

CONSIDER HOW THE **SON** SHINES!

A Translation of the  
BOOK OF HEBREWS

by  
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**GOD** has spoken to us!

In the old days, at different stages and in different ways, He spoke to our fathers through the prophets. But finally, in our own days, God has spoken to us through His Son.

And what a Son! God destined Him to inherit everything! Small wonder, since He also used Him in creating everything in the first place. The Son is the reflection of God's own glory, the exact representation of God's very nature, and His word is the power that sustains everything and moves it toward His goal. Even so, He was right here on earth until He had purged our sins, and then, when He had accomplished that, He took His place of honor at the right hand of God! He is seated there now in majestic splendor, and His great superiority over even the angels themselves is measured by the greatness of the name He has inherited. Theirs is poor by comparison! For instance, try to imagine God saying something like this to a mere angel:

**You are my Son! I have fathered You today!**

Or something like this:

**I will be Father to Him, and He will be Son to Me.**

And when the time came for God to bring Jesus, His pre-eminent one, into the world of people, He said:

**All of God's angels are to bow down to Him!**

By contrast, see how He speaks about the angels:

**He is the one who creates spirits to serve as His messengers,  
and fiery flames to serve Him by serving His people.**

But it was the Son that He said this about:

**Your throne, Great God, will endure to endless ages,  
and the scepter of Your kingdom will be  
the scepter of absolute straightness.  
You love uprightness and You hate anarchy.  
That is why God — Your God — used “Oil of Exultation”  
as your crown of exaltation above your peers.**

And, as if all that were not quite enough, God also said:

**You, right from the beginning, Lord, are the one  
who founded the earth,  
and the heavens themselves are Your handiwork!  
You will still be here after they are long gone.  
What are a mere heaven and earth to You?  
Like old clothes are to us people, perhaps:  
You’ll fold them away like a winter coat.  
You can change worlds like others change clothes,  
but that wouldn’t change You at all!  
How could You — the eternal Sun — ever be eclipsed?**

But did God ever say anything like this to the angels:

**Sit here, at the place of honor on My right,  
while I finish changing your enemies into a footstool for You.**

No, angels are simply not in the same class with the Son. Rather, they are worshiping spirits whose mission is to serve God by being helpful to all of His people, those of us who are, at last, about to inherit complete wholeness.

**2:1** All the more reason, then, for us to maintain a tight hold on the things the Son has told us, so that we don’t drift away from them through neglect. Why, even the message that was proclaimed to men by mere angels became firmly validated, fully confirmed for us by the fact that all bypassing of that message, all hear-one-thing-but-do-something-else, has been rewarded in precisely the pay it should have been. So do you think some loophole will let us evade what’s coming to us if we are unconcerned about our salvation? I’m talking about that salvation which is of such primal importance that it was announced by the Lord Himself! And it was confirmed for us, too, by those who actually heard Him tell about it. God in turn authenticated their testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by the way He decided to apportion the Holy Spirit to each of us.

For, you see, it was the Son — not angels — to whom God put the coming world-age of people in subjection, and it is that arrangement that we're talking about. God was putting Himself on record about that when this was written (you'll find it there some place):

**What kind of man is this You're keeping in view?  
Just who is this "son of man" that You're focusing on?  
For a while You abased Him far below the angels,  
but then You heaped crowning fame and honor upon Him.  
In doing that, of course,  
You put everything else in subjection beneath His feet.**

Now, this part about "everything in subjection to Him" — that means *everything*, including the angels! No exceptions, nothing left un-subjected to Him. Of course we don't see this yet — there are lots of things that don't seem to be in subjection to Him. But we do see Jesus, and that part about "abased below the angels for a while" and the part about "crowned with fame and honor" both refer to Him. We see Him crowned with fame and honor because He suffered death while He was "for a little while lower than the angels." And don't forget that He experienced death as a demonstration of God's freely-expressed favor on behalf of all of us!

So there's a fittingness about it all. It is exquisitely appropriate that God, the one for whom and by whom it all came into being, should use suffering to bring His Son to the culmination of that grand design for salvation by which the Son, in turn, could lead many children into glory. For, after all, the Son was the foundation of the whole plan! It is by His suffering that He is completely identified with all of us who also suffer, so that the Sanctifier and all of us who are sanctified have this in common. So, far from being ashamed to call us His brothers, He revels in it! Listen to Him tell it:

**Father! I proclaim Your name to My brothers!  
I sing Your glories in their gatherings!**

And He also says:

**I am completely confident in Him.**

As well as:

**See! Here I am with the children God gave Me!**

What this tells us is that, since we are flesh and blood children, the Son deliberately shared this human-body status with us so that His bodily death would serve completely to vitiate the one who holds the power of death over us — that is, the

Slanderer himself — and thus to set free His children who otherwise would be kept in life-long slavery to Satan because of the fear of death.

So that brings us back here again: obviously it isn't angels He's concerned with rescuing! He's rescuing the offspring of Abraham! Which takes us a step farther: He had to be identified with His brothers in every respect, or He couldn't both be mercifully understanding of them and at the same time serve with complete fidelity as their chief priest in everything that relates to God, and thus accomplish the expiation of their sins. In this human identity He suffered and He was tested — and He passed the test! He is able, then, to aid His people as they are being tested!

**3:1** All of which, my fellow saints, impels us to consider Jesus Himself in more detail. You who share in the fact that God Himself has chosen you: give some thought now to the One God sent here with the news about that choice. This Apostle whom we profess is, at the same time, the Priest to whom we confess — Jesus! Think of Him as our chief priest, one who is utterly reliable (from our side) and at the same time (from God's side) consistently loyal to the One who gave Him the appointment.

For a good example of such fidelity, consider Moses: he was utterly faithful among those God made him responsible for. But of course Jesus far outshines Moses in worthiness, to the same degree that a house builder enjoys greater honor than the house itself. And just as the one who builds a house doesn't intend to leave the rooms bare, in that same way God furnishes everything for us — we who are His house!

