13; 4:1, 11, 16; 6:1-2; 10:19-25; 12:1-2, 12-16, 25, 28; 13:9-14), this final plea moves from the praising heart to the practice that such praise should generate.

1) He is to be offered the sacrifice of thankful praise, v. 15.

“Therefore through Him, let us offer up/bring forth [ἀναφέρω, anapherō] a sacrifice of praise [ἀνεσίς, ainesis] to God on account of all/everything, that is the fruit of lips, while confessing [ὁμολογέω, homologeō] His name.” Praise is essentially a “telling forth,” an outward expression of an inner conviction; it is the utterance that worship generates, the “offering” of a bodily statement, thus by means of the lips. Here is response to sacrifice, the blood of Jesus offered “outside the gate,” v. 12, personally appropriated; it is a faith acknowledgment, under constraint of the love of Christ (II Cor. 5:14-15), that utterly repudiates human effort, all of the futile man-centered religious activity that is transacted “inside the gate” of Jerusalem. The atonement of Jesus has especially generated the praise of Christ in song. As Horatius Bonar well illustrates.

I bless the Christ of God;
   I rest on love divine;
   And with unfaltering lip and heart,
   I call the Savior mine.

His cross dispels each doubt:
   I bury in His tomb
   Each thought of unbelief and fear,
   Each lingering shade of gloom.

I praise the God of grace;
   I trust His truth and might;
   He calls me His, I call Him mine,
   My God, my joy, my light.

The “fruit of lips” is probably derived from Hosea 14:2 (cf. Isa. 57:18), which literally translates, “Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, that we may present our lips as bulls.’” So our speech is to be an offering because it is the organ that reflects what is in our heart. Thus, “I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than [formal] sacrifice” (Hos. 6:6). Hence, “My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You; and my soul, which you have redeemed (Ps. 71:23; cf. 51:15; 63:3, 5). Thus the praise of “His name” is the acknowledgment of “His salvation” (Ps. 96:1-3; 106:8).
2) He is to the offered the sacrifice of good practice, v. 16.

“And do not neglect [ἐπιλανθάνομαι, epilanthomai] doing good [ἐυποία, eupoiia] and fellowship/sharing, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased [εὐαρέστεω, euaresteo].” The true praise of God will have shoe leather to it; it will be recognized as a work of God working through a man (Matt. 6:16); it will make practical offerings that express Bonar’s further exposition of the character of praise.

Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and Thy ways.
Not for the lip of praise alone,
Nor e’en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part.
Praise in the common things of life,
Its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean.
Fill every part of me with praise;
Let all my being speak
Of Thee and of Thy love, O Lord,
Poor though I be and weak.

Here the second part of the great commandment is enjoined, namely love of neighbor as a consequence of the love of God (Matt. 22:37-40); it is “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6); it is “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God,” not the offering of “thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil” (Mic. 6:6-8; cf. Gal. 6:9-10; I John 4:11); it is “fellowship” at a most practical level by means of “contribution” (II Cor. 9:13).

(4) Faithful leadership recommended, vs. 17-19.

Leadership is God’s instrumental means of the orderly, fruitful, harmonious government of His people, whether by patriarch, priest, judge, prophet, king, apostle, elder, or “the great Shepherd of the sheep,” v. 20. It is a matter of divine appointment and training, not human accomplishment. It inevitably involves good and bad management in relation to good and bad following.

(a) The respect of faithful leadership, v. 17.

“Obey/be won over to [πείθω, peitho] those leading/ruling [ἡγεῖμαι, hégeomai] you and yield/submit [ὑπείκω, hupeikē], for they without sleep care/ceaselessly care [ἀγρυπνεῖω, agrupeinêo] for your souls, as [those who] will give account [ἀποδίδωμι, apodidômi], so that they
may do this with joy and not groaning [στενάζω, stenazō]; for this is unprofitable [πλοῖτελς, alusiteles] for you.” Whereas v. 7 considered past leadership, now there is concern for present oversight, even though the accepted terms of a pastor, elder, overseer, are not used in Hebrews. The inference here is stronger that the Christian is assumed to under leadership; it is not a soft option. Of course, it is also assumed that the leadership is qualified and faithful. Thus a complementary relationship is described.

1) Respectful submission, on the part of the sheep.

