

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS



An Explanation of This Letter
Especially for You

Ger de Koning

ROCK
SOLID
9

The Letter to the Hebrews

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Rock Solid #9

Ger de Koning

The original Dutch version is available at

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Layout: Jan Noordhoek

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah
Nah – Nahum
Hab – Habakkuk
Zep – Zephaniah
Hag – Haggai
Zec – Zechariah
Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew
Mk – Gospel of Mark
Lk – Gospel of Luke
Jn – Gospel of John
Acts – Acts of the Apostles
Rom – Letter to the Romans
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal – Letter to the Galatians
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians
Phil – Letter to the Philippians
Col – Letter to the Colossians
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy
Tit – Letter to Titus
Phlm – Letter to Philemon
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews
Jam – Letter of James
1Pet – First Letter of Peter
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter
1Jn – First Letter of John
2Jn – Second Letter of John
3Jn – Third Letter of John
Jude – Letter of Jude
Rev – Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Letter to the Hebrews

Introduction

This letter is called by someone: the letter of the opened heavens. You will discover how justified this description is. In this letter the writer is directing your attention to an opened heaven. And what do you see there, or better said, Who do you see there? Christ. You get to see the Lord Jesus in many glories. Both in His Person and in His offices (i.e. His official services) there is a variety of His glories. You will see His glories as God and His glories as Man, for He is both perfectly and truly God and perfectly and truly Man.

Although the name of the writer is not mentioned, this way of presenting the Lord Jesus just gives us all reason to presume that Paul is the writer of this letter. Like no other writer he shows us in all his letters the glory of the Lord Jesus as the glorified Man, while he also fully maintains His Divinity. He does not name himself as the sender so that all attention is directed only to the Lord Jesus. If he would have presented himself as an apostle at the beginning of the letter, he would then have drawn attention to himself too, and that would not be appropriate here. Besides, the Lord Jesus Himself is presented as Apostle in this letter (Heb 3:1). That too makes it inappropriate for Paul to present himself in that way. Therefore, from now on, I will not mention his name, but speak of 'the writer'.

There is another letter where the writer doesn't mention himself and that is the first letter of John. The reason for that is the same as for this letter: it is the purpose of the Holy Spirit that all light shines on the Lord Jesus.

The letter is written to the Hebrews, that means to Jews who have accepted the Lord Jesus as the Messiah and who have believed in Him. Their unbelieving fellow countrymen looked at Him as a deceiver whose crucifixion was justified. They had rejected Him. They treated the believing Jews as apostates who had abandoned the religion of their ancestors. They persisted in keeping the outward temple service and the offerings and customs that belonged to those services. At the same time their hatred toward their believing fellow countrymen was revealed.

They also pointed these believing fellow countrymen to the visible and tangible temple service and they mocked them because they believed in what is unseen and intangible. They made things difficult for the believing Jews by persecuting and scorning them. Therefore the writer of the letter – that is in fact the Holy Spirit through the writer – is doing his best to present the believing Jews all the glories of the Lord Jesus in heaven. Although they did not see Him, their faith was therefore not poorer. Their faith, on the contrary, was enormously richer.

In the letter the writer shows that the whole Old Testament worship service has been fulfilled in Christ. You will see that the sacrifices of the Old Testament have found their fulfillment in the sacrifice of Christ. In that way the priesthood of Aaron is also replaced by the priesthood of Christ. Next to these similarities there are also contrasts. Look at the sacrifices. Those were repeated again and again, while the sacrifice of Christ is made once for all, so that it is not needed to be repeated. With Aaron you see the same. Aaron was a sinful and mortal high priest, but Christ is the sinless and everlasting living High Priest.

Therefore the Christian worship service, in which Christ and His accomplished work are central, is far better than the Jewish service. In the letter the better things of Christendom with respect to that of Judaism will be dealt with. The word 'better' (or 'more') occurs more than ten times in the letter with a total of almost twenty times in the whole of the New Testament. You read for example about: better things, better sacrifices, a better hope, a better promise, a better resurrection, a better covenant, a better inheritance, a better country.

Now you should not think that it was easy for the believing Jew to abandon the old and familiar religion, which was even given by God. They were familiarized with it from their childhood and now they had to turn their back on all that splendor and impressive glory. An event out of Peter's life shows us how difficult that was. He was a Jew in heart and soul. The Lord really had to make great efforts to liberate him from his old thinking (Acts 10:9-16).

Perhaps you know from your own experience how hard it is to change certain religious habits and thoughts, with which you were familiarized. To the believing Jews holding on to the old things was a hindrance to grow

in the new and better things. Therefore the writer presents the glory of the new and better things, so that it will be easier for them to abandon the old things.

His arguments were not meant for the unbelieving mass of the Jews. Therefore he did not address them. These people were holding on to the outward forms. By name they were God's people and they even boasted on that. However, their connection with God was only formal, without any inward desire to Him and to obey Him. Among the mass, however, there were believers, who were standing in a real relationship to God by faith. They had acknowledged their Messiah in Christ. The letter was addressed to them with the purpose on the one side to liberate them from an earthly religion and on the other side to affirm them in their new and heavenly relationship with Christ.

The letter shows the heavenly character of Christendom in an excellent way. That's what makes this letter significant in our days. Throughout history Christendom has lost its heavenly character more and more. It has been reduced to a worldly system. Many forms of Christendom consist of ceremonies and religious rites, which are often directly copied from Judaism. In that way the Judaic religion, which has become meaningless to God, has come back.

Therefore this letter is extremely important for you too. In this way you learn to look at Christendom through God's eyes. Through this letter you will recognize how God wants to be served and worshiped, so that at the same time you may reject everything that is not in accordance to that.

The reason why this letter is written is because a certain weariness began to grow among the believing Hebrews, due to persecution and scorn, while what they were hoping for still had not come. Their hands became weak and their knees lame and the inclination arose to fall back to that which they had abandoned. They could not cope any longer with the pressure and their hope for a soon return of the Messiah was not fulfilled.

Therefore the writer presents to the Jewish Christians the exaltedness of Christendom in comparison to Judaism. Until now they had connected Christendom to Judaism. Thousands of Christians were zealots for the law,

but God was about to destroy the Judaic system completely. The writer also presents many believers who had also lived by faith, though without receiving any of what they were looking forward to. They persevered to the end.

Above all, the writer draws attention to the Lord Jesus and His perseverance. It seems that even He too did not receive what He came for. Still He kept on going and is waiting now in heaven for the time the promises will be fulfilled. Time and time again their attention – and also yours – has to be turned to Him. That's the way to be connected to heaven and to see that your calling is a heavenly calling. You are called from heaven and you are called to heaven. Your path is the path to heaven.

You cannot see that (yet) with your natural eye and therefore it is faith that it really comes down to. Because you still live on earth and because your attention is often drawn by things you can see, there is a great danger that you might give in to those things. However, if you look to the Lord in heaven by faith, you will not waver, but you will be strengthened in your Christian position. By looking to Him you learn to bear the cross of scorn and contempt on earth.

In summarizing, it can be said that in the letter the writer points to the Lord Jesus, to His life on earth, to His sacrifice on the cross, to His glorification at the right hand of God and finally to His future.

In conclusion to this introduction a global outline of the letter:

1. The personal glories of Christ and His place in heaven (Hebrews 1-2).
2. The heavenly priesthood of Christ to sustain His people (Hebrews 3-5).
3. The sacrifice of Christ that made you fit for heaven (Hebrews 6-9).
4. The access you now already have to heaven where Christ is (Hebrews 10).
5. Examples of faith that lead to Christ in heaven (Hebrews 11).
6. Sanctification and grace on the way that leads to Christ in heaven (Hebrews 12).
7. Jesus Christ, yesterday and today the Same and forever (Hebrews 13).

Hebrews 1

Heb 1:1-3 | The Sevenfold Glory of Christ

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

V1. Without an introductory word the letter begins directly with pointing at God's speaking. Through what God had spoken, He revealed His thoughts. You wouldn't have otherwise known them. God was not obliged to make His thoughts known, but it is His wonderful grace that He still did it.

The writer points his readers to the fact that God "spoke ... to the fathers" in times past. That makes it clear that the readers are in the first place believers from the Israelites. To those that were converted from the Gentiles, this phrase would have been neither meaningful nor important. Also the fact that God spoke "in the prophets" indicates that it is about readers of Jewish origin. The writer includes himself also. You can derive that from the word "us".

God spoke to the fathers by the prophets "in many portions and in many ways". In the course of time He had spoken to His earthly people at various moments and again and again by different prophets. He also spoke in various ways. Thereby you may think about warnings, teachings, visions, dreams, wonders and signs (cf. Hos 12:10). But all this speaking has not brought about the desired result. His people deviated again and again and much further and further away from God.

After God has spoken to His people in this way through the past ages, He finally spoke in His Son to them. This speaking happened in the last days. Those are the days that God still spoke to His people, but were coming to an end and they definitely ended when His people rejected His Son. This

speaking of God in His Son happened when the Lord Jesus was on earth. It was the last attempt from God's side to bring His people back to Himself.

However, there is a tremendous distinction between the speaking of all previous prophets, and the speaking in the Son. The prophets were people through the means of whom God addressed His people. But the Lord Jesus, the Son, is not a means through Whom God speaks. It is the speaking of God *Himself*! The prophets spoke *in the name of* God. The Lord Jesus did not speak in the name of God, but spoke *as being* God. He indeed did that as Man on earth, but that Man *is* God the Son.

That's what makes God's speaking in the Son extraordinarily impressive. When God speaks in the Son, there is no mention anymore of partial or temporary Divine speaking, for all speaking of the Son is always and perfectly Divine. The Son is infinitely far exalted above the prophets as He is also above all other people as well as above the angels to whom the Jews were looking up.

After the writer has introduced the Son in this way, he starts to describe the great majesty of the Son in an inimitable way. He does that by introducing to you seven glories of this Person Who is exalted beyond everything and everyone.

1. V2. In the first place the Son has been "appointed heir of all things" by God. As Son He will own in glory everything that exists. It is God's plan to subject all things to His Son Who became Man.

He could only receive the inheritance as heir after the testator has died (Heb 9:17). Now the wonderful thing is that He is the Testator as well as the Heir. And how did He receive the inheritance as Heir? By dying as the Testator. You may say that it is God's inheritance and that therefore God is the testament Maker, while Christ is the Heir. But Christ is God Himself and therefore receives the inheritance through His own death, of course as Man, for God cannot die. This is an inconceivable mystery to our understanding, but to faith this wonder is a reason to bow down and worship God.

There is yet a wonderful thing in addition to that. He is the Heir, but through God's wonderful grace you are fellow-heir of "all things", the

whole universe, nothing excluded (Rom 8:16-17; Gal 4:7). Shouldn't this awareness give us the courage to persevere?

2. His second glory is His power to create. Through Him God has "also ... made the worlds – the men's world, the angels' world and the world of the stars. The whole wide system of this universe is the work of His hands, Who has spoken to us: the Divine Christ. Without Him not one thing has come into being, that has that has come into being (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16).

3. V3. The third is that whatever glory of God radiates to the outside, it always happens through the Son. The Son is "the radiance of His glory". The light of God's glory has become visible in Him. He is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). It is like the sun with its beams. Where the sun is, its beams are seen, and where there are sun beams there is the sun. The beams and the sun are fully from the same nature. It is inconceivable that there are sun beams apart from the sun. The beams cannot be blocked or polluted. Whatever man did to the Son on earth, the beams could never be blocked nor darkened or blemished.

4. But fourth, He is the Sun Himself and not only the brightness. He is not only a reflection of God, no, the Being of God is in Him. The Son is "the exact representation of His nature". Everything that God is on high, Christ is as Man. It is 'expressed' in Him (cf. Deu 4:15-16,25; Exo 33:9-11,20-23). The whole Being of God is found in Him as an exact image.

What is visible in the Son is completely in accordance with and is identical to the invisible God. There is no thought in God or Christ is the exact image of it. He Himself is God, as much as the Father and the Spirit Who in and through Him are revealed in Their full nature. You see the triune God in Him in everything He says and does.

5. His fifth glory is that He "upholds all things by the word of His power". His word has Divine power (Psa 33:6,9). He is the Creator and He also sustains everything. After He has created everything He also looks after everything He has created, for He has created everything with a purpose. All things exist together in Him (Col 1:17), all things are held together by Him.

He doesn't bear all things as a dead matter on His back that it does not fall, but He leads everything to a goal. The bearing implies movement and going on. An example of that you see in His daily care for all His own. To each of the countless prayers that are daily sent to Him for all kinds of matters, He can answer by the word of His power. He takes care of the maintenance of the whole creation and of each individual life.

6. The sixth Divine glory becomes visible in Him as Man. That glory is that He "made purification of sins". Here it is not about 'our' sins, but about the *fact* of the purification of the sins. That He has done that, is an addition to the glory of the Son. He did that Himself, which underlines additionally that the Son has accomplished the redemption work absolutely Himself alone and in His own strength. The purification of sins means that He has done away and removed the sins.

7. Also the seventh Divine glory you see in Him as Man. He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high". As Man He took His seat on high after He had made purification of sins. The fact that He is there proves the perfection of His work. As a result, everything related to the majesty of God is fully fulfilled. Therefore He is entitled to that place. He *sits* there, which indicates a situation of rest. He sits down at the *right hand*, which indicates a place of honor.

On Him *there*, seated on high, your eyes are always directed as you read this letter. Should you ever doubt whether your sins have been put away, then look to Him *there*, seated on high. Looking to Him *there* makes an end to every doubt.

By the way, in this letter the Lord Jesus is seen four times at the right hand of God:

1. In chapter 1 (Heb 1:1-3) where He in His own personal glory is seated there after He made purification of sins;
2. in chapter 8 (Heb 8:1-2) in relation to His High Priest service;
3. in chapter 10 (Heb 10:12) with a view to the sacrifice accomplished by Him once for all, through which He can be seated as Priest, for the sacrifice doesn't ever have to be repeated again;

4. finally in chapter 12 (Heb 12:2) where it is not related to His Person, His service or His accomplished work, but to His inner feelings of 'the joy that laid before Him'.

Now read Hebrews 1:1-3 again.

Reflection: Meditate on the various glories of Christ and tell Him how much you admire Him for that.

Heb 1:4-5 | The Son Far Above the Angels (I)

4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. 5 For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?

It will be a good thing to reflect for a moment on how the Lord Jesus is presented in this letter. It is not simple to distinguish His various glories. He is, after all, God and Man in one Person. I will try to explain something about it. From the previous verses you have understood that He is now seated as Man in heaven. He has taken His seat there as Man, after He had accomplished the purification of sins through His work on the cross.

Before that time He indeed was in heaven, but not as Man. He was not eternally Man. He became that through His birth on the earth. John speaks about "Jesus Christ [as] coming in the flesh" (2Jn 1:7) and about "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14). Thus the Lord Jesus existed, for He is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, but He became Man, or, as John says, 'came in the flesh' or 'became flesh'. That can only be said of a person who has been there already, but now comes in a different way.

And how did that happen? God the Holy Spirit conceived Him in Mary (Lk 1:35). Therefore the Lord Jesus is the Son of God in two ways. First, He is God the Son from all eternity. Second, He became Son in a new way through His birth on the earth. Also as Man He could call God His Father.

His eternal Sonship is present throughout this letter. Sometimes this also comes forward, as in the previous verses in His glory as Creator and as Bearer of all things. But in this letter the emphasis is mainly on the fact that He is the Son of God as *Man*. In His Person countless glories are present. As limited people we cannot see the extent of all those glories as a whole. We can see them 'in part' (1Cor 13:9), which means that we are able to see and admire just a part of that glory at a time. This is how the writer approaches this issue here.

V4. We go back to our study of chapter 1. We have come to verse 4, where the writer connects to the foregoing by now comparing the glory of the Son

to the angels. Angels used to have an exceptional place in the Judaic system. The earthly people of God received the law through angels (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19). And when the Lord (Yahweh) appeared in the Old Testament He did that normally also in the form of an angel, as the Angel of the Lord.

To a Jew the angels were the highest beings next to God. They deeply respected them. John for example wanted to worship an angel (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9). To a Jew a human being was much lower than an angel. Now the Lord Jesus became Man. So He is in heaven. That presents a problem for the mind of the Jew. Christ became Man and yet is He more than the angels?

As the eternal Son and also as Creator He has always been exalted above the angels. The Jews, however, still had to develop a sense for the fact that He is still above the angels as *Man* and this because He is the Son of God as Man. To the angels that was not an issue. They saw in Him, also when He was as Man on earth, their Lord and Master. Angels honored Him at His birth (Lk 2:10,13-14). And during His life they served Him and were ready to do that (Mt 4:11; 26:53; 1Tim 3:16).

Now as Man He has returned to heaven, 'on high' (verse 3), where He had always been as the eternal Son. There God granted Him a glory He did not have before that time. By taking this place as Man, a dimension has been added to the distance in glory which was there between Him and the angels. That is indicated by the words "so much better".

Here is also mention of 'become' something, which indicates that it was not present before. The distance between Him and the angels has always been immeasurably great and cannot grow greater. But His excellence above the angels can indeed get more emphasis. That happens by the new name He has inherited. That name is given to Him by God after He had died – an inheritance is indeed connected to death –, was risen and had returned to heaven. It is the Name above every name (Phil 2:9).

Then the moment has come for the writer to prove His excellence above the angels. For that purpose he quotes many portions from the Old Testament that speak of the Messiah. The believers to whom he wrote were familiar with that. The verses quoted should persuade them. They give a unani-

mous testimony. In seven quotations from the Old Testament – specifically the Greek translation of that (the Septuagint) – the excellence, which is beyond all things, of the Son is shown.