But consider a bit further this superiority of our Messiah over Moses: there was Moses as the faithful servant in the house, and what he did and said were pointing in advance toward something that was still to be announced. And here is Jesus as God's appointed Son over the house, the one whom Moses' announcement was all about. And we are the house! He is Furnisher and furniture! All on the assumption, of course, that we persevere to the end with a bold confidence, with the certainty that the basis of our expectation lies simply in knowing Who is behind us!

But have some caution with your confidence, in accordance with what the Holy Spirit tells us:

**Today — did you hear His voice? — don't harden your heart!  
Don't revolt against Jesus in the way that the house of Moses  
— your ancestors —  
revolted against God during their rebellious time at Meribah.  
[Oh! We'd never do that! — so you say. But listen to what else He says:]  
Even when they saw My works for forty years,  
they perverted My test by trying to test Me!**

**They offended Me, and I became angry with them.  
I said to Myself, “Can a heart that’s always going astray  
ever conduct a body to its rightful destination?  
They don’t even recognize the King’s Highway!”  
So in My hot anger I took oath right then:  
“I’ll just see that they don’t enter My rest!”**

In accord with that, brothers and sisters, I say: Be alert! You have no excuse for unbelief, but there is always the possibility of it, and the heart that can stand off from the living God is in fact an evil one. It is sin that can delude you, and then before you know it your heart is calloused. So make it each day’s priority among you — while the Holy Spirit still calls it “today” — that each of you will strengthen the resolve of each other. For (in this way too) we are fellows in our Messiah — assuming, as I said, that we firmly maintain our grip on the confidence we began with, until the need for it is superseded. Some of our ancestors, you remember, lost it — as a little catechism on the following text will remind us:

**Today, if you’ve heard His voice, don’t harden your hearts  
as was done during the rebellion.**

Ready? Let’s begin:

1. Who was it that heard, but rebelled anyway?
2. Did everyone that Moses brought out of Egypt rebel?
3. Who was God angry with for forty years?
4. Who were those sinners whose corpses stayed to rot in the desert?
5. Who were those unbelievers that God took oath about when He said, “They will not inherit My rest!”?

Well, they were people. People who heard what God said, people who saw what He did, people who still couldn’t quite bring themselves to trust Him, people who — rebelled! And so because of their unbelief they were (not so much denied entrance as) unable and unfit to enter God’s rest.

**4:1** So, you see, this is a matter worthy of great concern! We fear for any of you who might seem to abandon or simply neglect God’s promise and thus fall short of entering God’s rest. After all, we have been evangelized just as they were, but the message they heard didn’t do them any good. Their hearing still needed another essential ingredient: they should have stirred in some commitment in response to

what they heard. If we are to enter His rest, we can do it only as people do who have committed themselves to Him!

And now, let's take a closer look at the part where God says:

**So in anger I took oath: "They'll never enter My rest!"**

This was in a context where God's works had been known from the time the earth itself was established. Right in the account of the creation, the mention of the seventh day includes these familiar words:

**And on the seventh day God rested from all His works.**

This is the rest He refers to again in the text we're looking at:

**They'll never enter My rest!**

What we learn from this is that the door is still open to us, and the key to this lesson is in that word "today." Look at the chronology here. God says,

**Share My rest!**

but the ones who first heard Him say it refused to commit themselves to Him and enter it. So He signaled another day — "today" — because it was, after all, quite a bit later (after Joshua's time, in fact) when David relayed God's word to us again:

**Today, if you have heard His voice, don't harden your hearts!**

If Joshua had really given our ancestors rest (after Moses failed to) then David wouldn't have been still talking about another rest later, long after Joshua's time. Obviously, then, the rest promised to God's people is still open to us. But this applies in another way, too: "Rest" means, quite simply, "Stop working!" The one who enters God's rest is the one who relaxes from his work, just as God Himself stopped after His own creation work. So, though it sounds like a paradox, you must exert yourselves to enter that rest, by committing yourselves to a confident relaxing in Him, so that you don't follow the bad example of our forefathers by falling into faithless insubordination. For we are so vulnerable!

While the word of God that announces this rest is also our best assurance of it and our best defense against missing it, that same word also spells out our fate if we do miss it. God is alive and His word is alive — powerful and sharp! Have you seen the way a well-tempered double-edged sword can split bones to the very marrow and whack joints apart? Well, God's word is sharper than that! It penetrates right down into your soul and spirit, and you should let its sharp point

help you correctly evaluate your own attitudes and intentions. His word is like His eye, searching you out. You're not only visible, you're vulnerable: you are nakedly exposed to His view, and so is all of creation. You have absolutely no secrets from Him at all — and, remember, He is the one you eventually have to settle accounts with!

So believe me, brothers and sisters, we **need** a mediating priest, and we have one — Jesus! He is not a priest who merely sends smoke and prayers to heaven; He went there Himself! He is the Son of God! Now we must cling to the very one our statement of faith is all about. His greatness does not mean remoteness: He was right here among us, He experienced all the tests and temptations that we face — not sinning in the process, of course — so He has an accurate feel for our weaknesses. This should encourage us to approach His throne in bold yet realistic confidence: the King is gracious! He extends mercy, and we find grace to help us right when we need it. That's how God intended His high priests to function!

**5:1** So we see God's Son both as God's apostle to us and as our chief priest in God's presence. Our confidence in Him is based upon the kind of priest He is. We will understand this better if we think a bit about the job description of a Jewish chief priest.

First, his function:

Each **human** chief priest was intended to represent people before God, in all kinds of matters that concern both them and Him. Especially, he is to keep the way open between them and Him by presenting offerings and sacrifices, because of sin. However, while he is doing this, the human chief priest's sense of outrage at people's ignorance and straying are somewhat tempered: he knows very well that when he presents sin offerings to God for the sins of other people, he is also representing **himself** right along with them, since he is subject to the same human weaknesses they are.

Then, his appointment:

A man does not become chief priest just by deciding to take that honor upon himself. He serves in this way because God has chosen him to do it — and that has been true since the time of our first chief priest, Aaron.