In I Thessalonians 5:12, believers are to “respect/appreciate/know [οἶδα, oida] those who diligently labor among you, and have protective care/charge [προίστημι, proistēmi] over you in the Lord and give you instruction/counsel [νοθετεῖν, noutheteîn].” There are several assumptions here, such as the fact that these leaders in fact strenuously work at their shepherding, that they do satisfactorily instruct in the Word of God. Hence Andrew Fuller gives further counsel:

First, it is necessary that your pastor be freely [not coercively] chosen by you to his sacred office. . . . Secondly, the rule to which you are required to yield obedience and subjection is not his will, but the will of Christ. . . . Thirdly, the things which he urges upon you are equally binding upon himself.196

2) Responsible supervision, on the part of the leaders/undershepherds.

This oversight is not so much controlling dominion, “lording it over [κατακυριεύω, katakurieûo] those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” (I Pet. 5:3). Rather, like the shepherds “keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8), especially with regard to threatening wolves, so Paul admonished the Ephesian elders about “all the flock, concerning which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,” after the manner of his own tireless interest, “night and day for a period of three years (Acts 20:26-32). The Apostle declared to the Thessalonians that “we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. . . . You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (I Thess. 2:7, 10-12; cf. Ezek. 34:2-6). Fuller further explains:

First, your pastor “watches for your souls.” . . . The world also will watch you, and that with the eye of an enemy, waiting for your

196 Andrew Fuller, Works, I, pp. 197-198.
halting; but he with the tender solicitude of a father to do you good. Do not oppose him in this his important work. . . . What if it should prove that he did not warn you, nor seek after you, nor care for you? Ah, then you will perish, and your blood will be required at his hand! . . . Second, the discharge of this his work will be either joy or grief, according to the spirit of the people among whom he labors. . . . If, in his public preaching, he have a zealous, modest, attentive, wise, and affectionate people, constant and early in attending, candid and tender-hearted in hearing, and desirous of obtaining some spiritual advantage from all they hear, you cannot conceive what joy it will afford him. . . . But if he have a slothful, selfish, cold-hearted, caviling, conceited, and contentious audience, what a source of grief must it be to him. Third, you cannot cause the work of your pastor to be grievous but at your own expense: it will be “unprofitable for you.” It is to no purpose that you have a pastor ordained over you in the Lord, unless his ministry be profitable to you.197

(b) The representation of faithful leadership, vs. 18-19.

The author of Hebrews is obviously a most significant Christian leader, yet not unmindful of his own need to be measured by the standards he proclaims (Acts 20:28), even by means of the addressees he has just exhorted. Since present separation is restrictive, there is prayerful hope that reunion in the near future will enable more personable, sanctified encouragement.

1) The desire for prayer, v. 18.

“Pray [προσεύχομαι, proseuchomai] on our behalf/for us, for we are persuaded that we have a good conscience [συνείδησις, suneidēsis], just as in all things [we are] willing to behave/conduct ourselves honorably [ἀναστρέφω, anastrephō].” There is obvious humility here, a sensitivity to personal holy consistency and responsibility, amongst a plurality leaders. As John declares that “if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God” (I John 3:21), especially with regard to genuine love of the brethren (I John 3:14-18, 23), so the author here gives reassurance of consistency between the instructor and the instruction given. The author’s request for prayer reveals that the leaders do not believe they are sufficient unto themselves; further it indicates confidence in the genuine faith of the addressees. As Hughes points out: “He can hardly ask them to pray for him if he if he has decided that they are already in a state of apostasy (cf. Heb. 6:4-6, 9 and 10:29, 39).” Here then is the responsibility of those who are faithfully led, namely that of praying for those who lead (cf. I Thess. 5:25; II Thess. 3:1).

197 Ibid., pp. 199-201.
198 Hughes, Hebrews, p. 587.
2) The desire for reunion, v. 19.

“And I exhort/urge [you] all the more earnestly [περισσότερος, perissoterōs] to do this, in order that I may be restored to you [ἀποκαθιστήμι, apokathistēmi] quickly/the sooner.” The request for prayer now specifies a sense of urgency, the yearning of the author for a personal return to a former state of fellowship. There seem implied here present restrictions, possibly imprisonment. Yet the confident thought is that prayer opens doors. However this call to prayer is also matched with the reciprocity of prayer in a manner that all the more stimulates prayer. Thus prayer is both taught (Luke 11:1) and caught.