To make yourself aware of the power of these quotations you ought to step into the shoes of the believing Jew. This also is not a simple section, but your effort to conceive something of it will be rewarded abundantly. It took me quite a while before I succeeded to comprehend a bit about how impressive this testimony from the Old Testament is. First of all I will give you the quotations in a row:

1. He is higher than the angels and is worshiped by them (verses 4-6, with quotations from (1) Psa 2:7; (2) 1Chr 17:13; (3) Psa 97:7);
2. His throne is forever and ever and therefore exalted above all thrones (verses 7-8, with quotations from (4) Psa 104:4; (5) Psa 45:7);
3. He is exalted above His companions (verse 9, with a quotation from (5) Psa 45:8);
4. He is exalted above His creation, for there comes an end to that (verses 10-12, with a quotation from (6) Psa 102:26);
5. He is exalted above the time (verse 12, with a quotation from (6) Psa 102:27-28);
6. He is exalted above His enemies (verse 13, with a quotation from (7) Psa 110:1); and once again:
7. He is exalted above the angels (verses 13-14, with a quotation from (7) Psa 110:1).

In these quotations you also see a chronological order. They are about

1. His birth (verse 5a),
2. His presence on earth in fellowship with the Father (verse 5b),
3. His return into the world (verse 6),
4. His kingdom in the millennium (verse 8) and
5. the eternal situation after the millennium (verse 11).

V5a. The first proof text (Psa 2:7) shows the superiority of the Son above the angels by pointing at His position as Son. God has never said to a certain angel personally: "You are My Son." Angels were indeed called sons of God (Gen 6:2; Job 1:6), but then it is about sons as creatures, like Adam, who is also called son of God (Lk 3:38). Here the name 'Son' is given to the Messiah, born on earth. It is therefore about His relation in time. He has been through eternity the eternal Son of the eternal Father and now His relation as Son born on earth is added to that since His birth.

There are people who are teaching that He only became Son when He was born, while His eternal Sonship is denied. However, if He first and only became Son by His birth, then the order in Psalm 2 (Psa 2:7) should have been: 'I have begotten You, You are My Son.' However, first it is written: "You are My Son." Then it is determined that that Son was "begotten", which means, He became Man. In this way the *eternal* relation is determined first and thereafter the *new* relation.

V5b. The second quotation (2Sam 7:14; 1Chr 17:13) is written in the future tense: "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son." That cannot possibly refer to His relation to His Father in eternity, for that has no beginning. It refers to His relation in time, from His birth. God makes clear here how the Messiah will be related to Him.

These words relate primarily to Solomon, the son of David. Solomon is an example of the Lord Jesus as the Prince of Peace. Therefore the Holy Spirit can quote and apply these verses to *the* Son of David, the Lord Jesus (cf. Mt 1:1). An application to angels is impossible.

Do you know to whom this quotation is also applied? To you and me! Just read what is written in 2 Corinthians 6 (2Cor 6:18). In the context of that section, it is about behaving in such a way that God really can call Himself your Father and that He can acknowledge you as His son or daughter. Then you look like the Lord Jesus, Who He also calls Son.

Now read Hebrews 1:4-5 again.

Reflection: What have you learnt about the difference between the Lord Jesus and the angels?

Heb 1:6-14 | The Son Far Above the Angels (II)

6 And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM." 7 And of the angels He says, "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE." 8 But of the Son He says, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. 9 "YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS." 10 And, "YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; 11 THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN; AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT, 12 AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP; LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED. BUT YOU ARE THE SAME, AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END." 13 But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

V6. The third quotation (Psa 97:7) is about worshiping the Son. Only a Divine Person is worthy of worship. God appeals to "all" angels to do that, not just a few. They are called "the angels of God", which means, creatures who are nearest to Him and who are instruments of His power and government. In that position they ought to worship the Messiah.

God makes this appeal "when He again brings the firstborn into the world". That certainly refers to His birth in Bethlehem. Then God brought Him into the world and the angels were praising God (Lk 2:13). But God will bring Him again into the world. Then He will not come as a Baby, but in power and majesty (Rev 19:11-16). He will come as "the firstborn", which means that He will be in the midst of others and amongst them He will take the first place. That also appears from the description of His

return in Revelation 19 (Rev 19:11-16). He is also the Firstborn of the whole creation (Col 1:15), the Firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5) and the Firstborn among many brethren (Rom 8:29).

V7. The fourth quotation (Psa 104:4) shows that angels have been made to something, namely “winds” and “ministers”. The Son however is not made to something. The messengers, these invisible creatures, are swift and invisible as the wind, but their work is observable. They are ministers with a power of flame of fire, terrible, terrifying and consuming. Therefore angels are exalted far above men. But the Son is exalted immeasurably far above the angels. While He is the Son, the angels are compared to no more than the elementary forces of wind and a flame of fire.

V8-9. The fifth quotation is from Psalm 45 (Psa 45:6-7). Psalm 45 is a Messianic psalm, in which the Divinity of the Messiah is emphasized strongly. The psalmist addresses the Messiah as “God”. As it is said, the Son has not been made to something, as the angels were, but God acknowledges Him in what He is: God. God speaks about His “throne”. That is His earthly throne, which ends to exist when He takes possession of an eternal throne. It is an eternal throne because righteousness is the foundation of it.

The Messiah exercises His dominion, of which the scepter is the symbol, as a righteous King. No one can dispute His kingdom and no one can question the righteousness of His reign. Any ground for this is lacking. Regarding the angels, they do not sit on a throne, but they are standing before the throne, ready to serve.

He is entitled to that place. He proved that when He was on earth. He showed that He loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Therefore He was a pleasure to God and therefore God anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His companions, i.e. the believing remnant of Israel.

The wonderful thing in this quotation is that on the one side you see that the Divinity of the Lord Jesus is affirmed again as well as His eternal throne. On the other side you see Him as the faithful Man on earth where He made God-fearing people His companions, above whom He at the same time is highly exalted.

V10-12. But His glory is presented yet more extensively: He is Yahweh. There can be no misunderstanding about this because of the sixth quotation (Psa 102:26-28). The quotation starts with 'and', which makes it clear that it connects and adds to what has already been said about the Son. In Psalm 102 He is not only seen as Man, but as Man in the deepest humiliation, in His suffering and finally in His death.

However, He is also acknowledged by God as the Maker of heaven and earth. The psalm is the prophetic expression from the heart of the Savior, in the prospect of what He endured on earth as Man. But you also hear God's answer to Him in this quotation. The answer implies that, however deeply He was humiliated, He was at the same time the Creator. That answer is quoted here by the writer. You read that God addresses His Son with "You, Lord". To the readers of the letter, and for you too, this means that the Jesus of the New Testament is the Yahweh of the Old Testament.

Then you read in the quotation about "the beginning" (Gen 1:1; Jn 1:1). He is at the beginning of all things. All things owe their beginning to Him Who Himself has no beginning. He also has no end, though His works do have, for they will perish. Mockers do say that all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation (2Pet 3:4), but they will be cruelly disillusioned. The material world has no life in itself and is neither eternal, as its Creator is. Here in one phrase you move from the beginning to the perishing at the end, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 21:1. It indicates the huge contrast between the Creator and the creation.

He is eternally the Same. His years will last endlessly, even now He has become Man, for also as Man He has no end. The creation will be changed, but He Himself is the Eternal and the Unchangeable. "Will be changed" indicates a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 20:11; 21:1). Creation will be like a "garment" and He will deal with the creation as with a "cloak". A garment finally grows old and you can fold up a cloak or change it for another one. That is not the case with the Son. Christ is Creator and also Recreator.

V13. The seventh quotation (Psa 110:1) is in accordance with the seventh glory of the Son in verse 3. Not only His Person is glorious and Divine, not only does He take the first place toward all creatures in the universe, but He has His own place at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. He Who had been with God in eternity, came to earth, was despised, but will rule soon, is now seated at God's right hand.

Psalm 110:1 is the verse from the Old Testament quoted the most in the New Testament. That's because in the Old Testament, in fact, only this verse says something about the present place of the Lord Jesus in heaven *after* His suffering, dying and resurrection and *before* His return.

He is now seated, while the angels are always standing (Lk 1:19; Rev 8:2). When Michael and his angels have fought against the dragon and his angels and have defeated them (Rev 12:7-8), they will return to God's presence and stand there in their place of humble servants, awaiting the next order. What God says to His Son He will never say to the mightiest angel.

V14. The chapter ends with a question that consists of a conclusion. Angels minister, but Christ rules. Angels are ministers of God, but also of the believers. Angels are spirits, they have no terrestrial bodies. They see the believers, they are spectators of what the believers do and don't do, as 1 Corinthians 11 proves (1Cor 11:10), and they provide them with assistance where it is needed, because the believers are companions of the Son.

The believers are presented here as "those who will inherit salvation". With salvation in this letter is meant the millennial kingdom. Therefore you should see salvation here as something that is in the future. Salvation is also something you already possess. Therefore you may know for sure that you are saved on the ground of your conversion to God and your faith in the Lord Jesus (Eph 2:8).

It is important that you, to know what the expression 'salvation' means, look at the context in which it is written. Salvation often means to be placed on a new territory, beyond the reach of evil spirits and connected to Christ. In the quoted Ephesians 2:8 the point is that you are already in heaven now, in safety in an area where you are connected to a glorified Christ.

As it is said, in this letter it is about salvation as something in the future. That implies that we sometimes have to go a tough and difficult way before we reach that salvation. That applied to the Jewish believers anyhow. Therefore they urgently needed a ministry of empowerment, comfort and protection.

The Lord uses among other things His angels to minister His own. He deploys them, He sends them. They go on His command. Like when He sends an angel to Cornelius (Acts 10:3) and to Philip (Acts 8:26). He deploys them to bring Lazarus to Him (Lk 16:22). God uses angels to protect us (Mt 4:6; 18:10; Acts 12:15). These angels are the chosen or holy angels (Mt 25:31; 1Tim 5:21).

You see a multitude of ministries that the angels do and that on your and my behalf. Therefore not the angels are worthy of praise – they would reject it (Rev 22:8-9) – but the Lord of the angels: the Man Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Creator and Heir of all things.

Now read Hebrews 1:6-14 again.

Reflection: Which glories of the Lord Jesus have you learnt about? Worship Him for them.

Hebrews 2

Heb 2:1-7 | Holding On to the Word

1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away [from it]. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. 5 For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. 6 But one has testified somewhere, saying, "WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? 7 "YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;

V1. Verses 1-4 form a parenthesis. In this section it is about the importance of holding on to what God has said. The words "for this reason" with which this section starts, refer to the entire chapter 1. There it is shown that the *position* of the Son is so much higher than that of the angels. Therefore the *word* He has spoken is also much higher than what the angels have spoken.

The expression "much closer" emphasizes that what the Son says is of a higher order than what is said by angels. What God spoke to the fathers came to the fathers through the mediation of angels. In those days it was of the utmost importance to hold on to that. Now the Son has come and has spoken, it is much more important to give heed to that, which means that they had to coordinate their life entirely with what He has said.

What He has said doesn't contradict what God said in former days. Only, it is of a totally different order. The law demanded of man and man could not meet the demands. The Son fully met those demands, but He did much

more than the law says. He has given His life for everyone who believes in Him, with the result that everyone who believes in Him has a new and eternal life. That new, eternal life is the Son Himself (1Jn 5:12). He who has the Son as his life, lives under grace and not under law anymore.

He who forgets that, is in danger of returning to a life under the law, to a life in Judaism. That is what the writer means with “drift away”. I hope you recognize the danger for yourself. If you start to let go of the Word and neglect praying, that is the beginning of drifting away.

V2. “The word spoken through angels” was not to be mocked. It was advisable to take heed to that (e.g. Gen 19:17,26). This becomes even clearer if you think on the law in this regard (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19). The law is *God’s* law. You cannot violate it with impunity or ignore it in disobedience. God always maintains the authority of His Word. He will punish sin, in whatever way it is committed, righteously. In the Old Testament there is an example of a “just penalty” on transgressing the law in the judgment on someone who did not keep the sabbath commandment (Num 15:32-36).

V3. If already such serious consequences are attached to violating the word spoken through angels, how serious then must be the consequences for someone who despises the word of grace that the Son Has spoken! The Lord Jesus has spoken to His people as a whole and also to the individual on earth about “so great a salvation”.

The *national* salvation, which means the salvation of Israel as a nation, is still a matter of the future. In Luke 4 there is a beautiful example of the speech of the Lord about the ‘great salvation’, for which He quotes Isaiah 61 (Lk 4:16-22; Isa 61:1-2). When He announces there the ‘acceptable year of the Lord’, it is similar to ‘*so great* a salvation’, i.e. the millennial kingdom of peace. It is *so great* a salvation, not just a great one. The same emphasis you hear in the words: “For God so loved the world” (Jn 3:16). It indicates its immeasurable size.

The salvation is in the first place great in size, for it does not only regard the Jews, but it is available to all people. In the second place, the salvation is also great in power, for it works justification and forgiveness. Then it cannot be otherwise than that he who neglects this word of grace of the

Son, receives a justified penalty that is more severe than the penalty under the law. To sin under grace is worse than to sin under the law, because he who neglects this salvation, neglects Him Who offers this salvation and Who is greater than the angels.

It is not about a salvation that came to them in a hazy and dim way. The word on this has not been sounded just for a moment to quickly die away again. No, there has been spoken to them about the enormously great salvation in a fully persuasive, clear way. It could not possibly be misunderstood. No angels were involved here as invisible mediators.

This word has come in the first place from the mouth of the Lord Himself in a brightly understandable language. Then, when He ascended to heaven, those who heard it from the mouth of the Lord confirmed it to the readers of this letter. You may think of the disciples here.

V4. Finally God underlined this word through the means of signs and wonders and miracles (i.e. works of power) and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will. Many of the readers could remember these things, because they have witnessed them themselves (Acts 2:43; 5:12,15). Therefore, regarding them, there should have been no doubt about what they were told. If such an abundant testimony is neglected, it is not possible to escape penalty. This serious word had to dawn on them, who were still doubting between Judaism and Christendom and who adhered to Christendom only externally.

By the way, it is noteworthy that the phrase "testifying with them" is written in the past tense. Could that mean that in the time of the writing of this letter the time of signs and wonders had already passed?

V5. After the parenthesis the writer moves on with describing the glory of the Lord Jesus, but now in connection to the world to come. Therefore he now describes His glory as Son of *Man*. Like in chapter 1 he compares the Lord Jesus with the angels. But the result is totally different here. The result of the comparison in chapter 1 is, that He exceeds far beyond the angels. But what is the result of the comparison in chapter 2? The angels are not even discussed, they are fully excluded.

The reason for that is that they will not reign in the world to come. In future God will reign through His Son as the Son of Man. We shall reign together with Him and then even reign over angels (1Cor 6:3). The future world is "His kingdom", it is the kingdom "of the Son of Man" (Mt 13:41). When He comes to earth to reign, "the times of refreshing" and "[the] period of restoration of all things" will begin (Acts 3:19,21).

It was the expectation of every Jew that, on the ground of the promises God made to the fathers, this new order would be introduced with the coming of the Messiah. Now the Messiah had come, yet this time had not begun. What these believers and you too have to bear in mind, is that this doesn't mean that the promises are not valid anymore, but that they are postponed.

Faith is put to the test through this situation. That applied to them and that applies to you too. Do you believe that God will still fulfill all His promises? If you really believe that, that prospect will protect you on the way of faith. You then will not give in to the temptation of adhering to a religion on earth that is connected to a lot of glitter and glamour and of which also unbelievers can partake.

V6. To prove that the government over the earth will be given to the Son of Man in future, the writer quotes a portion from Psalm 8 (Psa 8:3-8). If you read that psalm you see that David – he is that "one" of this verse – describes a wide view. He points to earth and heaven. He speaks about the majesty of God and about infants and babes. He calls the government of man over the created, what you see in paradise and what you will see in the millennial kingdom. In the verses that the writer quotes, both the pooriness of man as well as his futility come forward and his greatness.

The quotation begins with the question: "What is man?" In this psalm the question arises after David came under the impression of heaven. What is man in comparison to the awesome heaven, where you can see in the night the moon and the countless stars? What value should that weak and mortal man have to God Who has clothed with His fingers the whole immeasurable firmament with innumerable stars of which many exceed the earth many times in size?

What could be attractive in puny man that God is mindful of him? The answer to that question is: 'Just look at the Lord Jesus, 'the Son of Man', Who now is in glory. In Him you see how God really thinks about man. He is the true Son of Adam, as it is literally written here (Lk 3:38).

V7. That God has made man "for a little while [or: a short time] lower than the angels" points to the fact that man because of his body has less freedom of movement than angels. An angel is a spirit and has not that limitation. An angel is also far beyond man when it comes down to power.

Yet God has appointed man as ruler over creation and not an angel. In it you see the glory and honor of man. We will learn from the next section, in the study of verse 9, how impressively this quotation is applied to the Lord Jesus.

Now read Hebrews 2:1-7 again.

Reflection: How can you know for sure that you will not drift away from the word that you have heard?

Heb 2:8-12 | We See Jesus

8 YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. 9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, [namely,] Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one [Father]; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, “I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.”

V8. We still have a small portion from the quotation of Psalm 8 to speak about. Though this is a small portion, it includes much. It is written: “You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” This indicates the complete government of the Lord Jesus over creation, as it appears in the following. ‘All things’ is indeed everything and doesn’t allow any exception. It includes all things both in heaven and on earth, each part of the created universe. Wherever you look in the universe, there will be nothing found that is not subjected to Him.