There is an obvious parallel here with our Messiah: He didn't just thrust Himself into the spotlight by deciding to take the role of chief priest upon Himself. He was chosen for that honor by the same One who said to Him:

**You are My Son. I have fathered you today.**

Next, his purpose:

This is reflected by what God says in another place:

**You are a priest forever, in a way analogous to Melchizedek.**

Now, Sonship and designation as a Melchizedek-type priest could have been taken as carrying with them certain prerogatives. But just as Jesus did not assume chief-priestly honors for Himself in the first place, He also did not use His position as a way to sidestep His approaching agony. Think about His time on earth while He occupied a human body:

Even as He faced suffering and death, He knew God could set them aside, and He prayed intensely about this. His prayers were not demands for His rights as God's Son, but supplications in His role as a servant, expressed through tears and loud outcries. What He asked, and also His own attitude, were in complete agreement with the desires and plans of the Father, so those prayers were answered. But even so, the answer involved obedience on the part of the Son, and this obedience brought with it intense suffering (as we've just mentioned). But since He carried obedience through to completion, God made Him the very source of eternal salvation for everyone who in turn obeys Him. And He is, eternally, their chief priest, designated by God Himself, in a way analogous to Melchizedek.

Now, these quoted words "in a way analogous to Melchizedek" and "forever" refer to the timelessness of God's appointment of Jesus to be chief priest. There are quite a few things I'd like to tell you about this Melchizedek, but the way you have your mental ears plugged you would have trouble understanding them anyway. As a matter of fact, by this time you ought to be teaching others, but instead, you need a schoolmaster to drill you again on the fundamentals, the basic principles of what God's words should already have taught you. You should be shouting, "Bring on the spiritual beefsteak!" but instead you're more like a baby mewling for its bottle! Each one of you in the Royal Society of MILK-drinkers still needs to be tested by the message about straight living, for you still wobble about like toddlers!

Well, beefsteak is for the trained man, the one who has had all his capabilities developed by actually exercising them. He has learned to appreciate the difference between being straight and being crooked by facing daily choices, and by making those choices in the right way! **6:1** We should be able to assume the ABCs of the Messiah-message and push on from there toward maturity, building on them and building with them, but not having to go back to try to lay the foundation itself all over again. I'm talking about things like turning your back on dead works, like committing yourself to God, like teachings about baptism and eternal judgment and so on. God willing, all those things are becoming second nature and we can now go on from there! You can't go back and start all over with repentance now!

You've already stepped into the light, you've experienced God's heavenly gifts, you're a Fellow of the Holy Spirit, you've tasted how delicious God's word is, you know the power that will be unleashed during the coming age — and yet you fall! Your life becomes a shameful example of immaturity instead of exemplifying what life in Jesus is supposed to be — and you want to start all over again by crucifying the Son of God! Well, I have a parable for you: the ground soaks up frequent rains and then produces useful crops for those who farm it. When it does, God is pleased, and he says so. But if the crop is nothing but thorns and thistles, then words of approval are changed to a curse upon it instead, and the thorns and thistles go into the fire. Now, how about you? You've had the rain: where is your product?

Dear ones, we may not sound like it, but we're convinced that we can expect a better crop from you: salvation will be your harvest! God is not unjust, and He won't ignore your good works. You have shown love on His behalf in helping His people and you continue to do so. Now we have a deep desire to see that each of you shows the same eagerness about following through completely in the realization of God's expectations. So let's be diligent in following the example of those whose faith in Christ sustains them in patient endurance to the end, and shows that they are to be inheritors of all He has promised.

And, speaking of promises:

When God made His promises to Abraham, He was entirely serious about it. He swore with an oath that He would do what He had said. Since there was nothing and no one around to swear by greater than Himself, naturally it was Himself that He swore by. What He told Abraham was this:

**I promise (as only I can promise) that I will bless you (as I alone can)!**  
**I promise (as only I can promise) that I will (as only I can)**  
**make a great and numerous nation of your descendants!**

And God carried out exactly what His oath had promised. (It required some patience on Abraham's part, of course.) And what an oath that was!

When men make an oath, they pretend that in the case of noncompliance they will subject themselves to something or someone greater than they are themselves, something or someone beyond their own control. It is common practice for such an oath to be taken by men as binding upon the oath-taker, and the nature of what they swear by is supposedly a measure both of their seriousness and of the importance they place on the matter at hand. None of this merely human practice, however, is at all on a level with the certainty and seriousness of God: He wanted to assure those who were to benefit from His promises that nothing could alter or set aside His plans, and He used His own word as an oath to indicate this. He cannot lie, and in swearing an oath by these two unalterable things — His own

character, and His own promise — He wanted those of us who are vagabonds here on this earth to have the strongest possible encouragement to hang on to the tremendous expectations He Himself has set before us. He wants us to look at what He promised as absolutely unfailing and solidly based. Think of your soul as having an anchor that reaches right through the temple veil, and that grips — actually, rather, is gripped by — the power of the One who inhabits The Holiest Place of All! This is, of course, precisely where Jesus has entered ahead of us and for us. He has become our eternal chief priest, after the model of unending continuity as symbolized by Melchizedek!

**7:1** Now, when God said Jesus was a priest like Melchizedek, what was He telling us? Well, let's look at some of the characteristics of Melchizedek.

There he was, king of Salem, priest of Highest God, and he met Abraham when Abraham was on the way back home after he had wiped out those five kings and their forces who had opposed him. Melchizedek blessed and praised Abraham, and Abraham shared with Melchizedek a tenth of all the plunder he had gained by defeating his opponents.

Now, Melchizedek's name is understood by us in two ways. First, he was King of the Square — completely straight! Then, he was also King of Salem ("salem," of course, means "peace"). Now, we have no record of Melchizedek's genealogy — not even of his father and mother. So far as our knowledge goes, we have no clue to an earthly beginning of his life or to an earthly end of it, so that in this respect he becomes a kind of arch-type of the Son of God Himself. That is, he's "eternal," so he remains a priest through all the years you can conceive of. From this you have some idea of just how great this man was to whom Abraham, our ancestor-in-chief, gave a tenth of his war-loot. And you understand that when the sons of Levi received the priesthood, their instructions were to collect a tenth from the rest of the people in accordance with the established regulations. The people who paid their tenth were the priests' own brothers, they were descendants of Abraham just as the priests themselves were. So when Melchizedek, the one without ancestors, collected the tenth from Abraham, he was by implication collecting it from Abraham's descendants. And when he blessed Abraham, Melchizedek was at the same time blessing Abraham's descendants, the ones who, like Abraham, have received God's sworn promises!