If you look around you, there is still nothing to be seen of that general government. You see much misery and sorrow. That’s because man has given up and lost the government because of sin. That government is now in the hands of satan (Lk 4:6), who since the fall of man is ‘the god of this age’ and ‘the ruler of the world’ (2Cor 4:4; Jn 12:31). The curse is over the creation. Peaceful animals have become predators and the soil of the earth started to produce thorns and thistles.

V9. But it will not remain that way. To see how it will be, look upward. There you see “Jesus”. And how do you see Him there? “Crowned with glory and honor.” For the earth the day that He will be crowned is still to come, but in heaven He already wears His crown. God has given Him that place of honor as reward for His work on the cross. The suffering of the

death that the Lord Jesus has endured, is so highly appreciated by God that He immediately gave Him the place with Himself that is beyond all things and all men (Jn 13:31-32).

Because of this suffering of death the Lord Jesus “was made a little while [or: a short time] lower than the angels”, for angels cannot die, while the Lord Jesus died. And still He is the Creator of the angels and therefore their Master! It was only for a short time, only three days, but He was still a little lower than the angels. His humiliation has no boundaries and therefore His exaltation neither has boundaries. Today you don’t see all things subjected to Him, but in faith you see indeed Him to Whom all things will be subjected!

That’s the issue of the writer of this letter: turning the gaze upward to Him Who is on high. And to see Him is to see His work too that He did on earth by God’s order. He took the place of humiliation to taste death for the entire system that was far away from God. (‘To taste’ has the meaning of ‘getting to know by coming into contact with’.) Where the first man failed in such an extreme and irreparable way, the second Man came to obtain the full right on creation.

He obtained that right by glorifying God on the same territory where the first man failed. He glorified God on the territory where the enemy, who deceived man by his trick, ruled over man in power and wickedness. Therefore the Lord Jesus tasted death with the special purpose to redeem the children who would be brought to glory by God. Another reason that He tasted death is that the wonderful results of that would spread to *all* that is created, “for everyone” or “for every thing” (Darby Translation). So great is the grace of God.

To faith this all is an enormous encouragement. You see a Man in glory Who went through death and rose again. He is the assurance that it is not about the current world, but it is about the coming one. The way He went through suffering to glory, is also your way. By keeping yourself focused on Him, you get the power to endure all persecution and suffering.

V10. From this verse you see the Lord Jesus in the midst of His brethren, where He also takes the first place (Rom 8:29). That is the sphere of inti-

macy. "It was fitting for Him" means that it was fitted for Whom God is, for His whole way of acting that is never in contrast with His Being. "For whom are all things" shows that in the coming world God and His glory will be in the center. "Through whom are all things" makes clear that God is the origin of everything new that is to come, and He has wanted this. But God does everything through the Son. He is the center of the world that is to come, the millennial kingdom.

Then you read something wonderful. You read about "sons", indeed in plural. Of these 'sons' you read further that they are brought "to glory". The whole purpose of the letter is to focus your eyes on the final goal of the journey. Here you hear that when the Lord Jesus will reign on earth in the glory of the millennial kingdom, He will be surrounded by many sons. And who are those sons? They are the believing Hebrews to whom this letter is addressed and you are one of them too. You are seen here as one of the 'sons'.

There are even "many", so not just a few. You and countless other sons have already gone on the way to the glory. 'Sons' are all people who have accepted the Lord Jesus by faith and who are looking forward to His return to establish the millennial kingdom.

The way to glory, however, is a way of afflictions and goes through many difficulties. But there is an "author" (verse 10; Heb 12:2; Acts 5:31; 3:15), the Commander Who is in charge during the course. That is the Lord Jesus.

He has already gone all the way and He is already in perfection. He has gone through all the hardships which many sons on earth have to go through. This now is what is fitting for God. It would not be fitting for God to expect things of the 'many sons' of which *the* Son had not been a partaker. It was fitting for God's Being and nature to bring His Son as Author through the same way of many trials to the glory of the millennial kingdom. In this way the Son has been made perfectly fit to be an Author to all sons who on earth still have to go through a way of afflictions.

V11. You see how much God connects His Son with the many sons. Nevertheless the Holy Spirit also guards for an identification of the sons with the Son. There must always be a distinction. That He does by speaking

about “He Who sanctifies and those who are sanctified”. You also see this distinction in John 20 where it is not written ‘our Father’ and ‘our God’, but “My Father and your Father, and My God and your God (Jn 20:17; cf. Mt 17:27).

Here it is also not written that the Son and the sons are ‘all one’, but that they are “all *from* one”. ‘He Who sanctifies’ is Christ the Son. That He sanctifies means that He separates you from the people of the world to Himself. ‘Those who are sanctified’ are the believers, the sons.

It means that He consecrates you to be His companion and to follow Him. It is about your sanctification as a believer. The Son is seen here as Man, for only in this way God could unite people as sons with the Son and make them one company, one people and of course with the Son as Author.

Therefore He, the Son, is not ashamed to call us, the sons, “brethren”. That doesn’t mean of course, that we call Him ‘Brother’. It would be inappropriate to speak amicably about Someone Who surely is near to us, but for Whom we have the deepest respect.

V12. Using three new quotations from the Old Testament the writer makes clear how much the Lord Jesus and His own are ‘all from one’. In the three quotations the true Manhood of the Messiah and the close relations He has with His people on that basis, become apparent.

That relation could only be achieved after He had accomplished the work on the cross and by His death and resurrection. Only then He could speak to them about the Father as ‘your Father’ (Jn 20:17). He could only introduce them to the Father when He had fallen into the earth as a grain of wheat and had died, with the result of much fruit (Jn 12:24). That fruit He is presenting to you here: ‘brethren’, ‘sons’, ‘children’. You are included here! In each of these three relations you see an exceptional relation between the Lord Jesus and His own.

The first quotation comes from Psalm 22. This psalm speaks penetratingly of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross as the Bearer of sins. The response of God on this work is also spoken of in that psalm (Psa 22:21b). God answered Him by raising Him from the dead. Through His resurrection the

results of that enormous work has become visible. One of the results is that He proclaims the Name of His Father to those who He calls 'My brethren'.

But it doesn't stop there. This proclamation produces a new result, namely, that He in the midst of His brethren (the church) and together with them sings a song of praise. He Himself starts to sing this song of praise "in the midst of the congregation". His song is the song of gratitude as a response to the fact that God has raised and glorified Him. And as a result of His work you and I may sing with Him. In this way we are with Him in the same position before God, a position that we owe to Him alone. Isn't that great?

Now read Hebrews 2:8-12 again.

Reflection: What do you learn here about the connection between the Lord Jesus and yourself?

Heb 2:13-18 | Be Made Like the Brethren

13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME."

14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

V13. This section starts with a quotation in which the Manhood of the Messiah appears in a wonderful way. True manhood never becomes more apparent than in putting trust in God, no matter what the circumstances may be. It is a quotation from Isaiah (Isa 8:17) who is determined to wait on the Lord persistently and to look forward to Him, while he is in the midst of a nation for which the Lord has hidden His face because of their sins. That trust characterized the Lord Jesus when He was on earth. This is the trust that the recipients of the letter – and you too – may have.

What people were saying, mocking Him, when He hung on the cross, "He trusts in God" (Mt 27:43), was the power of His life unto death. This trust in God is of fundamental importance in a situation in which still nothing appears from the realization of God's plans and in which everything appears to be the opposite. Every opposition Christ faced on His way on earth could not take away His trust in God or even reduce it a little bit. In this He is your and my example.

However, He is not only an example. He also connects us to Himself in this trust that He has in His God. He trusts that He and we, the children, will go through all the difficulties together and that we will arrive in the period of blessing and joy that we are looking for. This too is a quotation from Isaiah (Isa 8:18). What Isaiah has said about himself and about his children the writer applies also to Christ and the remnant. "I and the children"

indicates that Christ has connected Himself as Man to the children that God has given to Him. Here it is about the spiritual children of God in this time. They are connected to Christ.

It is not about children of Christ or children of the Lord Jesus. The Bible never uses such expressions for believers. Here it is about the children of God who by Him are given to the Lord Jesus. Like in the way the children of Isaiah who, also in the meaning of their names, were a testimony to God's faithfulness in the midst of God's people, the believers of nowadays are in the midst of apostate Christianity on earth.

This quotation contains a great encouragement. With a trust that is so typical of Him, He gives aid to all who are given to Him by God. He points at them and says, as it were, to God: 'These are the children You have given Me. I will lead them safely through all difficulties and I will bring them where I am.'

V14. Before God could give them to the Lord Jesus, however, He had to become Man first. And not only that. If the Lord Jesus wanted us as children to be one with Him in His position before God, then it was necessary that He first made Himself one with us in our need. That's why He partook of "blood and flesh". The time before He became Man, He did not share in that, but He had to do that to be able to die. His death was necessary, because man was subjected to death.

Due to the fall of man satan confiscated man and got leverage over him, a power that he exerts through death. The Lord Jesus came to put an end to that. Only death can eliminate death. A beautiful illustration you find in David who killed Goliath with his own sword (1Sam 17:51). It also had to be the death of a man to destroy death for men. The Man Christ did that. In that way the risen Christ gained "the keys of Hades and of Death" (Rev 1:18), which means that He has full authority over them.

V15. Through His triumph over death and by rendering powerless, or disabling, the devil, the Lord Jesus worked an awesome liberation. With liberation there is mention of an enemy who had a total control over you, in such a way that you yourself had no possible way to free yourself. By sowing fear of death, the devil made sure that men remained under his

control. The devil always reigns by fear. Death is “the king of terrors” (Job 18:14). Concerning us, this fear has gone, for Christ has taken away the threat of that. Now death doesn’t scare us anymore.

V16. The Lord Jesus has not come to earth to die for angels. His concern was “the descendant [or: seed] of Abraham”. Literally it means the company to whom this letter is addressed. They are not only physically the seed of Abraham, but they are also and in particular in a spiritual sense his children (Jn 8:33-39). The latter are of course also the believers from the Gentiles (Gal 3:7-9; Rom 4:9-12) and therefore God laid hold on you and saved you. He accepted you and you are His.

V17. To be able to accept you and other countless people, the Lord Jesus “had to be made like His brethren”. That meant that He changed heaven for earth and came to live as Man in the midst of men and partook of their life. That was a tremendous humiliation for Him. And if you imagine that He took the lowest place among men (Phil 2:5-8), He really went through whatever a person could possibly go through. No matter how bad a situation may possibly be, it is not unfamiliar to the Lord Jesus.

In a perfect way He made Himself like the brethren. He has freed everyone who He calls His brethren, from the power of the devil. You saw that in verse 14. However, there were also sins that had to be reconciled. That is said at the end of verse 17.

For both problems there was only one solution: death. To be able to die the Lord Jesus *had to* become Man. Through His death and resurrection He conquered death and him who had control over it, that is the devil, and made atonement for the sins of God’s people. Therefore He could justly be “a merciful and faithful high priest”. He is merciful with a view to the misery, the temptations and the afflictions in which you may find yourself. He sympathizes with you. He is also ‘faithful’. He is that to Himself and to His promises. He is focused on the goal and He will lead you there, right through all the hardships and misery.

In all those things His concern is the “things pertaining to God”. He never does something for you that is apart from God. He sees your life in connec-

tion with God. As High Priest He is busy on your behalf, to help you that you may satisfy God in everything.

First, He had to make atonement on earth as High Priest for the sins of His people. He did that and therefore God can deal with His people and can also be with them on earth. As long as His people are on earth, they need support and encouragement. Therefore the High Priest, when He accomplished His atoning work, is now seated in heaven to continually be the High Priest. To God everything is in order, the sins are reconciled, but there is still a way to go. With a view to that way the Lord Jesus is making efforts, so that God's people will glorify God on that way instead of becoming unfaithful and thus forfeiting the blessing.

V18. No one else can help His people the way He does. Before His death He lived a perfect life, in which He got to know all the afflictions and temptations that can happen to an individual. Whatever suffering you may possibly go through, He has suffered it (Isa 63:9). Therefore He can sympathize with you and give you the help you need. That help pertains to the difficulties encountered by the faithful believer in doing God's will.

There is no believer who manages to achieve the final goal by his own strength. You need help, support, compassion, and the intercession of Someone Who knows the dangers of the journey and Who has overcome. It had to be Someone Who has persevered in the toughest afflictions and thus has suffered and therefore is able to sympathize with others. That Someone is the Lord Jesus.

During His life on earth He experienced all weaknesses – not: sins, for He only dealt with them on the cross and only in the three hours of darkness (1Pet 2:24) – of being Man. He knows what it is to be a helpless baby and to be a child growing up. He knows what it is to be an adolescent and to be an adult. He knows what it is to be hungry and thirsty and to be tired and sad. He knows what it is not to be understood, to be despised, to be rejected, to be neglected and to be blasphemed. He knows what it is to suffer hardships and to die. He has gone through everything to be able to be your High Priest in heaven now.

The temptations of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness are a beautiful example in this. He was tempted in earthly matters, in worldly matters and in religious matters (Lk 4:1-12). He responded to all temptations, that the devil was trying on Him, with God's Word. The Lord Jesus is engaged as High Priest in heaven in making you mindful with God's Word when you have to cope with temptations from the devil. If you quote God's Word, the devil will flee.

Now read Hebrews 2:13-18 again.

Reflection: What has the Lord Jesus ever done to be High Priest? In which things is He High Priest for you?

Hebrews 3

Heb 3:1-6 | Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest

1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; 2 He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. 3 For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. 5 Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; 6 but Christ [was faithful] as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

V1. With the first word “therefore”, the writer of the letter makes a strong connection between the two previous chapters and what is following. In the chapters 1 and 2 he magnificently presented the glories of the Lord Jesus to the readers including you. Because He is so tremendously exalted and yet also so near, *therefore* you must keep looking to Him. In that way you will be able to keep on going on the path of faith, right through all temptations and afflictions. You will not be discouraged if it gets tough, for you keep focusing on Him Who is far beyond everything and Who leads and helps you.

Look at how you are addressed here. You hear that well, “holy brethren”. Do you remember that the Lord Jesus is not ashamed to call the faithful believers ‘brethren’ (Heb 2:11b)? You are even addressed as a “holy” brother. You are one of those whom the Lord Jesus has sanctified and whom He has connected to Himself (Heb 2:11a).

And still it doesn’t stop there, for you are also one of the “partakers of a heavenly calling”. Israel had an earthly calling and hope. But together with these Jewish Christians you partake of a new privilege. It is about something you get by the calling of Christ from heaven. That’s why this privilege is not limited to those who are members of God’s earthly people by natural birth, but it applies to everyone who is connected to the Lord

Jesus by faith. It is a calling from heaven, that is the origin, where this calling comes from, and it is a calling to heavenly glory, that is the purpose of the calling, that's where the journey goes to (cf. Phil 3:14; 2Tim 1:9).

With regard to the earth it means: loss of earthly blessings together with the endurance of rejection, suffering and shame. The letter shows this from beginning to end. But that is no deterioration. You and everyone who keeps focusing his eyes on the Lord Jesus like that, get something better instead. It is like the many believers in the Old Testament, who knew that they would not partake of the millennial kingdom during their life, but did not mourn about it. They indeed learnt to look forward to a better country and that is their heavenly country.

To be able to persevere it is necessary that you focus all your attention on "Jesus". This Name opens a world of rejection on the one hand and a world of glory on the other hand. Every time when the name 'Jesus' appears in the Bible without an addition like 'Lord' or 'Christ', God wants to fix our thoughts on two aspects. On the one hand on Him like He once was as a humble Man on earth and Who was rejected by people. On the other hand God shows us that it was just that Man Whom He glorified with Him in heaven and that it is exactly in that Name that every knee shall bow (Phil 2:10).

To Him you already testified, because you already bowed your knees for Him. You confess Him to the people around you. But what you confess in the world, you first had to learn to see in the sanctuary. Therefore this calling "consider ... Jesus". You see Him as the One Who came from God to His people as "Apostle" to reveal God's thoughts to them. You also see Him as "High Priest", that is as the One Who went to God on behalf of God's people to represent them to God. As 'Apostle' He is the true Moses and as 'High Priest' He is the true Aaron.

V2. After describing His functions the writer emphasizes the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus. How important is faithfulness! What is the advantage if someone has the highest and most powerful function, but is not faithful in practicing it? The Lord Jesus *is* faithful. He is faithful to God, Who appointed Him as Apostle and High Priest "in all His house". 'His house'

may remind you of the tabernacle or maybe also of 'the house of Israel', with which God's people is meant (Heb 8:8).

V3-4. God also could testify of Moses that he was faithful in God's house (Num 12:7). Moses might have resembled Christ concerning his faithfulness, yet Christ far surpasses Moses, as He also far surpassed the angels in the previous chapters. Moses was not the builder of the house, not of the tabernacle, nor of Israel. Moses was not above the house, he was part of it, while Christ is the Builder of it. The glory of the Builder is reflected in the house.

The writer is easy to understand. He says: 'If you see a house, you know that there is a builder.' The Builder is God the Son. He is the Builder of the universe, the Builder of the tabernacle, of Israel and of the church. As Builder He is the source of all His buildings. He has invented and executed them (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2) and He dwells in them. Christ goes beyond all things. Moses was only connected to the house of Israel, but the Lord Jesus is connected to all things, without limit.

V5. Here the writer refers again to the faithfulness of Moses in all God's house. God designed this house and Moses executed God's design (Heb 8:5; Exo 25:9,40). He was God's minister in His house and therefore part of the house. His ministry consisted of passing on to the people what God spoke to him in the tabernacle (Exo 25:21-22).