Now, it goes without any argument that the one who bestows a blessing is greater than the one who receives it, and it was Melchizedek who conferred a blessing upon Abraham, right? So there, on the one hand, are Levi and his sons — mortal men — receiving the tenth from other mortal men, while by contrast here we are dealing with the One who is analogous to Melchizedek, and one of the main characteristics emphasized about Melchizedek is this: he continues living!

Now, as we've just seen, Levi, the receiver of the tenth, had also paid the tenth through Abraham, since (in a manner of speaking) Levi was still in Abraham's body when Melchizedek met Abraham. In spite of this, however, over a long period of time, the people were regulated by the priesthood of the Levi-dynasty. But if the priesthood modeled on Levi had actually been able to bring God's plan to consummation, then later on there would have been no reason or need for God to say to us, through David, firstly, that He would raise up yet another priest, and, secondly, that the expected priest would be modeled after Melchizedek instead of after Aaron's son Levi. But God did say that! — which certainly indicates something about how the former levitical priesthood ranks vis-à-vis the one modeled on the priesthood of Melchizedek!

But: there can't be a change in the priesthood without a corresponding change in the regulations! This means that in all these new arrangements, a different tribe would have to participate, even though it had never before officiated at the sacrificial altar. Obviously, our Lord is a descendant of Judah, not of Levi, and nothing in the writings of Moses made any reference to priests from the tribe of Judah. But the stage was set for a change, and that change is quite obvious and well-established. God spoke through David about the new and yet-to-come priest:

**You are an eternal priest modeled after Melchizedek!**

Our new priest has been inaugurated with indestructible power, not merely in accordance with regulations that concern the human body. Not that such rules are wrong or outdated, so much as that they are weak and had an inadequate effect. So they are not really annulled so much as superseded by the introduction of the one model which can fulfill the highest possible expectations, one which draws us near to God Himself! The superiority of this model over the old one is marked by the degree to which God's own oath, in swearing by Himself, is superior to any human oath. Under the old model, priests took an oath of office, but they had no control over the forces they called into witness — so in a sense they were under no oath at all! But our new priest is backed by God's promise, God's character, and God's determination to comply with His own oath, as well as by God's complete control over every element involved in the oath itself. Through David, He says:

**The Lord has sworn an oath, and He will never swerve from it:  
You are an eternal priest!**

And in doing so, He established Jesus Himself as both the pledge and the measure of the superiority of the new agreement: He has staying power! Under the old order, there had to be a continual succession of priests appointed, since, being merely human, they kept dying off. But throughout eternity there is no change in the priesthood of Jesus, because He retains the office forever! From which we conclude that there is never a time when He is off duty. At any and all times He is

able to save any and all of us who will approach God through Him. He is always alive, and always on the job, mediating in our behalf.

That is what He is like! He is entirely and eternally appropriate as chief priest for us: holy, innocent of any evil, in no way defiled, in touch with sinners but uncontaminated by sin, native of God's superior fineness. He contrasts with the chief priests of the former order in this significant way, too: they had the daily obligation to present sacrifices for sins — first for themselves and then for the people they represented, for, after all, they themselves were just people too. But Jesus presented a sacrifice just once — once and for all time! — and the sacrifice was Himself. The Law's regulations established mere men as chief priests — men subject to all human weaknesses. But God's sworn oath, superseding the Law's regulations, has established His Son as the eternal chief priest, of proven and complete superiority.

**8:1** So here's the bottom line of what I've been saying: this is the kind of chief priest we have! He occupies the place of honor at God's right hand in heaven — God Himself placed Him there! — in splendor surpassing the greatness of any human throne. He is the chief ministrant in the Holiest Place of All, in the real tabernacle, the God-designed one in heaven, not the man-made copy of it here on earth.

Each earthly chief priest, you see, was instituted to offer up both gifts and sacrifices. From this we deduce the obvious: he had to have something he could offer. (If Jesus were here on earth now, of course, He wouldn't be serving in the temple as a priest, but there are still priests busy each day in the temple offering up gifts according to regulations that have been superseded!) Still, such earthly priests can, in a sense, symbolize for us the One who officiated at the real tabernacle in heaven, as is implied by the warning Moses received when he was ready to detail for his workers the way the tabernacle was to be finished up. God told him then:

**Be sure you do all this exactly like the design which I showed you up in Mount Sinai!**

The details in that design were (back at that time) pointing forward to what Jesus has by now already accomplished by offering Himself on the cross-altar, and He has mediated a contract whose superiority to the old one is measured by the superior promise it was established upon. For, if there had been nothing lacking in the first contract, there would have been no reason to devise a second. But He was, in effect, finding the first agreement inadequate way back then when He said:

**Look! The Lord is insistent! He says:  
“The days are coming when I will finish what I started with the Israelites. I'll establish a new contract with them, and it will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I led them by the**

hand out of Egypt. They didn't honor their part of that agreement and yet claimed that I should honor mine! But I didn't!" the Lord says, "I left them to their own devices! Well, this is the contract I will draw up with the Israelites later on," the Lord says: "I'll place my laws in their very minds — I'll write them on their hearts! Then they'll understand that I am to them what a God should be, and they will become a people I'll be glad to call mine. Then one person won't be teaching his fellow-citizens or his brothers, urging them to know the Lord, because they will all know Me already — the old ones and the young ones, the important ones and the insignificant ones. How will they know Me? They will have experienced My mercy in the face of their vileness. They'll know I am not carrying their sins in My memory."

It's obvious that when He calls the second contract "new" He automatically makes the first one "old." The old agreement is archaic and fading away in the light of the new one. **9:1** The first one was associated with ordinances of ritual which were holy at the same time that they were concerned with material implements. For example, the forecourt of the tent was equipped with the lampstand, the table, and the display of the holy bread. This first court is called the Holy Place. Behind the second drape, however, was the second court, and its name signified this:

### **Of all holy places, this is the holiest!**

Here were found the golden incense altar and the Contract Box which was completely overlaid with gold, and in it were the golden jar which contained the "whatcha-call-it,"\*[see footnote] and the staff which sprouted for Aaron, and the stone tablets on which the contract was inscribed. Above it were the angels overshadowing the Mercy Throne — but I'm not going to speak in more detail about these things here and now. As you know, however, once these things were properly prepared, the priests would enter into the forecourt daily to carry out the prescribed rituals. But only once a year could the chief priest enter the second court — and even he could not enter without a blood offering. He would offer up this blood on his own behalf as well as on behalf of the rest of the people, to beg forgiveness for their sins, even for sins they might have committed without being aware of it. The Holy Spirit had already made this apparent, although while the fore-tent was still in existence the holy way in which God wanted His people to live had not yet been completely explained.

All this contains a lesson for us in the present time, for it reminds us that those offerings and sacrifices which are being offered up right now in the temple are powerless — as we are well aware — to accomplish the purposes of the ritual! This teaches us that regulations concerning food and beverages and various kinds of ablutions (for implements as well as for bodies) were ordinances that had to do only

with physical things, and were valid only until the time when the new order of things would be established. And of course that time has already come. Christ Himself, our Messiah, has come as our chief priest. He entered once for all time into the Holiest Place of All, and there He accomplished our eternal redemption. Not in a man-made tent but rather in His own body, He both made and became that sacrifice, superior to and more perfect than anything pertaining to the created world. He mediates good things for us! Certainly the blood of he-goats and young bulls couldn't accomplish this, but the blood of Jesus Himself did! After all, if the blood of he-goats and bulls and the ashes of heifers sprinkled on defiled things as well as on people's bodies — if that blood, I say, was considered to make them ceremonially pure, then by far greater measure the blood of the Messiah, who offered up Himself through the Holy Spirit as an unblemished offering to God, is indeed able to cleanse our very consciences! He takes us out of the realm of worrying about such mundane things as being contaminated by working with dead animals, so that now we can concern ourselves with the proper worship of a God who is alive.

This is what has uniquely qualified Jesus to be mediator of the new contract. Whereas under the first contract those animal deaths were concerned with releasing us from first-contract transgressions, now, in contrast, all those who have been appointed to an eternal inheritance actually receive what was promised in the first place. In a sense, it's like when someone makes a will. The will is inoperative until that death takes place which allows the provisions of the will to take effect. Wills are put into effect by death, since they are not in force while the people who made them are alive. So not even the first will-contract could have been put into effect without bloodshed. For example, do you remember how Moses explained all the requirements of the Law to all the people? It was not, however, until he actually received the blood of young bulls and he-goats and water and red wool and hyssop and then sprinkled that blood on all the people as well as on the very book of regulations itself, that he could say:

**This is the blood which makes effective the will-contract which contains the provisions about what God requires of you.**

Then he also sprinkled that blood on the tabernacle itself as well as on all the implements intended for use in the various rituals. As a matter of fact, there was hardly anything in the regulations of that first will-contract that didn't require blood-sprinkling to purify it. Without that, under that set of regulations, there simply was no such thing as release from defilement. **10:1** The very ritual-implements themselves (which are mere copies of the real things in the heavens), had to be purified by sacrifices such as those we've been talking about.

But where issues of spiritual life are concerned, the very substance of these heavenly things (of which the earthly or physical things are only a copy) requires a

far better sacrifice than what is represented by merely offering up animals. After all, our Messiah didn't enter that Holiest Place of All for merely human purposes, or bearing man-made offerings. Those lesser things were mere tokens or symbols representing the real world in heaven. But our Messiah has entered heaven itself! He is there right now! — appearing before God on our behalf! No, He is not repeatedly offering Himself to God — in the way that the chief priest had to enter the Holiest Place of All once each year with blood from something else — as if it had been necessary for Him to be killed repeatedly from the time of the creation itself. No. This is a once-for-all-time (and for all eternity!) thing! The crux of history is in this very fact: the Messiah accomplished the setting aside of sin forever when He came to earth and sacrificed Himself. And just as surely as God has so ordered things that people face His judgment after their one death, just as sure it is that the Messiah, after He had once been offered so that He could carry away the sins of many people, is going to be seen a second time by those who look forward to His coming. He won't be bringing those sins back with Him. The result for those people will be eternal wholeness in Him.

Now, the Law was not itself the reality of things, but was rather a foreshadowing of coming good. It was by no means able to bring to maturity the people who came constantly into the Tabernacle bringing their annual sacrifices. If it had had such power, then of course people would have stopped bringing them: once cleansed, those involved in this ritual would no longer have had sin on their consciences. But we see that the contrary situation in fact exists: it is by means of the annual sacrifices that remembrance of sin is kept alive! It follows, then, that the blood of bulls and he-goats is not adequate to take away sins.

It was in this context that Jesus came into the world, in effect saying to the Father:

**You didn't want sacrifices and offerings,  
but You prepared a body for Me.  
Burnt offerings for sin did not please You.  
So then I said: "Look! Here I am!  
I've come to do what You want, O Great God!  
This is written about me in the scroll."**

The very things which the Law prescribed, the things the Law said must be brought — offerings, sacrifices, burnt offerings for sin — are what this quoted passage says God did not find satisfaction in, for they were not pleasing to Him as long as they were not accompanied by purified lives. What God did want was precisely what Jesus came to accomplish. He said,

**Look! I've come to do what You want!**

So He has set aside the first contract and established the second — which is where we come in! We have been made holy because that is the way God wanted it, and Jesus, His Appointed One, did it by offering up His own body once and for all.

So let's take another look at what the priests are continuing to do under the Law. There they are, daily repeating the ritual, daily offering up the same varied sacrifices, which are not able to finish off sin. By contrast, Jesus brought just one sacrifice for sins and is eternally seated at the right hand of God, and there He remains, waiting until God puts Jesus' enemies in subjection under His feet. By that one offering, Jesus has forever made complete those whom He has purified. The Holy Spirit Himself added His testimony about this for us when He said,

**“This is the contract I will draw up with them after those days,” says the Lord, “putting my laws in their hearts and writing them in their minds, and never again remembering their sins and lawlessness” . . .**

... and when He said that, He had said it all. For obviously, once forgiveness is provided and is in effect — and “never” is a long time! — any further sin offerings are simply beside the point.