V6. And again the comparison is made between Christ and Moses. In verse 2 the comparison indicates that there is an accordance between Christ and Moses regarding faithfulness. Regarding the house of God, there appears to be a clear difference. Moses was a minister, indeed an honored minister, *in* the house, but Christ is Son *over* the house, which is even *His* house.

And then the writer clarifies almost unexpectedly the meaning of the house of the Son. Until now, when you think of the house of God, you have always thought of the tabernacle. And rightly so. However, now it appears that still something else is meant by the house, for you read "whose house we are". That means that the believers are the house of the Son.

By itself that is not a new thought. Paul has already used earlier the picture of the house in his metaphor of the church to indicate certain aspects of the church of God (1Cor 3:16; Eph 2:21; 1Pet 2:5; 1Tim 3:15). The house as

a picture of the church puts the emphasis on the dwelling of God in the church and it emphasizes that the order which is in the house, is His order.

In the letter to the Hebrews God's people are not really seen as the church, but as a company of pilgrims that is on their way to the promised blessing. This company is also seen as a people of priests. The house of God has to do with the latter. The house of God is a house in which priestly service happens. In it Christ exercises His priestly service and the believers do that in imitation of Him. In the Old Testament you see that Aaron was in charge of the priestly family of the service that was exercised in God's house, the tabernacle. The believers are now that priestly family (1Pet 2:5) of which the true Aaron is in charge, the Lord Jesus, as Son over His house.

The word "if" that now follows, may possibly give the impression that what is previously said, suddenly is made doubtful. What does it mean? On the one hand you know for sure that as a believer you belong to the house of the Son. On the other hand it seems like because of the word 'if' a condition is connected to it. You are a member of the church, but you should persevere till the end, otherwise you will apostatize. That's what it says, isn't it? Is that really what is meant?

That is really *not* what is meant. He who has ever become a child of God by conversion and faith, is forever a child of God (Jn 10:28-29). This is the word of the Lord Jesus and is therefore above every doubt. There is no such thing as apostacy of saints. He who apostatizes proves that he has never been a child of God. The word 'if' has to do with the responsibility each confessor has. You are a confessor too, for you confess the Lord Jesus as your Lord. The same goes for me.

The course of time makes clear whether someone is really a Christian or whether he is a Christian only by name. The pseudo Christian sooner or later gives up, but the true believer perseveres till the end. That is not a matter of sowing doubt, but the addressing each individual on his confession. You are to hold fast the confidence and the boast of the hope. If you do not hold fast the confidence, you will end up like the Israelites in the wilderness, who by unbelief never reached the promised land. This is explained in the next verses.

If your confession is real, you will hold fast, for you will ask God to give you the strength to be able to. You will then hold fast the confidence to testify of Someone Whom you are only able to see by faith. You will also hold fast the boasting of your hope in a future in which He really will be seen, but then in power and majesty. If you hold fast your “confidence and the boast of our hope”, you will surely be able to resist each temptation to return to your former life.

Now read Hebrews 3:1-6 again.

Reflection: How is the Lord Jesus presented in this portion and why?

Heb 3:7-13 | Encourage One Another Day After Day

7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, 8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, 9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED [Me] BY TESTING [Me], AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. 10 "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; 11 AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'" 12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is [still] called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

V7. Also this section begins with "therefore" (verse 1) and that's why it also connects to what is said in the previous verses. You will see that the writer through examples from the Old Testament shows how important it is to hold fast to what he mentioned in the second part of verse 6. Those examples are from the journey of Israel through the wilderness.

God's earthly people had to go through the wilderness to the promised land to be able to enjoy the rest of God and be with Him. That wilderness journey is a picture of the journey of God's heavenly people through the world with the goal the glory with the Lord Jesus. To that journey of faith all kinds of dangers are connected, through which the trueness of faith is tested. This section begins with chapter 3:7 and continues till chapter 4:13. It can be divided into three subsections:

1. the apostates will not enter the rest (Hebrews 3:7-4:2);
2. the believers will enter the true rest (Hebrews 4:3-10);
3. the testing power of God's Word (Hebrews 4:11-13).

After 'therefore' a quotation of the Holy Spirit from Psalm 95 is quoted (Psa 95:7b-11) and is applied by a "today" to now. In Psalm 95 it is a "today" to Israel, but until the end, which is until the coming of the Lord Jesus, God repeats this word in His love. And what is important 'today'? Listening

to His voice. Whenever you read or hear this, it is always 'today' and it is always the moment to listen to God's voice.

The remedy and the protection against all evil is the Word of God. It may be the case that only a few hear it, nevertheless it still sounds to each individual among the Hebrews who has ears to hear. Hearing the voice of the Son of God is characteristic for the sheep (Jn 10:27). All blessing depends on that.

V8. The appeal is not to harden the heart. He who hardens his heart, is unreachable for God's voice and will surely perish on the journey to the blessing presented. The writer clarifies his urgent appeal by an example to listen to God's voice and not to harden the heart. He points out to the readers, including you, an event from Israel's journey through the wilderness. It is about two events, but reflecting the same bad behavior of the Israelites.

Those events you find in Exodus 17, right after they were brought out of Egypt (Exo 17:1-7), and in Numbers 20 at the end of the journey through the wilderness (Num 20:2-13). They took place at Massah and Meribah. The writer doesn't mention these names literally, but mentions their meaning. Meribah means 'protest', 'fight', 'quarrel', 'dissatisfaction'. You recognize 'provocation' in it. Massah means 'trial' or 'temptation'.

Their provocation began with their dissatisfaction about having no water to drink. They concluded from that, that God did not seek their happiness, but that He only sought the bad for them. Isn't that a warning for you and for me? How do we react when we lack for something that we find necessary? Do we find this a reason to get dissatisfied? Isn't there then also a great danger that we will start to tempt God by becoming rebellious and by challenging Him to prove that He is also there for you and me?

V9. The Holy Spirit shows us that the conduct of Israel was not occasional, but that this conduct characterized the people of Israel during the whole wilderness journey. Moreover God showed them for forty years that He was there for them (Deu 4:32-35). He liberated them, He guided them and took care of them and yet they went straight against Him (cf. Deu 6:16;

9:22; 33:8). The biggest mistake you can make is thinking that you are better than they. Therefore it is really important that you take this warning to heart.

V10. Now the people of Israel answered in this way to all of God's care for them, it is no wonder that God became angry at this generation. God also indicates what the problem was: going astray in their sinful heart. Because their heart always went astray from God they did not understand anything about His ways, which means His actions both in blessing and in judgment.

Moses did know God's ways, for God revealed them to Moses (Psa 103:7), because he feared and loved Him. For knowing God's ways it is necessary to give Him your heart. That's what He asks of you (Pro 23:26). If you give Him your heart you put your whole life in His hands, so that He can direct it. In this way you walk in His way which ends in glory.

V11. If you do not fix your heart on Him but go astray, you will never enter God's rest. It is impossible that God will allow a person to enter His rest, who goes astray in the way the writer is telling here about Israel (Num 14:21-23). He swears that He will never allow that. "My rest" is God's rest. It is the rest that He will have when He dwells in the midst of His people. That is the promised land, where the people will live in peace and in security, without any fear of enemies. This rest will only be in the millennial kingdom of peace of the Messiah, the great Son of David.

V12. By using the words "take care, brethren" the writer now applies the quotation to the readers. What had happened to those who once left Egypt can happen to some of them too. The writer has a tender care for each of his readers. He addresses all of them as 'brethren', which means that he considers them true believers. However, he also appeals to their confession, i.e. as being responsible for their deeds.

There is a possibility that in any of them there is "an evil, unbelieving heart", a heart that doesn't trust in God. The writer does not presume that in all of them there is an evil, unbelieving heart. He says: "In any one of you." By putting it that way they should all know that they are all ad-

dressed. Every person will come to self-examination and ask: "Surely not I, Lord?" (Mt 26:21-22).

Only an unbeliever has an evil, unbelieving heart. If such a person doesn't truly convert to God, he will surely "fall away from the living God". Such a person appears to have never been a believer. Through the test of faith he is exposed. The true believer perseveres, despite hardships. He knows that he has no power in himself to persevere, but that God has all power.

The pseudo believer will leave under the pressure of the circumstances. He has no trust in God, for he has no life of God, because he never went to Him with true repentance of his sins. Still he pretended that and he joined a Christian company. However, when the moment of truth comes, he falls away from the living God.

Falling away is rebelling against God. A person does that if he turns his back on God when the adversities get that great that he cannot fight against them and therefore blames God for that. The root of evil is unbelief and the core of unbelief is the lack of trust that all circumstances are in God's hand, that He never tests beyond what someone is able and that He finally will surely make a way through all difficulties. 'Falling away from the living God' happens if a person goes back to a dead and outward religion, as the temple service had become, after having confessed the true service of the God of Christendom. Beside and apart from Him there is no life.

V13. After the appeal to examine themselves the writer points out that they also should seek one another's interest. They have to encourage one another. That is necessary because the danger is lurking that unbelief creeps into one's heart because he gets trapped in "the deceitfulness of sin".

Sin always deceives. It always looks attractive, for you wouldn't take the bait otherwise. But once you have committed sin, you feel the bitterness of it. If you do not immediately repent by confessing your sin and forsaking it, sin will harden you. Let us not take this lightly and let us encourage one another "day after day". That means that it should be habitual to encourage each other. This also implies that we as believers should have daily contact with one another.

Unfortunately, regarding that, individualism has gained a lot of ground among believers. Each individual is occupied with his own matters and having contact with each other as believers falls by the wayside. Therefore it doesn't come as a surprise that many get astray from faith, though still hopefully without them falling away from the living God. It is important to give attention and care to one another's souls and to seek one another's spiritual well-being. We ought not to leave this care to some 'clergyman'. It is a command to each Christian to do that to another and which ought to happen 'today', for tomorrow may be too late. After 'today' the eternal judgment follows.

He who doesn't let himself be warned, will leave the way of the shame of Christ and will turn back to the nice, but deceiving rituals of a tangible religion with earthly benefits. Returning to that means returning to a religion without forgiveness, without hope and even without the possibility of conversion. Therefore it is that important to encourage one another day after day.

Now read Hebrews 3:7-13 again.

Reflection: By which warnings are you challenged here and in which way could you warn others?

Heb 3:14-19 | Hold Fast the Assurance Firm Until the End

14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, 15 while it is said, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME." 16 For who provoked [Him] when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt [led] by Moses? 17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 [So] we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

It is a good thing to repeat that in this letter everyone is addressed who confesses to belong to God's people. In the first place it is about believing Hebrews, Jews who came to faith in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, given by God. They are familiar with the prophecies of the Old Testament. They learnt from that about the coming of the Messiah. When the Lord Jesus came, they believed in Him as the Fulfiller of all God's promises to His earthly people of which they were part. But the Lord Jesus was rejected. By that their faith was severely put to the test. They do not see the Lord Jesus, but to faith He certainly is there, namely in heaven.

They found themselves on earth. Instead of finding themselves in the millennial kingdom of peace, that was to start with the coming of the Messiah, they are mocked and persecuted by their unbelieving fellow countrymen. They had to learn that the fulfillment of the promises was postponed. That fulfillment is sure, only there is still a way of faith to go before it happens.

Here you see the parallel with the wilderness journey that the people of Israel made from Egypt to Canaan. You travel with God's people through the world on the way to the promised blessing of rest. In this letter the world is pictured as a wilderness, the territory of trials of faith, accompanied by temptations through worldly and religious seductions.

V14. You are one of the "partakers of Christ". The writer sees himself as one of them. He speaks about "we". Then that conditional "if" appears again (verse 6), through which it seems that it is still not sure and that it will only be sure if you have made a certain performance. That performance is here: "Hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."

Again I want to make it clear that it is different from making a performance. You ought to discern again two things clearly. On the one side, a person who once has become a child of God through conversion and faith, remains a child of God for ever. If a person is a child of God, his life must and will show this. Therefore on the other side it becomes clear through trials whether someone is really a child of God. On the one side each believer is a companion of Christ, but on the other side, not everyone who outwardly belongs to God's people is a believer. The latter will be evidenced by perseverance.

Although trueness is assumed, there is room left that the confession is only a lip confession, with no life from God present. Therefore hardships are the test whether there is real faith with the confessor. To a true believer hardships are not hindrances for faith, but on the contrary it is a motivation to show faith. Such a person has started the journey of faith with assurance and he will continue with assurance. A lack of assurance in God causes a person to doubt his salvation. Then the awareness of His love, His power or His concern for us is not there anymore. The assurance has disappeared. The hope and the appreciation for intangible things are diminishing, while the appreciation for tangible things is increasing.

The exhortations are meant to keep you in the assurance you have and to persevere in that. They are not meant to stop fear and doubt. The letter is not addressed to doubting Christians or people who still do not have total assurance in God.

I again went into details here because I know that young Christian believers, and even older Christian believers also, may struggle with these things. I hope that it has also helped you to understand the writer's arguments better.

V15. The writer repeats (verses 7-8) the essence of the quotation from Psalm 95 to make the reader aware of the power of it. The danger the Hebrew confessors were exposed to – and to which we are exposed in Christendom –, was the same as that of their ancestors when they were in the wilderness on their way to the promised land. To be able to face this danger it is a crucial thing to listen to God's voice. You hear His voice if you read His Word and in the meetings where His Word is preached. By

subsequently doing His will you will be kept from a hardened heart and from provoking God.

V16. To emphasize his exhortation more, the writer asks three questions in verses 16-18. In these three questions he summarizes in three great events from the past the history of the people of Israel. The first question is about the departure from Egypt, the second question refers to the wilderness journey, the third question regards the entry into the promised land. He himself replies to these questions in the form of questions in which the answer is embedded. By teaching in an interrogative sentence he forces his readers to think. It is not the issue to rationally give a good answer; the point is that the question moves the heart.

The first question shows that a whole nation can be affected by the sin of unbelief. So not only an individual was involved. This is the embarrassing answer of a whole nation to the mercy of the Lord toward Israel. "All" refers to those who were guided by Moses from Egypt, which means six hundred thousand men together with their households (Num 1:46).

The gravity of sin is that they became rebellious after they heard God's voice. That makes them much more responsible than many who live in sin without having heard anything about God and Christ. Therefore the idolatry that is committed by Christians in worshiping Mary and Peter and angels is much worse than the worship of idols as Zeus or Venus by pagans.

V17. The first question deals with the attitude of the people toward God. The second question shows the reaction of God to the sin of the people. It was not only that the whole nation was sinning against God, but they did that all the time for forty years. Therefore God was angry with them the whole time, which was the reason that they who had sinned didn't reach the promised land. Their "bodies fell in the wilderness". God didn't punish them because of only one mistake, but because of their persistent rebellion during the time when His care for them was overwhelmingly evident.

V18. The third question shows that they hardened their heart to the utmost. Even when they were standing at the border of the land, they did not enter the land because of their disobedience. Disobedience is unacceptable to God. He abhors and judges that. He swore because of this evil "that they

would not enter His rest". God cannot possibly connect Himself to disobedience in any way. To bring these disobedient or unbelieving people into His rest would be in contrast with His Being. His rest is only for those who do rest in Him and in His will.

V19. You can see this verse as a conclusion. That conclusion is that their unbelief is the cause of their perishing and of not being able to enter. Unbelief is the lack of trust in God being able to bring them there and that He wanted to bless them. They didn't know God. He was acting strangely in their eyes. Still God had spoken to them and had revealed them His will and His way. However, when the heart desires other things than only honoring God by trusting Him, which means to believe Him, the blessing will not be obtained.

It is not written that they were stopped by God, but that their own unbelief made it impossible for them to enter. They were not able to do that. The inevitable result of unbelief is that it does not take into possession what has been reserved for faith. Unbelief excludes trust. Unbelief robbed the wilderness generation from the rest they were supposed to expect, after they went out of Egypt.

The character of unbelief is the attitude of neglecting or forgetting God, acting as if He doesn't exist, while the everlasting Present One is full of mercy. Unbelief makes God a liar instead of Someone Who speaks the truth in what He promises. Unbelief makes God Someone Who is too weak to fulfill His promises. Unbelief means that He is changeable and that He reconsiders His promises and that He is therefore not the Unchangeable One. Unbelief doubts His faithfulness to the expectations that He raises through His promises.

I hope that unbelief will not get a chance to settle in your heart. I rather hope that you are like Caleb and Joshua (Num 14:6-9). Opposite the unbelief of their ten fellow spies and the unbelief of the whole nation, they honored God by keeping His Word as the absolute truth and His power as infinite, His counsel as unchangeable and His faithfulness as that great that He surely fulfills the expectations raised by Himself.

Now read Hebrews 3:14-19 again.

Reflection: What makes you confident that you will enter God's rest?

Hebrews 4

Heb 4:1-11 | The Rest of God

1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh [day]: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; 5 and again in this [passage], "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." 6 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through [following] the same example of disobedience.

V1. This chapter begins with a strange call, at least at first glance, to "fear". But 'fear' here doesn't mean that you should continually live in fear and doubt whether you will be saved after all perseverance. To fear does not mean: to be afraid of God, but: to be afraid of yourself, of your own weakness and of your own wicked and sinful heart.

If you fear God you will take to heart the warnings that are made to Israel, that you will not follow them in their ways of unbelief. However, if you ignore those warnings and think self-confidently that you will achieve the final goal in your own strength, it means that you have no trust in God and you live independently of Him. In that case you may possibly imagine that the promise to enter God's rest also applies to you, though reality will be

that you will come short of it. To have come short of it means to perish in the wilderness and not reaching the rest. Though, if you completely trust in God for entering God's rest, you will undoubtedly enter His rest at last. Distrust in yourself and trust in God are proof that you have new life.

V2. You received that new life when you accepted the "good news" that was preached to you. The same goes for the readers of the letter. The good news, the literal meaning of the word gospel, was preached to them by the Son of God (Heb 1:1; 2:3).

Also to the people of Israel the good news was once brought. It may remind you of two events. The one is the good news of their deliverance from Egypt. The other is that they were going to enter Canaan. Therein is an application for you. The good news means to you that you were delivered from the power of sin and that you entered the heavenly blessings.

Whatever the preaching of that good news consisted of, if it were not united by faith the hearers it would not profit them.

V3. To partake of the contents of the good news, faith is essential. That applies to everyone who hears. Only then there is an entry into the rest. The emphasis is that only those who believe will enter the rest. Like Joshua and Caleb we, who have believed, shall enter the rest. They who do not believe now, will not enter it later, just as surely as those who did not believe did not enter then.

The rest is nothing new in itself. The rest that you will enter, exists from the beginning. The first time rest is spoken about in the Bible is in connection with the day of God's rest on the seventh day that followed the six days of creation. In that rest God purposed man to partake of, but sin disturbed that rest. Therefore a new work from God was necessary (Jn 5:17) to be able to give and to enjoy a new rest.

God cannot rest where sin is present. Only when the curse has been taken away from creation He will be able to rest again in His works. When it is written that God rested from all His works it doesn't mean, of course, that God was tired and needed rest. The rest of God has to do with His innermost being. It is the rest of the inner satisfaction with which He can look at His works.

V4. The writer supports his argument with a quotation from Genesis 2. God had worked in His creation and had rested from His work when He had completed it (Gen 2:2). In that way He proved from the foundation of the world that He had a rest. As it is said, God's rest came to an end through the fall of man. But the Son of God has provided a new rest. God is resting in the work that His Son accomplished on the cross. In that work there is also rest to be found for all who are weighed down by the burden of their sins (Mt 11:28). Through that work God can rest in His love, which will soon be with respect to all creation (Zep 3:17).

V5. In this verse the writer once again quotes Psalm 95 (Psa 95:11). His whole argument is focused on making his readers fully aware of the fact that there is a rest of God and that God desires to have people partaking of this rest. He also shows clearly that man did not enter God's rest because he acted in unbelief.

V6. He reminds them that the rest is still accessible, but also reminds them that everyone who are disobedient will never enter it. As a kind of summary he poses that some – those who believe – will enter the rest. He also poses that those to whom the good news was preached during the wilderness journey, did not believe God and that they disobeyed His commandment, which was the cause they did not enter this rest.

V7. However, this is not the last word. God is still busy in His mercy to lead His people to partake of His rest. Therefore He again fixed a certain day, which He does in the time of David. That is "so long a time" after the events of the wilderness journey of forty years.

The writer again quotes Psalm 95 (Psa 95:7-8) with in it the call to Israel to convert to the Lord with a view to the coming of Christ to earth to lead the people into the rest. "In David", the man after His heart, He offered the people a new opportunity to receive the fulfillment of His promises. But even then the promised rest did not come. Not even under Solomon, who was a man of rest (1Chr 22:9).

V8. God would not have spoken about another day "through David" if Joshua had brought the people into the rest when he captured the land. Their hearts were not changed by living in that land. They were still unbe-

lieving and disobeying like they were in the wilderness. All the blessings in that land only made it all the more clear how little they valued God's provisions.

V9. All of this means that the rest for the people of God that is showed by the Sabbath, still is to come. It also means that we should not expect the rest here and now and we should even less expect that we would have already reached it. The writer doesn't say where the rest is. In that way he leaves room for a rest in heaven for a heavenly people and a rest on earth for an earthly people. Not Moses, not Joshua, not David and not even Solomon, but the Lord Jesus will realize and preserve the true rest. It is a rest "for the people of God".

That rest of God is for all the fallen asleep believers from the Old Testament and the New Testament in heaven. That is not the Father's house, but heaven as that will extend over a cleansed earth. It is the situation of the millennial kingdom of peace, when Christ will be Head over all things that are in heaven and on earth (Eph 1:10). The Lord Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk 2:28). The Sabbath is not a picture of the everlasting rest, but of the rest of the millennial kingdom of peace. The rest of the millennial kingdom is still to come both for the heavenly people of God, the church, and God's earthly people, Israel.

V10. There is also a rest from your works and that is when your life of faith on earth has come to an end. That rest is the portion of all those who have persevered in faith and have not fallen and perished because of unbelief. He who dies in faith, enters into the rest of God and rests from his works. This is compared with the rest that God had after His works. Those works are of course good. Therefore the works here are the works of the believer. Those are the works that were done by faith and not works for earning salvation (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 4:5). From those works the believer rests when he enters into the rest of God when he has come to the end of his pilgrim's journey.

V11. In order to reach the rest of God you have to persevere. A present, apparent rest is not the true rest. The faith of the Hebrews was weakened by the continual trials, through which the coming rest faded more and more. Therefore they were exposed to the danger of changing the life of faith for

enjoying a rest that is an apparent rest. Therefore the writer appeals to be diligent to enter the promised rest, which is still to come.

“To be diligent” means resisting the temptation to give up under the pressure of circumstances of whatever nature. The diligence of the believer implies a continual examination of himself and of the circumstances. As a perfect touchstone for this, you are given the Word of God (verse 12). On that basis you can examine if there are wrong thoughts or considerations in the heart.

Love can never rest where sin rules and where sorrow and misery are seen all over. That goes for God and for the believer. The time will come when God wipes all the tears from the eyes. Then you are in His rest.

Now read Hebrews 4:1-11 again.

Reflection: When will you enter the rest of God?

Heb 4:12-16 | Three 'Aids'

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as [we are, yet] without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

In this section the Holy Spirit presents to you three 'aids', which will enormously support you and which are also absolutely essential for you on your way to the rest. These supporting aids are:

1. the Word (verses 12-13);
2. the Lord Jesus as High Priest (verses 14-15);
3. the throne of grace (verse 16). Seek your help only there and there alone to conquer all adversaries (Psa 60:11).

1. The Word watches over your inward and judges sin.
2. The High Priest watches over you regarding the circumstances you are in, sympathizes and helps you.
3. To the throne of grace you may always go as boldly as to the Lord Jesus.

You see, everything is provided for. This is how God is to His people.

V12. We first look at the Word. In what you read about the Word three features of God are presented: life, power and omniscience. Beware of making the mistake to criticize the Word, for the consequences are fatal. You are not the one to judge the Word, but the Word judges you. In fact you do not know your own heart, but God surely knows it (Jer 17:9-10a). Through the Word you learn to know your own heart. When you read the Word, sin and unbelief become apparent. If you are sincere in your

heart, this judgment about the effects on the heart has a great value (Psa 139:23-24).

The “word of God is living” because this Word is the Word of the living God. He gave to Israel ‘living oracles [or: words]’ (Acts 7:38). The Word is also “active”. It is not like the empty words of people, without content. It ‘performs its works in you who believe’ (1Thes 2:13), but it also accuses (Jn 5:45). Furthermore, it is “sharper than any two-edged sword” (Rev 1:16; Eph 6:17). When used, it is destructive, it cuts away that which should not be there, it kills what should not remain alive.

It is not only destructive, it is also discerning. In that way it is “piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit” which means that the Word discerns what comes from the soul and what comes from the spirit. The ‘soul’ rather indicates feelings and desires, the ‘spirit’ indicates more the hidden considerations and belief or unbelief. Soul and spirit are, so to say, the two parts of the non-material nature of man.

The Word also unveils the distinction between “joints” and “marrow”, whereby ‘joints’ indicates more the outward actions and the ‘marrow’ the inward power of those actions. The sinfulness of the human heart shows itself by the members of the body that are functioning through ‘joints’ and ‘marrow’.

Soul and spirit on the one hand and joints and marrow on the other hand present the total man. In this way the writer shows that no single aspect of the total man escapes from the working of the Word of God.

Finally it is said of the Word that it is “able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (cf. 1Chr 28:9). Here we have come to the most inner part of man, the center from where soul and spirit and joints and marrow are directed in their workings. What becomes visible in life emerges from the heart. Therefore you should watch over your heart above everything that you should watch over (Pro 4:23). And for that, the Word of God has been given to you. So use it!

V13. In this verse the writer suddenly moves from the Word of God to God Himself. What the Word does, God does. This connection between the Word that is addressed to you and God Himself is remarkable. The Word

comes from God. It is as it were His eye that is focused on your conscience and that brings you into His presence. God exposes everything in you.

He does not do that for Himself, for He does not need it. There are no secret things for Him that He should expose. All things are open and laid bare to His eyes. But He wants to make you aware that you are dealing with Him. You are going your way under the all-seeing eye of the living God. If you are aware of that, you will, in self-judgment, put away everything that could possibly hinder you to persevere in the way of faith.

V14. Then the writer comes back to his main subject: the High Priest in the heavens (Heb 2:17; 3:1). The ministry of the Lord Jesus as High Priest is diverse. Therein the grace of God is revealed magnificently. Consider just the connection with the two previous verses about what the Word does. If the Word exposes in you whatever can go wrong, don't you see your weakness and incapability to reach the final goal by your own strength?

Therefore it is a great blessing that you have a great High Priest and a throne of grace. The Lord Jesus exercises His high priesthood in heaven, where God is, to help you from there in accordance to Whom God is. Christ not only went *into* heaven, but He passed *through* the heavens. He did not stay in the first or second heaven, but He entered the third and highest heaven.

He is not only High Priest, He also is the Son of God. To be able to become High Priest the Lord Jesus has gone a long way. He has become Man and has suffered on earth. He also accomplished the work of propitiation. Then He passed through the heavens to take His place on the throne of grace. He is also appointed by God as Son over His house and He now can also sympathize with us in our weaknesses. Without being the Son of God He couldn't be our High Priest. However, now He is able to comfort us as Man, while He, with the full knowledge of God as Son, draws near to God for us.

Therefore it is justified that He is called here the 'great High Priest'. That's something that was never said of any high priest in the Old Testament. Again and again the writer points to the greatness of the Lord Jesus. Here He is great in His compassion for us. He is "Jesus the Son of God". 'Jesus',

the humiliated Man on earth in all our afflictions, Who as 'the Son of God' can sympathize with all His own.

Now He has been presented like that, the writer exhorts again to hold fast the confession, which is hold on to Him Whom you confess. You are on the way to Him and you may thereby know that He helps you.

V15. And Who is He Who helps you? He is Someone Who knows exactly whatever you're going through and Who understands you thoroughly because He Himself also has gone through all of that. You can count on His sympathizing with you.

To sympathize with another person it is not necessary that you feel at the same time what the other person feels. When you suffer pain you cannot think of the pain of someone else. Though to share in suffering you ought to have a nature that enables you to be aware of what the pain of the other person is.

This is how Jesus exerts His high priesthood. In every way He is beyond the reach of pain and affliction, but He is Man and He not only has the nature of man who used to suffer pain, but He underwent afflictions that a believer has to endure in a more than perfect way than any of us ever endures.

He was tempted in all things as you are, "[yet] without sin". That doesn't mean 'without sinning', but it means that He absolutely had no part in sin. He knew no sin (2Cor 5:21); in Him there is no sin (1Jn 3:5). Satan had nothing in Him (Jn 14:30) – neither did God find anything in Him (Psa 17:3) – whatever could be a lead to sin.

His suffering was not caused by sin (as it could be the case with us) and it neither led Him to sin. But because He was tempted, He is able to fully sympathize with you. He feels what you feel and therefore He is able to understand and help you. He cannot sympathize with your sins. If you have sinned, He is the Advocate with the Father (1Jn 2:1). Infirmities are no sins. Paul boasted in his infirmities (2Cor 12:9-10), but never in his sins.

V16. When the writer has presented the glory of the great High Priest to you like that, it could only cause the result that your heart is full of confidence to draw near "to the throne of grace". You may say that to yourself:

'I can draw near with confidence, because I can freely look God in the eyes because my sins are taken away and also because the High Priest, Who can sympathize with my infirmities, is there.'

'The throne of grace' reminds us of the ark in the tabernacle. God dwelled between the cherubim on the mercy seat of the ark. That throne was a judgment throne, but through the offering that the judgment had borne, the blood was sprinkled on the ark. Therefore the judgment throne has now changed into a throne of grace. To us Christ became the offering and through His blood we are able to come to the throne of grace. Christ Himself was set forth by God as propitiation, or a throne of grace, (Rom 3:25). Therefore you may come to God without any hesitation. This you do when you focus directly from your heart on God and tell Him everything that is in it.

Christ represents you there and therefore God is well pleased with you. You take refuge at the throne of grace because you are aware that you will fail if God doesn't help you. Then you receive "mercy", that is God's sympathy in your circumstances, you are made aware again of His mercy and protection. You also find "grace", you are made aware again that you stand in grace before God (Rom 5:2).

This awareness is your "help in time of need", at the crucial moment, the moment that the hardships nearly become too much for you. You suddenly see again that God is greater than the hardships and that the Lord Jesus is always beside you in times of difficulties.

Now read Hebrews 4:12-16 again.

Reflection: Just reconsider the means that God has provided you with and thank Him for them. Ask Him to help you to use them extensively.

Hebrews 5

Heb 5:1-7 | Aaron and Christ as High Priest

1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer [sacrifices] for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but [receives it] when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; 6 just as He says also in another [passage], "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." 7 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.

V1. The writer is now going to explain more about the person of the high priest. His readers were familiar with this person. They knew him well from the Old Testament and also from practice before they believed in the Lord Jesus. First he points at the high priesthood as how that functioned among God's earthly people and had in Aaron its first representative. Then he compares the high priesthood of the Lord Jesus with that of Aaron to show the eminence above that of Aaron.

He already touched on the high priesthood of the Lord Jesus in the chapters 2, 3 and 4 (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15), only now he explains it in detail. This teaching goes on till chapter 10. For the Jewish Christians, who continually had a tendency to return to the old traditions, this teaching was of great importance. It is also important for professing Christianity, where many things are present that remind us of Judaism.

The high priest in Israel was characterized by some things. In particular he was someone from among the people, "from among men", a man taken from among men. Therefore it was necessary that Christ *became* Man,

although you ought not to forget that He is much more than that, for He is the unique, eternal Son of God.

Furthermore, the service of the high priest relates to people. He is “appointed on behalf of men”. Men are the object of his service and he makes efforts on their behalf. However, they are not a goal in themselves. In the service of the high priest it is about “things pertaining to God”. It is about His interests and His honor and about a cleansed nation that is consecrated to Him and worships and serves Him.

In the Old Testament that service is presented explicitly by the offering of “both gifts and sacrifices for sins” (cf. Heb 8:3; 9:9). Regarding ‘gifts’ you may think of all possible offerings and regarding ‘sacrifices’ you may think especially of bloody offerings. Sins cause separation between God and His people. When offerings were brought for the sins, God could be with His people again. It was the task of the high priest to restore the connection between God and the people.

V2. Because Aaron, as human high priest, was a sinner himself, he could “deal gently” with others. Christ could never deal gently with sins, for that’s what He died for. The gently dealing of the human high priest is something in the sense of ‘expressing moderate feelings’. It indicates an infirm and incomplete sympathy. He dealt gently “with the ignorant and misguided”. These are sinners, but not sinners who live in conscious rebellion against God. For the latter there is no offering possible (Heb 10:26-29).

V3. Because Aaron was a human high priest, he also had to bring offerings for himself. That applied both to Aaron and to his successors in the next centuries up to Christ. He indeed performed for the people with God, but at the same time he was one of them, also in their sinfulness. The weakness that is meant here, indicates the tendency to sin. That was not the case with Christ. He did not sacrifice for Himself, He sacrificed *Himself*.

V4. The high priesthood is not an office that anyone could claim for himself. That this nevertheless happened in the unfaithful Israel – there is a situation where there is even talk of two high priests (Lk 3:1) –, doesn’t change anything to God’s statutes. God has determined His choice who finally will be high priest, as it is to be seen with Zadok and his sons (Eze 44:15-16; 48:11).

A person is high priest on the ground of calling, not by pretention. Just as Aaron was called by God, so too Christ was called by God, albeit in a way that at the same time shows a great difference from Aaron.

So you see that there are some similarities in the verses 1-4 between Aaron and Christ. I go through them again and discover the following. Both Christ and Aaron

1. are appointed on behalf of men in the things pertaining to God,
2. sacrifice for the sins of the people and
3. take no honor for themselves.

There are also differences and even more than similarities:

1. Aaron was taken from among men, while Christ became Man and is also the unique Son of God.
2. Aaron was surrounded by infirmities and had the tendency to sin, while Christ is without sin, neither was the tendency to sin in Him.
3. Aaron had to sacrifice for himself, while Christ sacrificed Himself for others.

In what follows also the difference becomes apparent:

1. The difference between the way Aaron is called and the way Christ is called (verse 5) and
2. the difference between the priesthood according to the order of Aaron and that according to the order of Melchizedek (verse 6).
3. In verse 5 the glory of Christ's calling as High Priest above the calling of Aaron is confirmed by Psalm 2 (Psa 2:7).
4. In verse 6 the glory of Christ's priestly order above that of Aaron is placed in the light by Psalm 110 (Psa 110:4).

V5. We first look at the quotation from Psalm 2 (Psa 2:7), where the glory of His Person becomes apparent. The beginning of the verse still shows a similarity with Aaron. Christ never sought His own honor, not even in the high priesthood. Then the contrast follows: He is personally the Son. That gives a much higher dignity to His high priesthood than that of Aaron.

He was begotten by God in Mary (Lk 1:35) and therefore He is as Man also God's Son. This Man is the High Priest with God, what He was not and could not be as God the Son. Only when He became Man, could He become High Priest.