So you see, my brothers, it is the blood of Jesus Himself which is the basis for our boldness, the confidence that takes us directly into the Holiest Place of All. Call it “The Inauguration”! Call it “The Grand Opening”! The aisle we follow, leading us behind the veil, is not a thing, it is a Person who is alive, and we walk it, as it were, in His own body! What a great priest He is on behalf of the house of God! We approach with hearts made true, in full confidence. His blood has sprinkled our hearts, cleansing our consciences from evil as effectively as clean water washes our bodies.

So we must hold on, and that is what we must hold on to. Our confession is not just pronouncing words. It is also the expectation we have, and we cling to it (remember that anchor?). The promise is firm, so our hope is unwavering. The One who made the promise is reliable! This frees us to be reliable in turn: in our relationships with each other, our former paroxysms of self-concern are changed into outflowings of love. We become helpful out of concern for each other. If we are not enlivened by the great expectations He has put before us, then we're no longer nourished by His bloodstream, we're dying, and we're no longer in close association with the rest of the Body. But we must not neglect that fellowship even though others do. Rather, we must continue to encourage each other, and the more aware we are that the time is drawing near, the more we must intensify this unifying communion of helpfulness with each other.

Suppose the contrary for a moment: suppose that, having already received knowledge of the truth (as I've been talking about it), we were to deliberately

continue in sin. What further sacrifice for sin could we anticipate? If we thwart the purpose of the one sacrifice Jesus has already made, why should we expect anything but the execution of a fearful judgment, motivated by the consuming fiery zeal of God Himself, which is reserved for His enemies? It won't long be held back! Look at your nation's history again. What happened when someone continued to ignore the Mosaic regulations? Why, on the testimony of two or three witnesses, he died without further mercy! And those Mosaic regulations were as nothing in importance when compared with God's revelation in Jesus! If you trifle with God's very Son, wouldn't you expect to merit more severe treatment than that which those people received under Moses? Boot Him aside if you will, boot aside the blood of His agreement, but you do so at your own risk! Befoul that which was meant to purify you, insult the Spirit who intended to apply His merciful grace to you — but while you do, remember the One who said this:

**Revenge pertains to me alone! I am the great and final Paymaster!**

He also said:

**The Lord Himself hands down the verdict  
concerning His own people!**

Don't trifle with the living God! You're in His hands and they are fearsome! They don't caress everyone. Some are punished by them!

Do you remember the early days of your relationship with Jesus? Do you recall how in His light you endured many struggles and much suffering? You were jeered at and subjected to public embarrassment, sharing in the experiences of others who had been treated in the same shameful ways. You entered into the sufferings of prisoners and became able to accept the pillaging of your possessions without losing your joy. You knew that your true possessions were both better and permanent. Well, don't discard your bold confidence in Him now! Keep in mind where the final payoff really is — and what it is! You need patience to continue doing what God wants you to do, but by exercising that patience you will receive all that He has promised. With this kind of attitude,

**. . . it will seem like no time at all: the Expected One will not delay. He who continues to be God's "absolutely straight one" will live because of his faith in Him. But if he withdraws, if he holds back, then I cannot think well of him at all.**

Look! We are not — you and I — those who shrink back and go to destruction. We are the ones who take a firm grip on eternal life because of our confidence in Him! **11:1** This confidence is simply the assurance we have that what He promised is awaiting us. We don't see it in hand yet, but faith's eye sees it

as already given to us. This is the whole point of what we've been told about some of our ancestors! Items:

- Our confidence in God tells us that it was His word which so aptly fashioned everything that is. It's all His handcrafted masterpiece. What we see around us came into existence — and as a matter of fact still exists — made up of things not even visible to the physical eye.
- It was because Abel simply believed what God said that he brought to Him a sacrifice better than Cain's, and it was his taking God at His word which showed him to be absolutely straight. God said this about him, that his gift was evidence of his belief. Abel, of course, has been dead a long time, yet he still speaks to us through this if we will listen.
- Enoch was another one who took God at His word. As a result he didn't experience death as the rest of us do. God simply carried him away and his neighbors saw no more of him. His disappearance, his having been carried away by God Himself, is ample testimony to the fact that God was pleased with him. Obviously, God is not pleased when men don't even believe what He says! Never mind trying to approach Him if you won't listen. You might as well not believe He is there at all. But He is there, and He is both the Rewarder and the Reward of the person who takes Him as He is.
- Look at Noah! God warned him that something entirely beyond human experience up to that time was about to happen, and Noah said, in effect, "If You say it, I believe it." His worship went beyond mere words: he got to work on the ark — and saved his whole family that way! (This implied, at the same time, the condemnation of everyone else.) Noah believed what God said, and in this way showed that in God's sight he was absolutely straight! So he was in line for the ensuing benefits.
- God summoned Abraham, and Abraham responded. In confidence he left home and went to a strange land (he didn't know yet that God was going to give it to him), not even knowing where he was going. He only knew Who told him to go and Who was going with him, and they lived together — God and Abraham — in that "Promised Land" because Abraham believed what God promised. Eventually Abraham, along with Isaac and Jacob (two other inheritors of God's promises), reached the city God Himself designed and built, and they felt right at home! But I'm ahead of my story: Abraham still has some other things to say to us.
- When God told Abraham he would have a son, Abraham believed Him. No matter that Sarah was sterile and Abraham himself already beyond the ability to father children! God said it, Abraham believed He was able to do it, and —

behold! — Abraham himself eventually planted the seed! In believing that the Promiser was reliable, Abraham became capable! The nation which came to be as uncountable as stars in the sky or sand on the sea-lip was engendered by a man who had already been sexually dead!