V6. The other quotation, from Psalm 110 (Psa 110:4), adds even more glory, which becomes apparent from the introductory words: "Just as He says also in another [passage]." The writer draws – of course under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – from the riches of God's Word to let fall continually another ray of light on Christ. Thereby he doesn't act randomly, but he continually quotes verses that magnify the radiance and glory of Christ and which causes his argumentation to be strengthened and clarified.

In the quotation of Psalm 110 the glory of the office of Christ becomes clear. Psalm 110 is a psalm that, as many psalms, refers to the millennial kingdom of peace. The enemies of the Messiah are made His footstool (Psa 110:1). He receives out of Zion the strong scepter (Psa 110:2) in the midst of God's people who will volunteer freely and celebrating (Psa 110:3), while He shatters hostile kings and judges among the nations (Psa 110:5-6). Besides all this glory and magnificence there is also a review of His life on earth when He was dependent on the refreshment by God (Psa 110:7).

From both quotations (Psalm 2 and Psalm 110) it becomes clear that God declares that the Messiah is both Son and Priest. Sonship and priesthood are therefore closely related to each other. That goes for Christ and also for us.

I will not comment yet on "the order of Melchizedek", for that will be further explained in chapter 7. What becomes clear though, is that He is not *high* priest according to the order of Melchizedek, but *priest* according to the order of Melchizedek. There is a nice explanation for this. A high priest assumes other priests, but the Lord Jesus alone is priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The order of Melchizedek is an order of blessing. Melchizedek blessed Abraham from God's side and he praised God for what He did for Abraham (Gen 14:18-20). According to that order the Lord Jesus is King-Priest Who brings blessing from God to God's people, what will be fully fulfilled in the millennial kingdom of peace. The priesthood of Melchizedek, which

in the Old Testament is only mentioned in Genesis 14 (Gen 14:18) and in Psalm 110 (Psa 110:4), existed earlier than that of Aaron and will also remain to exist when that of Aaron will not be necessary anymore.

V7. Here the writer refers impressively to something that didn't take place in the life of Aaron or Melchizedek, but it did take place in the life of Christ. Between His being conceived as Son of God on earth and His glorification as Priest in heaven are "the days of His flesh", by which His life on earth is meant. His glory doesn't bring Him nearer to the misery of man, while His life on earth does.

In what is described of Him here you learn how true it is for Him to partake of your hardships and sorrows. On earth, 'the days of His flesh', He endured, in dependence on God, all the fear of death. He offered up supplications to be saved, for He did not want to save Himself because He came to obey. His life on earth made Him suitable to be High Priest in connection with us. His life on earth also led to the offering of Himself, in which He is unique.

He did not offer up prayers and supplications when He was tempted by satan in the wilderness. That He did in Gethsemane, when the moment came before Him that He would be forsaken by God. All sufferings from man's side He bore with joy, something that many martyrs have done in His footsteps. But to be made sin He could not encounter with joy. In this also no one could follow Him.

Seeing that before Him, He offered up both His prayers and supplications to God, He sent them up to Him. He did so, trusting that God "was able to save Him *from* death". It was not that He wanted to be saved *of* death, for that was necessary. He knew that and therefore He prayed: "Nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done" (Lk 22:42). And He was answered, for God raised Him up. "He was heard because of His piety" means that He was heard because of His perfect trust in His God, because of His piety and because of His perfect commitment and His dependence of God. What a Lord!

Now read Hebrews 5:1-7 again.

Reflection: Name some glories of the Lord Jesus from this section and thank God for them.

Heb 5:8-14 | Milk and Solid Food

8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. 11 Concerning him we have much to say, and [it is] hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes [only] of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

We ended the last section with a glance at an exceptional period from the life of the Lord on earth. Therein the writer took us to Gethsemane where the Lord Jesus was confronted with the deepest suffering that could ever happen to a man. He endured intensively the suffering on the cross ahead. By fully surrendering Himself He offered up prayers and supplications to His Father to be saved from that suffering. In full acceptance of the will of His Father He complied with His will. We see here a special event in a life of obedience.

V8. His whole life was suffering, suffering as a result of the temptations that He was heading for because He obeyed God perfectly. Before He became Man, obedience was unfamiliar to Him. In heaven He did not have to be obedient to anyone. In heaven He could not be familiarized with obedience. Up there angels were obeying Him. Only when He came on earth He took a place of submission, primarily toward God, but also toward His parents (Lk 2:51). In that way He had to practice obedience as a deed and in that sense He had to learn what it is to obey.

V9. Unlike us He had no will of His own. He did not need to unlearn something, nothing had to be restrained or bend or changed with Him. With Him there was nothing that wasn't subjected. In this way "having been made perfect" through His life on earth, means that in that way He was made perfectly suited to be able to exert His service as High Priest in

heaven for us who are also in a position of obedience. He became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8).

Obedience was the secret of His way. It is also the secret of your way, preventing you from falling into an enemy's trap. If you obey Him Who by His own obedience reached the end perfectly, He will also bring you there where He already is now. Through His service as High Priest He keeps you from the dangers and temptations of the wilderness until you have reached the final salvation, the Sabbath rest. He is the Author of an "eternal salvation", which means that the range and its blessings extend to eternity.

V10. Because Christ has completed His way on earth He has become perfectly suited to be our High Priest. Due to His perfectly obedient life God could designate Him "as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek". God designated Him after His work on earth and thereby He confirmed His service in heaven now for us. After God called Him in verse 6 for that service, He is now designated as such by God (to carry out this service).

The necessary condition was fulfilled by Him: He has been made perfect. A Priest Who is the Son of God would not have been able to do much for us if He had not learnt to know the reason of His service by experience. Precisely because He knows from His own experience what you may be struggling with, He is perfectly able to help you. He is the absolute assurance for your final and eternal salvation.

V11. This verse is the beginning of a third parenthesis that runs till chapter 6:11. A parenthesis is an interruption in the argument of the writer in which he seriously warns his readers to take his teachings to heart; he warns them about the consequences if they don't do that. In earlier parentheses he warned not to drift away from the Word (Hebrews 2:1-4) and not to doubt the Word (Hebrews 3:7-4:13). The warning in this third parenthesis is not to get bored with the Word for that will cause you to become dull of hearing.

The writer points out that there is still much more to be said about Him, that is Christ as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. He was willing to speak about that with them, but that would only be possible

if the readers had an appropriately spiritual mind. In this parenthesis he tries to achieve that they would come far enough that he could speak with them about it.

At this moment it was, however, difficult to explain that. That was not caused by his ability or qualification as a teacher, but it was caused by his pupils. They were not able to understand his teaching because of their spiritual laziness. They were not always lazy, but they became lazy. They became lukewarm; they lost their first freshness because religious traditions started to influence their mind again. There is nothing that makes a person that dull in spiritual matters as religious traditions.

If heavenly matters lose their radiation, earthly and visible matters become powerful and meaningful again. This acts as an additional delay in following the Christian, heavenly calling. It was not that the readers were lacking in intelligence and neither did the writer note a hostile or worldly mind. The dull making and lazing making factor was that in their heart they longed again for the old religious forms of Judaism. This hindered them to grow practically in the truth of God as it is revealed in Christendom.

They were prepared to listen to the teaching of Christ on earth, for that was connected to their religion. Then at least the visible and tangible remained to exist and in that way they had a hold on their religion for their own sense. The glorified Christ as the fulfillment of all that is visible and tangible was not everything for them yet. When they were told about the latter, they delayed their speed to hear, which caused that they did not understand their true Christian position.

V12. They were, however, for such a long time Christians that they should have been able to teach others. Instead of that they themselves needed to be taught again about "the elementary principles of the oracles of God". They ought to be teachers in that sense that they spiritually had grown in such a way that they were able to share the spiritual things together. But the old forms of their religion, which they abandoned when they converted, became attractive again.

There is hardly any greater hindrance for making progress in your spiritual life and for growing in spiritual insight. The maintaining of an old form

of religion is often seen as the highest proof of devotion, while in reality formalism forms a barrier between your soul and what God wants to show you.

Another hindrance for your spiritual growth is the wisdom and the philosophy of the world (1Cor 2:6; 3:1-2). In Colossians 2 both hindrances are called together “principles of the world” and are put against Christ (Col 2:8). Both religious traditions and worldly wisdom are enemies of faith that is only fed by the Word of God of which Christ is the center.

It was not only that the Hebrews remained stuck in their spiritual growth, due to their dullness or slowness in hearing, but they went back to the beginning. That’s why they had to be taught again what they had already known for a long time, but what had lost the essence for their heart. It no longer had authority in their life. Once God’s Word no longer fills your heart and governs your life, you sink and are in danger of returning to the world. Then you need to be taught again about the first principles of the oracles of God, which indicates the speaking of Christ on earth (Heb 6:1; 1:1).

V13-14. The writer calls that “milk”. ‘Milk’ is the word of and about Christ on earth. They were not ready for solid food. Solid food is the word about Christ in heaven. As a Christian you live by milk if you for instance take the beatitudes (Matthew 5-7) as standard for your Christian life, while you don’t think about your heavenly position in Christ. It is not wrong to be an infant, but it is if you remain one or if you act like one again.

If you think about your heavenly position in Christ you are partaking of solid food or as it is called in verse 13 “the word of righteousness”. Then you are partaking of the righteousness of God in which everyone who believes shares through the perfect work of Christ. On the basis of that righteousness Christ received the place He now has in heaven and that you have in Him there. Are you unskilled in that while you ought to know better then you are an infant. To say it with the words of Galatians 4 (Gal 4:1-7), where the same things are the issue: you are a child.

Opposed to this is the spiritual mature believer who has gone through a healthy spiritual growth and who knows his position in Christ and lives

accordingly. To become spiritually mature is not an automatic procedure, but a result of a habit to exercise your senses. By “senses” is meant your perceptivity or discernment. Your spiritual growth is extremely dependent on the discernment of good and bad. If you focus your eye on the heavenly Christ you are not an unworldly eccentric, but you gain insight into doing the good and refraining from evil..

Now read Hebrews 5:8-14 again.

Reflection: Are there things in your life that are delaying your spiritual growth?

Hebrews 6

Heb 6:1-8 | True or False

1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do, if God permits. 4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and [then] have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. 7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

V1. The writer continues in the first part of this chapter his exhortations of the concluding verses of the previous chapter. He would like his readers to realize that they should not get “stuck” in “the elementary teaching about Christ”. By that he means everything that was said about and by Christ in relation to His coming to the earth. You may think of the announcement by John the baptist and also of the preaching of Christ Himself. Of course, everything about this in the Bible is God’s Word and therefore important, but it is all connected to the Old Testament and to Christ’s reign over His earthly people.

However, because of the rejection of Christ, a completely different situation emerged and to this the writer wants to focus the hearts of the believers. He wants them to “press on to maturity” or, as it also can be translated ‘to press on to perfection’. ‘Perfection’ is the knowledge of Christ in relation with the place He now takes, glorified in heaven.

The words “press on to” refer to the spiritual growth of the believer to that ‘perfection’. That means that you make Him in glory the object of your

faith and the goal of your life. Then you will certainly not be willing to go back to the tangible religion, but you will surely want to go on, with the desire to learn to know more of Him and the wonderful results of His work.

Therefore, what you read in the second part of verse 1 and in verse 2 does not refer to Christendom but to Judaism. The writer doesn't want to go into detail again about this issue, for they knew that from their past as Jews.

They indeed knew about "repentance from dead works". That implies the repentance from works that were done by their own will, independent of God. Also about "faith toward God" they did not have to be taught again anymore. They are familiar with that from an early age. Repentance and faith are not specifically Christian truths. They were and are needed in all ages in case a sinful man wants to come into connection with a holy God.

V2. The "instruction about washings" – and definitely not, as it is translated in the NKJV: the doctrine of baptisms – indicates the statutes that God gave to Israel concerning washing with water. That concerned matters or people who were defiled through contact with sin, that they may be used again in the service of God (e.g. Num 19:18).

The instruction about "laying on of hands" refers to what they had to do, for example, in offering. The laying on of hands means identification, in this case with the sacrifice (e.g. Lev 1:4; 4:15).

The Jews are also familiar with "the resurrection of the dead" (Jn 11:24) as well as with "eternal judgment" (Isa 14:9-11; 38:18; 66:24).

All the characteristics mentioned are thus not specifically Christian, but on the contrary typical Jewish. Therefore the writer wants to leave all that.

V3. When he says "and this we will do", he doesn't mean by that that he will come back on this later. No, 'this' refers to 'to press on to maturity' of verse 1. "If God permits" he wants to take the readers with him in spirit to heaven, to the Lord Jesus in glory.

V4. He consciously expresses himself like that to be dependent on God's strength because the spiritual condition of some Hebrews did not allow

him to carry out his plan at this moment. That's because there were people among his readers – and there are also today – who accepted Christendom only outwardly, while inwardly they have not changed at all.

They exerted a wrong influence on the true believers, who, due to that, also became dull in following the rejected, though glorified Messiah. Therefore the writer addresses all of them in general terms. Thereby I underline that the impossibility to be renewed again to repentance, only refers to those who only outwardly partook of the privileges of the verses 4-5, but *inwardly* had no new life.

All characteristics that are mentioned in the verses 4-5 are *outward* characteristics. They apply to all professing Christians, thus both to the true Christians and to the Christians who are Christians only in name. With Christians who are Christians only in name there is knowledge, joy, enlightenment, privileges and power, but no spiritual life. Those are people

1. who have tears like Esau (Heb 12:17),
2. who are willing to die the death of the upright like Balaam (Num 23:10b),
3. who want God fearing people praying for them like Pharaoh (Exo 8:8) and Simon the magician (Acts 8:24),
4. who prophesy like Caiaphas (Jn 11:49-52),
5. who love to hear the Word of God like Herod (Mk 6:20)

and who are still no more than sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

“Have once been enlightened” means that they received light about the Person of Christ, His work, His glorification, but that it only refers to an intellectual enlightenment, while the light had not enlightened their conscience.

“Have tasted of the heavenly gift” means that they have received a certain taste of what God gave in Christ, possibly also from the heavenly position that Christ, the Messiah now takes. However, they have not eaten of it and they did not identify themselves with it.

“Have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit” are those who find themselves on the territory where the Holy Spirit works. It doesn’t necessarily mean that the Holy Spirit also dwells in the person.

V5. “Have tasted the good word of God” means that they understood how precious the Word is, though it doesn’t have to mean that through that they were made alive.

“The powers of the age to come” are the works of power that will take place in the coming age, when the triumphant Messiah, the Son of God, will completely destroy all powers of the enemy. The Hebrews did see such works of power when the Lord Jesus was on earth and also during the early days of Christendom.

V6. Each Christian shared in all these characteristics because he lived in a circle where these things were found. Even if there was no spiritual life, still each person experienced these influences. But it only applies to a person who has no spiritual life that he will fall away from that circle with those characteristics. He could turn his back on that circle and return to his former circle of confession.

The people concerned here first belonged to God’s people who crucified the Son of God. Then they confessed this as a sin and became confessors of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah. But now they were willfully and knowingly committing the same crime again by returning to those people, while they turned their back on Christendom with its glorified Lord. It is not about people that were acting in ignorance. For these people the Lord Jesus indeed prayed: “They do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

Fallen away people or apostates are those who were once enlightened and who acknowledged Christ as the Son of God, who also confessed His crucifixion as sin, but returned to it and still held Him for a traitor Who was rightly crucified. Those are not ignorant.

Some people in professing Christianity find themselves in the same position. They were made familiar with the truths about Christ, but come to deny, against their better judgment, His virgin birth, His perfect life, His Godhead, His atoning death and His bodily resurrection. For such people it is impossible to be renewed again to repentance, which means to repent

again from their current error. They knew the truth, they confessed it, but then rejected it again and now they were dull of it. This rebellion reveals a hardened heart that can never possibly repent.

V7. The writer clarifies with an example from nature what it means to have life of God or when this is missing. The life of the confessor is compared with “the ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it”. In the rain you see the ministry of the Word, which is compared with water (Eph 5:26). The condition of the earth becomes visible through the rain that often falls on it.

The ‘rain’, that means the blessing from heaven, falls on the soul of the confessor in the form of Divine light, the heavenly gift, the Holy Spirit, the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come. In the case of a true Christian the result of this ‘rain’ will be producing fruit for God in bringing praise offerings and the following of the Lord Jesus. In the case of the Christian only in name, the apostate, it appears that the rain doesn’t produce fruit in his life. That’s because the earth contains nothing what could bring fruit: there is no new life, no indwelling Holy Spirit.

V8. The nominal Christian never brings forth useful vegetation because the soil is no good. Out of him only thorns and thistles come forth, the results of the fall of man (Gen 3:17-18). That which is in connection with sin is under the curse and will eventually end up in an eternal curse and burning.

Now read Hebrews 6:1-8 again.

Reflection: What similarities and differences are there between the true and the false Christian?

Heb 6:9-20 | God's Promise Is Sure and Steadfast

9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. 10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. 13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." 15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. 16 For men swear by one greater [than themselves], and with them an oath [given] as confirmation is an end of every dispute. 17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a [hope] both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

V9. In the previous section the writer demonstrated insistently and seriously how terrible it is to belong to the Christian company outwardly, without being born again inwardly. Having read it, you would begin to doubt about yourself if it is all true.. You might be going through the same as those to whom this letter was addressed originally. After all, they were facing so many difficulties, there was a lot of resistance and the promised blessing seemed so far away. But now you suddenly hear that the writer, as far as the readers of his letter are concerned, was convinced that he was dealing with true Christians.

The reason why he had written that way, was because of the dangers of apostasy under the pressure from outside. With his warning he was considering the few who were in danger of falling away. Still he gave his warning in general terms because everyone should know that he is ad-

dressed. It should also make you deeply conscious that you will never make it by your own strength.

After the warning he now speaks about the fruits of the new life that were visible in the lives of these Jewish Christians. His conviction toward the genuineness of their faith was not because of great deeds they had done by faith, but because they had ministered to their fellow believers in simplicity. Others will notice that with you too. He calls them “beloved” to make them feel his love for them. Even though he had to address them seriously about the fate of the apostates, as far as they were concerned he is convinced that they were connected to “better” things. The ‘better things’ are all things that are related to the heavenly position that the Messiah now takes.

Likewise he is, concerning them, convinced that they would surely reach “salvation”, that is the final goal of the journey that a Christian makes on earth. In that way he focuses their eyes on the liberation from earthly circumstances to partake of the kingdom at the side of the Messiah in heaven.

V10. It may be that the Hebrews were afraid that God had forgotten what they had shown toward His Name, i.e. what they had done to His honor. After all, they saw so little of His approval. It was appropriate, according to their Jewish way of thinking, that being faithful to God and defending the honor of His Name are rewarded by Him. But instead of the rest and welfare what they possibly were expecting, their life became even more difficult. The writer assures them that God is not unjust. He rewards what is shown toward His Name, although the reward can be postponed for a while. They had ministered to His saints and in that they had ministered to Him and they were still ministering to Him. God is not unjust to forget that (Mt 25:40).

V11. What matters now is to persevere in this with the same zeal they had shown at the beginning. They became dull of hearing (Heb 5:11). Therefore there could perhaps be also a danger of becoming dull of their works.

The exhortation for perseverance comes to each of them personally, “each one of you”. It is wonderful to begin well, but there has to be shown the same diligence “until the end”. Again the attention is focused on the time

that “the full assurance of hope” will be fulfilled. The end is the appearance of Christ for the establishment of His kingdom of peace, when He will reign as the true Melchizedek, the King-Priest, and will bless His people.

V12. Therefore they ought not to become sluggish, what happens if earthly things will replace the heavenly ones that once filled their heart. Particularly by returning to a tangible religion the spiritual growth will be enormously delayed.

In order to exhort them to go on with zeal on the path they had chosen, the writer points them to become imitators of those who had been in the same position like them. They knew the Old Testament, didn't they? Well, there are enough examples there of believers who inherited “through faith and patience ... the promise”. God had promised them something and they had trusted God that He would give what He had promised. And despite the time was expiring they remained to trust patiently on the promise. They received that promise as an inheritance, while they held on to the promise that God was surely going to fulfill it, even beyond death.

V13. The great example of a person to whom God promised something and who was strengthened by God in his faith, is Abraham. The Jewish Christians were in the same position as he was. He also had to rest in the promises without possessing what was promised. God even confirmed His promise by swearing an oath to give Abraham full assurance.

It indicates that God surely knows how hard it is for His own to continue to trust patiently on the fulfillment of the promises. In order to empower further the assurance of the oath, the writer points out that God swore “by Himself”. There is no higher authoritative source. The highest authority Himself acts as guarantor for the execution of the promise.

V14-15. You see that every possible doubt is excluded. God already had promised a son to Abraham when he was still childless. Then Abraham had believed God (Gen 15:1-6). That faith in God sustained him when God asked him to offer his only son (Heb 11:18). For this reason God gave Abraham a new promise, that of a rich blessing and countless descendants (Gen 22:16-17). God supported that promise by the most powerful oath. Abraham has not seen that fulfillment, but the promise and the oath were

sufficient for him to go on living and dying in faith, with the assurance that the fulfillment comes.

V16. God makes every effort to convince His people that He will really do what He says. He adapts to what is common among people by swearing an oath. Among people an oath is an end of all dispute (cf. Exo 22:11). In everything you see the extent to which He meets His people.

V17. You see that again: He calls them expressly "heirs of the promise". As if it is not enough that He as the almighty God has promised something, He confirms His promise with an oath. A promise is a declaration of purpose. An oath draws the attention to the person who puts himself openly and seriously behind the declaration. Because He knows how hard it is for His people to wait patiently for the fulfillment for a long time, He makes every effort to show "even more ... the unchangeableness of His purpose".

V18. And as if all that is not enough yet, the writer points out that God cannot lie (Num 23:19; 1Sam 15:29; Tit 1:2). God does not commit perjury. Therefore promise and oath are the "two unchangeable things" that guarantee the fulfillment of God's counsel.

From this knowledge and assurance "a strong encouragement" comes forth. They were in danger to lose courage and to give up. In that situation encouragement is needed (1Thes 5:14). Then it is necessary to get your mind focused on the heavenly Lord and on the assurance that everything that is related to Him, will be fulfilled (cf. 1Thes 4:18).

The Jewish Christians had fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus; they had themselves been baptized and had condemned the sin of the people in the rejection of their Messiah. By doing that they took hold of the hope set before them and were looking forward to the coming of the King-Priest to establish His kingdom of peace. He is the hope of the glory to come (Col 1:27).

V19-20. This hope is like an anchor, keeping the ship amidst the turbulence firmly in its position. The anchor is behind the veil in heaven. Here the most vulnerable believer finds the strongest assurance of his faith without seeing anything of the fulfillment of the promise on earth. In heaven you see the Lord Jesus Who already entered there as the Forerunner of a long

line of believers who will follow Him there. Where He has already entered as the High Priest, we may already follow Him in spirit now, and will soon follow Him literally.

To the Jewish Christians the 'forerunner' is a totally new thought. In the Old Testament the high priest never entered into the sanctuary as the forerunner, but as the representative. He entered into a place where no one could follow him. But Christ entered into the sanctuary and those who are His, follow Him into the sanctuary.

It is also encouraging while thinking of the anchor behind the veil, to think of the connection that you, who are on earth, do have with the Lord Jesus in heaven. Our hope is like a reliable and sure anchor for our souls, reaching beyond the veil, where Jesus, as forerunner, has already entered, for our benefit: He is High Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.

The assurance that we will enter heaven is the fact that the Forerunner is already there. That is confirmed in the last line by again quoting from Psalm 110 (Psa 110:4; Heb 5:6). In that way the attention of the Jewish Christians remains focused without diminishing on the Lord Jesus in heaven and on the future, for He is forever connected to the heavenly sanctuary. By seeing Him continually in that way the Jewish Christian will be delivered from Judaism and be strengthened in the heavenly character of Christendom that he accepted.

Now read Hebrews 6:9-20 again.

Reflection: Write down all assurances that are written in this section, regarding the promises that God will fulfill and thank Him for that.

Hebrews 7

Heb 7:1-7 | Melchizedek

1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all [the spoils], was first of all, by the translation [of his name], king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. 3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually. 4 Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. 5 And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. 6 But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. 7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.

In this chapter you finally get more to learn about the person of Melchizedek. With this, the writer returns to his main subject with which he started in chapter 5. He also said in chapter 5 that it is difficult to explain if we have become dull of hearing (Heb 5:11). Still he wants to explain it now, for concerning his readers he is convinced of better things. He assumes that they will make efforts to understand him. You want to do that too, undoubtedly. That is also necessary, for it is not all that simple. At the same time, the greater the joy if you get to understand something about it.

If you look at the priesthood of the Lord Jesus you should do that through the eyes of a Hebrew believer. As you are (most probably) a Christian of Gentile origin, you have never been under a priesthood that was instituted by God. However, you will find a lot here that encourages and edifies you.

V1. In his explanation about Melchizedek it is about two things: the dignity of his person and the importance of his priesthood. In this letter Melchizedek is mentioned eight times. The only thing we know about

Melchizedek, is written in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. To be able to explain this priesthood the writer first pays attention to the history of Melchizedek as you find that in Genesis 14 (Gen 14:18-20).

When Abraham defeated five foreign kings with the help of his servants and delivered Lot he encountered the even more dangerous appearance of the world. In the person of the king of Sodom the world doesn't approach him with hostility, but with seductions (Gen 14:17,21). However, God guided him in such a way that he first met Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High God (Gen 14:18-20). After this meeting Abraham had the strength to meet with the king of Sodom.

Herein is a great encouragement. There is nothing that strengthens you so much in this hostile and seductive world as an 'encounter' with the One Who is seated at God's right hand as the true King-Priest. When you have that encounter, He blesses you, poor warrior, with a wonderful blessing with which He shortly will bless the whole creation.

The Melchizedek in the book of Genesis was a common king like the other kings of that area that God was going to turn upside down. In addition to that he was a priest as well. But not in the way the others were priests in that area. Those were idol priests, while he on the contrary was priest of the Most High God. The name "Most High God" is significant. It is the name of God in connection with the millennial kingdom of peace. He is the supreme Ruler over all things. He possesses heaven and earth (Gen 14:19; cf. Eph 1:20; Col 1:16). To the unbeliever it is still hidden now, but in the millennial kingdom of peace He will be visible for everyone and be acknowledged by everyone. Likewise Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged Him after his humiliation (Dan 4:34-35).

Abraham is blessed by Melchizedek in relation to the name of God as the Most High. This anticipates the kingdom of Christ when He will reign as Priest on His throne in blessing (Zec 6:13). This Melchizedek blessed the Abraham who was tired from the war, as Christ will do to the whole creation. Melchizedek brings praise to God and blesses Abraham in the Name of God. He gives Abraham bread and wine. That is far better than what the

king of Sodom could offer him. Bread and wine speak of Christ Himself as food and joy after the war (and not of the Lord's Supper, for that is not for the purpose of strengthening, but in remembrance of!).

V2. Abraham expresses his appreciation and gratitude toward Melchizedek by giving the tenth to him. The writer pays more attention to the tenth in verse 4. First he explains the meaning of the name Melchizedek. That name is a junction of 'righteousness' and 'peace'. These are especially the features of Christ in His reign in the millennial kingdom of peace. Then it becomes fully visible that in Him righteousness and peace have kissed each other (Psa 85:10). Here, by the way, you have an important indication that you may spiritually apply the meaning of names mentioned in the Old Testament (cf. 1Cor 9:9; 10:1-11; Gal 4:21-31), without giving any room to your own fantasy.

Righteousness and peace are also the characteristics of His kingdom now, even if it still only exists in a hidden form (Rom 14:17). What will fill the earth in future, should now already be present in your life. After all you have accepted the Lord Jesus as your Lord and you are baptized and due to that you came on a territory where His authority is acknowledged, haven't you? The order is: first ("first of all") righteousness (Isa 26:9) and then peace (Isa 32:17), for there can be no true peace than on the basis of righteousness alone. That goes also for you personally (Rom 5:1).

V3. In the way Scripture introduces Melchizedek, it becomes clear that he is a beautiful picture of Christ. If you read in Genesis 14 about Melchizedek, there he, as it were, suddenly appears out of nowhere. Earlier you do not hear anything of him and later in the history he neither appears anymore. There is nothing known about his ancestors to whom he might owe his priesthood. Neither is there a list of descendants known of him, something that was essential for the priesthood of Aaron (cf. Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:64). No limits were prescribed to his priesthood (cf. Num 4:3). It is a man without historical background of whom also no other actions are told. He appears and disappears. There is something timeless about him.

Of course, as a human being he was born like any other human being and died as well. Neither is he a revelation of Christ. On the contrary, it is written that he, in his performance, *was made* like Him, from which it appears that he was not the Son of God. But by the way he appears in the Scripture, God wants to tell something about His Son.

You have seen that in the meaning of the name Melchizedek and you now see what is said about him, or better, what is not said about him. The lack of information about his genealogy and about his birth and death makes him a striking example of the Son of God. The Son of God is the eternal Son of God and thus without origin, without a beginning and an end. As for His priesthood, it means that it never ceases and that it will never be handed over to someone else. This makes a great contrast with the priesthood of Aaron, which was handed over from father to son.

V4. You ought not to forget what you just saw of Melchizedek. The writer, with the words “now observe” calls upon to carefully pay attention with great interest to all the particulars of his greatness. Like the Hebrew readers you may think great of Abraham, but Melchizedek was far greater! Abraham is emphatically mentioned “patriarch”, which emphasizes his dignity. But the fact that Melchizedek received the tenth from Abraham proves the higher and more excellent dignity of this person. He, who receives tithes, is indeed greater than he who gives tithes.

V5. Then the writer involves the tribe of Levi in his argumentation. He had proved that the person he described in the previous verses, is greater than Abraham. That means that that person also is therefore also greater than Abraham’s descendants Levi and Aaron and that therefore also the priesthood of Melchizedek is greater than that of Levi and Aaron.

That appears also from the giving and the receiving of the tithes. The Levites actually received as a whole the tithes from the people (Num 18:21,24), of which they then gave the tithes to the priests (Num 18:26). The similarity between Levi and Melchizedek is that they both received the tithes from others. But there is a great difference here too. The Israelites did not give the tithes to the Levites out of respect for them because they stood

above the people, but they did that because God commanded them to, as compensation to the Levites for their service and for their missing an inheritance.

That was also the reason why the Levites were allowed to accept the tithes of the people. They were entitled to receive the tithes because God designated it like that for them. The tithes belonged to God (Lev 27:30; Pro 3:9; Mal 3:8-9). They were given to the Levites by the Israelites because they represented the Lord.

V6. In the case of Melchizedek it was different. The entitlement that Melchizedek had to receive tithes was not designated through a command from God. He didn't even belong to the descendants of Levi and neither did he belong to another generation for whom something was designated. He accepted the tithes of Abraham on the ground of his own person and function. Thus he is greater than Abraham and therefore also greater than Levi.

After receiving the tithes he blessed Abraham as the vessel of promises. Abraham was the holder and preserver of Divine promises. He was going to become the father of a multitude of people, in whom all people on earth would be blessed by God! The person by whom Abraham is blessed, is therefore really someone who is supposed to be called great. For a Christian all true blessing is also related with the Person and the office of Christ in heaven.

V7. He who blesses is "without any dispute" greater than he who is blessed. The fact that the greater blesses the lesser is forgotten in professing Christianity. You see that for example in cases where the pastor blesses the church, as if he is greater than those he serves. In Christendom, however, there is no believer superior to the other (Mt 23:8).

Now read Hebrews 7:1-7 again.

Reflection: What are the similarities between Melchizedek and the Lord Jesus?

Heb 7:8-19 | Priesthood of Levi and of Melchizedek

8 *In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one [receives them], of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.* 9 *And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.* 11 *Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need [was there] for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?* 12 *For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.* 13 *For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar.* 14 *For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.* 15 *And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become [such] not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.* 17 *For it is attested [of Him], "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."* 18 *For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.*

V8. The writer does his utmost to clarify the huge difference between Abraham and Levi on the one hand ("in this case") and Melchizedek on the other hand ("in that case"). Thereby you should consider that, concerning these Hebrew Christians, there was an exceptional appreciation for the great patriarch. Also for the tribe of Levi they had great respect. As a link between the people and God, this tribe was indeed in an exceptional way connected with Him. That tribe had to make sure that the connection between the people and God was maintained. But after all they were all "mortal men", while of Melchizedek on the contrary, is witnessed that he lives on.

Levi needed the tithes to remain alive, but the moment would come that he had to die, for he was a mortal man. Melchizedek did not need the tithes to remain alive. He accepted the tithes as an homage. In the same way

you cannot give anything to Christ as if He could not function without what people give Him. Whatever you give Him from your property, from your time, from your abilities and from your worship, you do that out of reverence and honor.

Melchizedek was, in type, as a reference to Christ, also the living one. Christ is forever Priest; death cannot rule over Him anymore. Of Him Who became Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, is witnessed that He lives. We do not learn anything from the death of Melchizedek.

V9-10. The arguments are concatenating to magnify more and more the person of Melchizedek before the eyes of the Hebrew Christians. That goes also for the remark that Levi, who himself received the tithes, was nevertheless the lesser of Melchizedek because Levi, as it were, gave the tithes in Abraham to Melchizedek. When Melchizedek accepted the tenth from Abraham, he accepted that of Levi as well because he, although was not born yet, is seen as present in Abraham, as he descended from Abraham. [Note: This way of speaking you also see in Genesis 25, where Rebekah is not told that there are two 'children' in her womb, but two 'nations' (Gen 25:23). In that way it is said that these two children represent two nations (cf. 1Cor 15:22)].

V11. Up to verse 10 the writer has tried to make clear that Melchizedek is greater than Aaron. From verse 11 he goes a huge step further. Melchizedek not only is greater than Aaron, but he came instead of Aaron, he replaced him. The writer again will put forward the necessary arguments to explain that. Then you become convinced that the disappearance of the order according to Aaron is no loss and also that the replacement by the order according to Melchizedek is nothing but gain.

It is not about replacing something good by something better. No, the replacement occurs because the priesthood of Levi was not satisfactory; it did not bring anything to perfection. That doesn't mean that there was something wrong with the Levitical priesthood on itself, just as there was nothing wrong with the law. The priesthood was given by God, though in relation with the law.

However, man himself is only to blame for the fact that both law and priesthood didn't bring man to perfection. By 'perfection' is meant that the conscience is freed from every burden and that there is a free access to the sanctuary in the presence of God. If the Levitical priesthood would have been able to achieve that, it was not necessary that another priest had to arise in connection with another order, fully independent of the order of Aaron. But that goal could not be achieved. Therefore the Levitical priesthood had to disappear and had to be replaced by another one.

V12. However, because the priesthood changed, the necessity for "a change of law" also arose. Mind you that it is about the change of law, by which is meant a certain principle, a certain law and order. The Levitical priesthood was connected to the law of Sinai. Therein miscellaneous rules were dictated regarding the priesthood in Israel, concerning matters as succession, garments, when to bring sacrifices and which sacrifices that should be. Those laws applied to the priesthood of Aaron. They couldn't be transferred to that of Melchizedek, because this priesthood is exercised according to totally different rules.