- When these people died they still hadn't received what God had promised, but they believed Him when He said their children would. Since God had said it, they believed it — seeing it in their mind's eye, far down the future, and then making their earthly farewells. They realized they were foreigners on earth, pilgrims just traveling through. People who live and die like that make it obvious that this world is not their home. Their sights are set on truly arriving Home! Now, suppose they had left their hearts in the land they'd come from. They could have gone back there, but they aspired to better things. The home they trudged toward was Heaven itself, and this fact lent wings to their feet. God takes pride in the fact that people such as those call Him God, and He extends the keys to His City to them.
- Abraham passed the test concerning Isaac because he obeyed when God said to sacrifice him. He didn't know how God could ask that and still fulfill His own promise about Isaac's children, but he decided that was God's problem. God had said,

**I'll establish your descendency through Isaac's children,**

so Abraham had to assume that "After I sacrifice him, God will have to bring him back to life."

And, in a real sense, you could say that Abraham received Isaac back from death.

- Isaac demonstrated this same kind of assurance about what was still to happen when he blessed Jacob and Esau.
- Even when he was dying, Jacob confidently blessed each of Joseph's sons, leaning worshipfully on the end of his staff.
- Joseph, as he was dying in Egypt, confidently reminded his sons of the exodus which was yet to be, and gave them instructions about the disposition of his own bones — in the promised land!
- Moses' parents demonstrated confidence in God when they hid their newborn son for three months. They knew he was a special child, and they did what they had to do in order to preserve his life, even if that meant risking the penalties which disobedience to the decree of the king himself might bring them.

- When he was grown, Moses showed his confidence in God when he had a decision to make. He could have ascended to Egypt's throne as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, but instead he chose to share in the sufferings imposed upon God's people rather than enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin. Disgrace while expecting the coming of God's Appointed One was a richer life for him than owning all of Egypt's treasures. He had his eye on the bottom line. Relying on God, he led God's people out of Egypt in spite of the king's rage, because things that had never happened before were, to him, as obviously possible as if he had already seen them. In this same confidence, he instituted the Passover and the Blood Smearing, so that the Destroyer would not strike the firstborn children of the Hebrew people. Trusting God, Moses passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry ground — and watched the pursuing Egyptians drown trying to do the same thing.
- And don't forget Joshua! He believed what God said, and took his army seven times around the walls of Jericho. And the walls fell!
- And Rahab the prostitute. She showed the Israeli spies how to escape safely, so she wasn't included in the ranks of the disobedient nor destroyed with them.
- And . . . on and on! Shall I continue? How much more time I would still need to recount the confidence in God which led to the exploits of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the other prophets! They conquered kingdoms, did good things because they were the right things to do, faced ravenous lions yet remained un-attacked, went through fire without being burned, escaped the sword's edge, experienced renewing of strength when they were weak, were made victoriously enduring in time of battle as they were bending back the attacks of enemy armies. Women even saw dead sons and husbands brought back to life. Yet there is also a more sober side of the picture: some people died under torture, preferring the expectation of a better resurrection to temporary deliverance as a reward for recanting. And others experienced jeerings and beatings, some even to the extent of imprisonment. Some were stoned to death, some were sawed in half, some were murdered by the sword. Some graduated from desert school — sheepskins and goatskins were their clothing, not their diplomas! They went hungry, they were oppressed, they were mistreated by people who in no way measured up to them. They wandered homeless in deserts and through barren hills, taking shelter where they could find it, in caves or in mere holes in the ground.

All of these, speaking through desperate circumstances, have left their testimony as a legacy for us. They believed what God said, but they didn't actually experience receiving then what He had promised. And while God has made a far better provision for us, He expects to include us as participants when He writes their final chapter.

**12:1** That being the case, how do we participate? Well, the nurturing cocoon of exemplary witnesses which has surrounded us should encourage us not only to run well in our own scheduled race, but also to exercise great patience and determination in training for it. Away with every deterrent! We must strip ourselves of every entangling sin and distraction! We must keep our heart's eye on the One who both laid out the course and will be with us at the finish line. This One is Jesus, and He merits our complete confidence. Why? Because He has already done just what He expects us to do: He could endure the cross because His eyes were on the joy awaiting Him just ahead, and He knew the glory of this would far outweigh the shame of that. Now He sits at God's right hand — God placed Him there — exalted as on a throne, and He expects to share all of that with us!

Just think, for instance, of the patience with which Jesus withstood such a torrent of opposition from sinful men! Then you won't so easily give in to the discouragement that produces heart-weariness. Your struggle against sin hasn't resulted in bloodshed or death for you yet, has it? And you haven't snubbed His encouragement, have you? He's your heavenly Father, isn't He? Then He speaks to you when He says,

**My child, don't shrug off the lessons your Lord wants to teach you! Don't give up when He corrects you! After all, He wouldn't bother teaching you if He didn't love you, and He won't waste His time spanking someone else's children.**

So be patient under His disciplinary hand, for He is treating you as one of His own much-loved children. Can you imagine the horror of being a child whose father doesn't consider him to be worth training? All true sons expect a share of discipline. Be your Father's son — don't make yourself a bastard! If you've had respect for your parents and teachers who train you for life on this earth, all the more you should submit to God who is your spiritual Father, concerned about your eternal life! Your parents, after all, only gave you relatively brief training as seemed appropriate to them. But God is concerned that His training will prepare you to share His own holiness through all eternity. Granted, training can be painful and, for the time being, may not be a pleasure trip. But look at the bottom line: the trophy for those who exercise themselves under His coaching is the peace that results from learning straightness from Him. So receive His strength in those withered hands and paralytic knees, and guide your feet straight down the course He has set for you. He won't run you ragged or out of joint! His purpose is healing strength, not lameness.

In all your dealings with other people, too, you must make peace and holiness your goal. Neither you nor they will ever meet the Lord without these. Take the initiative in working to see that neither you nor anyone else is lacking in God's

grace as you stretch toward His goal for yourself. Otherwise, bitterness may sprout up in you, and once it takes root it is hard to root out. And bitterness — just plain bitterness — causes so much trouble, and it defiles lives just as surely as sexual impurity does! Don't follow Esau's example. His here-and-now, life-on-this-earth-only outlook led him into a very sad trade-off: for one measly meal he gave up all he had a right to as Isaac's firstborn son. And later, when he came to his senses and wanted to recover his rejected inheritance, his repentance could not accomplish that, and even tears of remorse didn't buy it back.

What a difference God's grace makes in the way we approach Him! By way of contrast, think back to the very palpable awesomeness which absolutely cowed the people who followed Moses. There was that fiery pillar of smoke, and the dense overcast of cloud that brought overwhelming darkness, and storms and whirlwinds and blaring bugle-sounds, and thunderous words which so terrorized the people that they begged Moses to ask God not to speak directly to them. They could not face, for example, the severity of the commandment that said,

**If one of your animals even sets foot on this mountain,  
it must be stoned to death!**

And the spectacle presented to Moses' eyes was so awesome that even he cried out in terror,

**I'm shaking with fear!**

How different is the winsome invitation of God's grace! We can approach Him much as we would Mount Zion, the living God's own city, heavenly Jerusalem, attended by myriads of helping angels. We meet God, not in terror as they did, but rather in the festive gatherings of the church itself, since each of us is now registered in heaven as one of His cherished children. Yes, He is also judge of everyone, so we dare not trifle with Him as deliberately mischievous miscreants! Rather, in approaching Him, we join the ranks of those who are matured in straight living and whose spirits are now part of the heavenly company. We're drawing near to Jesus Himself, who under the terms of the new contract sacrificed Himself to draw us back to God — and that blood of His, sprinkled from the cross, speaks for us in an incomparably more effective way, for example, than the blood of Abel's sacrifice spoke for him.

But be on constant guard that your life does not, in effect, beg off from the way of grace that Jesus has communicated to you. Don't assume that we can with impunity repudiate Him who has come to us from heaven. Why, even our earthly ancestors didn't escape when they ignored Moses' warnings. The very earth beneath them shook at the sound of God's voice, and today He still announces,

**One more time I Myself will shake not only the earth but the very heavens themselves!**

And this whole “one more time” bit makes clear to us that only abolishment awaits everything of earthly human origin, for only the things of God’s doing will stand unshaken. In view of this, and since we have been made to become subjects of an unshakable kingdom, we can relax in confident joy, at the same time that our worshipful lives of service pleasing to Him are lived out in awed reverence before Him. For our God of grace and mercy is at the same time a God of consuming fiery purity.

**13:1** So, continue now in your loving brotherly regard for each other. Don’t miss the blessings that go along with extending hospitality, blessings both you and your guests will share. Some people have entertained guests without even being conscious of the fact that they were helping God’s own messengers. Minister to the needs of your Christian brothers in prison in the same way you would want to be ministered to if you were their fellow prisoner. Help those who are being mistreated just as you would want to be helped if you were suffering the same bodily indignities they are being subjected to. Remember that God Himself honors the marriage bond — there is nothing at all dirty or shameful about sexual relations with your own spouse. But God’s judgment will come down hard on those guilty of improper sexual relationships, whether within marriage or outside of it. Greediness, especially for money, should in no way characterize your life. When you are tempted to feel that your needs are not being satisfied, remember that it is God Himself who says,

**I have not deserted you, and I never will!**

With this kind of encouragement, we will find ourselves truthfully responding,

**The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what is ahead,  
regardless of what people may do to me.**

Be properly appreciative of your leaders, who guide you by sharing God’s message with you. Examine carefully the way obedience to His word works out in their lives, and make their confidence in Him your own model. They believe that Jesus, God’s Chosen One, still deals with us today just as He did in the past, and He’ll continue to do so right into eternity. So don’t be led down the wrong path by strange teachings, for there are people who will try to make void the effect of the true word which tells you that you have been purchased! It is the grace of God that nourishes your spiritual life, so occupy yourself in the enjoyment of His grace and not in just grubbing for food or pleasing your palate. As Christians, we have a spiritual altar of sacrifice from which the Jews, who are still (in ignorance) carrying on the tabernacle-type sacrifices, have no right to eat. Do you remember those

animals whose blood was carried as a sin offering by the chief priest right into the Holiest Place of All? Yet the bodies of those same animals were thrown outside the boundaries of the encampment to be burned. This fact prefigured the sufferings of Jesus, who accepted the shame of dying outside the city gates so that His own blood, as a sin offering, could cleanse away the shamefulness of His people. In a sense now we too are called to this same kind of “outside the gate” suffering, and as we join Him there we feel the burden of the same disgrace that fell upon Him. This world and its way of life are not our spiritual hometown, and so we still keep our eyes alert for that first glad glimpse of the Home that awaits us there with Him. It is through Him that we should offer up our sacrifices of praise to God by every possible means, for He reaps a harvest of praise as our lips impress those around us with the glories of His name. But our deeds must follow suit, so we must not neglect doing good and sharing what we have with others, for God accepts such deeds as fragrant sacrifices.

Follow the lead of your elders, and bow to their authority. They are vigilant for your spiritual wellbeing, since they have to render an accounting to God for you. Your willingness to follow them makes their responsibility a joyous one, so that they don't have to groan over your obtuseness — which wouldn't help you, any more than it would help them.

You can pray for us — and please do! — without any second thoughts, for we are sure that we follow the Lord with a clear conscience. It is our desire that every aspect of our lives should be appropriate to what we teach. I especially urge you to pray that I might soon be restored to you.

And it is my fervent desire that the God who gives peace in accord with the blood-sealed eternal contract, who brought back from death our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of His flock — I fervently ask Him to create in you the desire to please Him by doing all kinds of good, accomplishing through your daily activities the things which only Jesus, God's Appointed One, can equip you for. Such things are especially pleasant in His eyes, for the glory He receives through them endures through all eternity. May it be so in you!

I urge you, my brothers, to bear up well under these brief words of appeal. As you know, our brother Timothy is away on a mission. If he returns here soon, he will be with me when I come to see you.

Greet all your leaders for me, as well as the rest of your fellow saints. All of the Italians among us here send greetings to you, with best wishes for God's grace to be with you each one.

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\*Hebrews 9:4. We get our word “manna” from the Hebrew expression used by the wanderers in the desert at the time they first saw the “manna” on the ground. The Hebrew word means “What's this stuff?”