V13. By the replacement of the priesthood that is exercised according to other rules, it was also no longer enforced that the new priest had to be from the tribe of Levi. Christ indeed did not arise from Levi, the priestly tribe, but from Judah, the kingly tribe (Rev 5:5). Judah was never connected to the altar. Moses never made even the slightest reference or allusion that someone from the tribe of Judah would be consecrated to be a priest for the service at the altar.

"The one concerning whom these things are spoken" is Christ. He is the object of all things that is said in the Scripture and here it is particularly regarding His priesthood.

V14. The argument of the writer was clear and evident. His readers knew for sure and without any doubt that "our Lord" arose from Judah. Delicately he called Him, Who is King, 'our Lord'. In that way he indicates that the Lord Jesus has authority over the life of His people as much over that of himself. Judah is the kingly tribe. That's where the Lord Jesus 'arose' from, as "descended" also can be translated. He is Shiloh, the Prince of peace, from Judah (Gen 49:10).

Thus, the new Priest comes from the kingly tribe. That makes Him that unique King-Priest. These two offices together with His name 'Branch' are wonderfully presented in Zechariah 6 (Zec 6:12).

V15-16. All the previous teachings of the writer, in which he shows that the Levitical priesthood has brought nothing to perfection and that a new kind of priesthood is required, become only clearer by the arising of the other Priest Who resembles Melchizedek. The other Priest, the Lord Jesus, is not a priest according to a commandment that God had put on people, without demanding anything from the inward man, the mind of the heart. Each person who fulfilled the prescribed conditions, was given part in that priesthood. It is not like that with the Lord Jesus. He became priest "according to the power of an indestructible life".

Not a new fleshly commandment determined His priesthood, for example a commandment that instead of from Levi the priest has to come from Judah now. Christ is not a priest because He arose from Judah, but because He possesses an indestructible life.

V17. That indestructibility became evident in His resurrection and the result of that is that He has no succession. In Him you see that new life from death is the feature of the true high priest, as God has shown in the rod of Aaron which He made to produce blossoms (Num 17:1-8). Not only that He has no successor, but as Man He is also "a priest forever". Therefore Psalm 110 is quoted again.

V18. Again the writer contrasts the old and the new. He calls the old "a former commandment" (verse 18) and calls the new "a better hope" (verse 19). He also makes clear that the old commandment really had to be set aside "because of its weakness and uselessness". It was 'weak' because it did not give man any power to fulfill God's commandments (Rom 8:3-8). It was 'useless' because it did not produce the desired result: it did not make the conscience free from burdens and it could not realize a free access to God.

V19. The entire old system of the law therefore "made nothing perfect". God gave the law to His people on mount Sinai so that through the law it would become clear how sinful man is. The law therefore is also called 'the

power of sin' (1Cor 15:56; Rom 7:7) and the 'ministry of death' (2Cor 3:7). Therefore the law is put away, as much as sin is put away (Heb 9:26). With regard to the believer, that happened because he died through the law to the law (Gal 2:19).

The law showed man the right way, but did not give him the power to go the right way. It prescribed what should happen in case of sin, but the prescribed sacrifice could not take away sin and had to be repeated again and again in case of new sins. Instead, a new hope has come and the access to God has been opened through the new priesthood, to which other laws are connected.

The better hope assures you that you will achieve the final goal through all seductions and afflictions. In the meantime you are allowed to freely come to God and be close to Him.

Now read again Hebrews 7:8-19.

Reflection: What are the differences between the Levitical priesthood and that of Melchizedek (that means: that of the Lord Jesus)?

Heb 7:20-28 | Such a High Priest Was Fitting for Us

20 And inasmuch as [it was] not without an oath 21 (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, 'YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER'"); 22 so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. 23 The [former] priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the [sins] of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, [appoints] a Son, made perfect forever.

V20-21. Still the writer is not finished with clarifying the difference between the priesthood of Melchizedek and that of Aaron. He makes use of all differences to make his readers aware of the excellence of the priesthood of Melchizedek beyond that of Aaron. The following difference is that God, with the introduction of the Levitical priesthood, didn't swear an oath, while He on the contrary did with that of Melchizedek, i.e. of Christ. Again the writer uses the quotation of Psalm 110 (Psa 110:4; Heb 5:6; 6:20; 7:17) to prove it.

By swearing an oath God declares that His purpose concerning the priesthood of Christ is absolute. The oath is additional assurance that He will never ever reconsider this, otherwise He would dishonor the One to Whom He had sworn – that is He Himself. Also human weakness or sin has in no way an impact on this priesthood. This priesthood can never be set aside. The Levitical priesthood was totally different. There was no oath connected to this priesthood, which was not designated with the purpose to be everlasting, but was only meant to function for a certain time.

V22. Because the priesthood of Melchizedek was established by the swearing of an oath, it is better than that of Aaron. This fact leads the writer then to speak about “a better covenant”, which means better than the covenant of Sinai. This covenant is as much better as the priesthood made by an oath is better than the priesthood without an oath. There are two parties obliged in making a covenant. At Sinai the people obliged themselves to keep the law and God obliged Himself to bless them if they kept the law. But it has become clear that man failed under the old covenant, under the law, just as the priesthood without oath failed.

However, with the better covenant “Jesus has become the guarantee” and therefore the blessing is sure. He has kept the law and thus fulfilled all obligations. And not only that. He also took away all debts that rested on the people by taking them upon Himself and paying for them. As a guarantee He met the obligations for the party that has failed. He did not make Himself a guarantee in an impulsive action, without overseeing the consequences (Pro 6:1-5). He knew what He was doing and He also knew that He was able to pay the costs.

V23. The writer mentions another difference between the old and the new priesthood. The old priesthood had to be passed on to someone else over and over again, due to the death of the previous official priest. Therefore no Israelite could ever set his hope on a high priest forever. Therefore the succession of the high priest was also regulated in the law. When Aaron died he was followed by Eleazar (Num 20:25-28). A high priest under the old covenant did not live forever. In case a member of the people needed him and had told him everything, it could happen that this member had to tell his whole story again to another high priest, because the previous one had died.

V24. This can never happen to you. The Lord Jesus has a totally different priesthood. That is not to be passed on to others, for it is permanently. That has to do with the glory of His Person. One of His glories is that He continues forevermore. He also knows what death is, for He died once. However, He became alive again. Because He has been in death and is now alive forevermore (Rev 1:18), His priesthood can never ever be abolished by death anymore.

His priesthood is wonderfully related to life, *His* life. In verse 8 you have read that He lives on and in verse 16 that He is Priest according to the power of an indestructible life. Therefore He exerts an unchangeable priesthood. His priesthood will never be handed over to someone else for the reason that He wouldn't be able to exercise it anymore. What a surety you have in Him!

V25. The results of such a priesthood are presented in verses 25-26 in a way that is a tremendous encouragement to you. The Lord Jesus is a High Priest Who always lives for you. He is able to keep you entirely safe and up until the end of your journey through the wilderness. He can help you through anything. He is able to save you from all possible temptations and at last bring you to the ultimate eternal salvation, the eternal Sabbath rest.

He has the necessary power to do this work. Christ's salvation is a perfect salvation, whatever your need or any of His own is. He is not going to carry you through for only a part of the journey through the wilderness to drop you on a certain moment or to hand you over to the care of someone else. He will carry you through the whole journey. He will really save you forever.

Through Him you are allowed to draw near to God. God sees each of His sons in relation to His Son, Who lives in heaven. This life is not a passive life He lives peacefully in rest after the defeat of sin and death. He is not in heaven to rest, but "to make intercession for" you. That is active, that's what His life exists of, that's what He continually is occupied with. As long as believers live on earth, He lives for them. He is always and uninterruptedly available to them.

He intercedes between you as a weak believer on earth and the strong and holy God in heaven. He prays to God (cf. Rom 8:26-27,34) for you with a view to what you are going through on earth. He knows exactly what you're going through because He knows it from experience. He makes sure that you will not give up.

If Christ intercedes like that for you, would God reject Him? Of course not! Therefore it is so important for you to draw near to God with the consciousness that He sees you connected to Christ. You cannot come to

God without that consciousness. He cannot receive you in His presence if you come to Him with the thought that He has to see you as so gorgeous or so miserable. On the contrary, it will give you the greatest assurance and boldness to come into God's presence if you go there with the thought that you are together with Christ. God can accept you because He sees Christ, and He listens to you because He hears Christ.

V26. Christ is exactly the High Priest that is fitting for us. What He is before God, we are too, which means that He represents us before God. He is "such a high priest" Who is exalted far beyond the high priest from the old covenant. He is High Priest according to the glory and purity of heaven, the dwelling place of God where we are allowed to enter. His exalted high priesthood is fitting for our high position as sons of God.

For us a High Priest is fitting Who is "holy", not because we are unholy, but because we are holy too. He is "innocent", which means without evil, blameless, without deception and through Him we too are like that before God. Christ is completely separated from sin; He has no sin (1Jn 3:5), He knew no sin (2Cor 5:21), He committed no sin (1Pet 2:22). That is fitting for our perfect condition before God as we are seen in this letter.

"Undeified" means spotless, clean. We get defiled by touching sin. If we are conscious of our connection with Him, we will avoid every contact with sin.

On earth He was always "separated from sinners", although He welcomed them and ate with them (Lk 15:2). His accessibility for sinners never caused Him to ever be united with them. Only in the hours of darkness on the cross He did that for those who acknowledged to be sinners. Now He is also literally separated from them. Our connection with Him means that we are morally separated from the sinners around us; that means that we do not participate with them.

Finally it says that He has become "exalted above the heavens". Therein you see that He is exalted above all that is created. That is your position in connection with Him.

V27. The difference between the former high priests and Christ is big. They were imperfect and sinful and therefore they had to offer up sacrifices for

themselves. Those sacrifices were imperfect as well. They couldn't take away sins and they had to be repeated over and over again. But Christ is without sin. He is a Priest Who sacrificed Himself as a perfect sacrifice and did that "once for all", so that it is not necessary to be repeated. The value of His sacrifice is everlasting and sufficient for all God's people.

V28. The last verse provides a summary. The law regulates a high priesthood that is exercised by failing people and therefore doesn't satisfy. Opposite the law is a high priesthood that is based on the word of an oath. And who is that high priest? That is Someone Who is "Son". That is a name that hasn't been used before in connection with the new High Priest. Then you think of His relation to God as Father. He was eternally Son, but He has become Priest.

The fact that He is priest as Son, adds a particular radiance to His priesthood. Rightly and naturally this priesthood is perfect forever, because the Son has been "made perfect forever". Who would want to exchange such a priesthood for a human priestly system?

Now read Hebrews 7:20-28 again.

Reflection: What signs or characteristics demonstrate the excellence of the Lord Jesus as High Priest above the high priest under the law?

Hebrews 8

Heb 8:1-5 | The Main Point

1 Now the main point in what has been said [is this]: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this [high priest] also have something to offer. 4 Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; 5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned [by God] when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."

V1. The writer can now determine "the main point" of all that is previously said. As a kind of climax he summarizes the previous arguments for his readers. Centered in all teachings of the previous chapters is the Person of the High Priest. Again he speaks about Him as "such a high priest" (Heb 7:26), first emphasizing His Person and then emphasizing His service. Such a One, Who is Son (Heb 7:28), and no one else, is that High Priest.

But it is not only a contemplation of His Person at a distance. Surely, He is exalted far beyond us, though He is also still close to us; yes, He belongs to us. After all, it is said that we "have" Him, right? You are allowed to make use of His service, He is available to you.

It must have been a tremendous encouragement for the Hebrew readers. You should again imagine that these believers were mocked for their faith by their unbelieving countrymen. They believed in an invisible Messiah and were adhering to promises that showed no signs that they were going to be fulfilled.

The unbelieving Jews on the contrary were able to show their temple, their offerings, their priests, their high priests, and their ceremonial service. It looked like they had the right on their side. You could see everything that

they were pointing at, while the believing Hebrews could not deliver a single proof of what they saw in faith and to what they were adhering.

Just as the writer continually was making efforts to turn the eyes of the readers upward, to heaven, to the Lord Jesus, he does the same here. He gives the believers the answer they need to silence their unbelieving countrymen and maybe even more to make an end to their own rising doubts. They are now able to say to their mocking countrymen (and to themselves): We have the substance, you have the shadows; we have Christ, you have ceremonies; we have the Person, you have the picture.

They could even add to that: 'Our High Priest is seated because the only sacrifice He offered has fully met the holy requirements of God. This aspect of His service, the offering of a sacrifice, has been accomplished and never has to be repeated. Your high priest, however, is continually busy; he never rests, because his service never leads to perfection and because he himself continually fails. And where does your high priest serve? In a temple on earth, which is also temporary as all things on earth are temporary.'

Besides, he was allowed to come only once a year into the sanctuary. He had to be surrounded by the frankincense and had to carry blood. When he finished that service he came outside again. He had to repeat this ritual each year, because his service was imperfect. And where did our High Priest take his seat? At "the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens". He is a High Priest Who is connected to the throne of the Majesty.'

As you know, a throne has got to do with reigning. He is King-Priest. He reigns and blesses. The throne is here called 'the throne of the Majesty', which refers to impressive greatness, power, excellence. The dignity of His Person and of His service fully meets the Majesty, that is God, Who exceeds endlessly far above all things in glory and greatness. The place where He abides is also appropriate. He is in the heavens, which refers to His exalted position.

The Lord Jesus is seated indeed. That is in regard with His work that has been accomplished once for all on the cross. The sacrifice He offered up there, that is He Himself, is perfect and has never to be repeated. In the

following chapters the writer will get fully into detail on this wonderful sacrifice.

V2. However, the Lord Jesus is also “a minister in the sanctuary”, which means that in another way He is not seated, but is doing His service on behalf of others. The sanctuary is “the true tabernacle”, the true realm of the service.

The sanctuary in the wilderness, the earthly tabernacle, was a real sanctuary. There was nothing lacking, but it was not the ‘true’ sanctuary. In the same way Israel was a real vine, but Christ is the true vine. Israel has never been able to give God that joy He was seeking, due to weakness and sin. Christ on the contrary was able to do that.

The true tabernacle was not made by human hands. The earthly tabernacle was, although commanded by God, built by human hands. That means that it was not everlasting, for it belonged to a perishable creation. Concerning the heavenly and true tabernacle it is different. That one is established by the Lord and therefore not evanescent. And the service there is also performed by a perfect High Priest.

V3. That brings the writer to the remark about the offering of gifts and sacrifices, for a high priest includes an offering. Only on that condition he was allowed to enter the sanctuary. Therefore also Christ had to have something to offer, for otherwise He would not have been able to serve as High Priest. Well then, Christ has entered the sanctuary on the basis of His own sacrifice. The earthly high priests came with “gifts and sacrifices” as it was commanded in the Old Testament. Christ gave and sacrificed Himself. He is the fulfillment of all Old Testament gifts and sacrifices.

V4. He achieves His service in heaven on behalf of a heavenly people. On earth He couldn’t be priest, as the writer demonstrated in chapter 7 (Heb 7:12-17). How could these believing Jews desire again a system where Christ couldn’t even be priest? On earth the priests exercised their service according to the Levitical order. But if in that order there is no room for the priesthood of Christ and no room for Him to exercise it, then there also cannot possibly be room for those who belong to Him. If He cannot be priest on earth and cannot exercise His service there, there must be

another place for Him to do that. He surely does and that happens in the true sanctuary, which is in heaven.

Each earthly priesthood, as you see that especially in roman-catholicism, is not only a return to the shadow of the Old Testament, but is particularly a practical denial of the priesthood of Christ. Only Christ's priesthood is valuable to God. Each earthly priesthood is also a presumption of the office and the service that belong to Christ alone. An earthly priest wrongly claims a position between men and God, as if he is better and higher than the people he presumes to represent. He also presumes to represent God toward the people, as if he alone knows the thoughts of God. God does not recognize such priesthood.

Recently I read the book 'Von Rom zu Christus' (from Rome to Christ). In that book testimonies are written from ex-priests who tell about how they have become free from the error of roman-catholicism. One of them tells about how the light of God began to shine more and more in his soul, which made him discover that he was a stranger to God, someone of whom God said: 'I never knew you; depart from Me' (Mt 7:23).

He summarized all that he had ever done for Him: 'Am I not your priest? Am I not a clergy man? Look at all offerings I have brought: many years of study, separated from my family and home, the oaths of poverty, obedience and being unmarried. All that I possessed, my will and even my body I have consecrated to you, that I might serve You better! And now You're telling me that You never knew me? Just remember all the children I baptized, the confessions I took the time to listen to, how many miserable and discouraged souls I have comforted; the coldness, loneliness and ingratitude I endured.'

Despite of the whole litany of good deeds the same judgment was still sounding in his ears: 'I never knew you.' An earthly priestly service provides no peace with God, neither to the priest nor to those he acts for as a priest. Peace with God is only to be found in having faith in Christ Who as the perfect priest offered up the perfect sacrifice. In that way this ex-priest also found peace with God.

V5. This letter was written when the earthly temple service still existed. The writer points at those who serve “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things”. It is tragic though, if you think that there were still so many priests in those days who were achieving a service that makes no sense, neither for God nor for the people. The service on earth was a visible, earthly ‘copy’ of the service that is taking place in heaven. ‘Shadow’ adds that that earthly service is nothing essential in itself, though it refers to a reality. If you see a shadow of a person you don’t see the body, but the shadow certainly refers to the body behind it.

The writer clarifies this teaching with the example of Moses who received instructions from God how to build the tabernacle. When he was with God on the mountain, God showed him the blueprint of the tabernacle. He had to build the tabernacle on earth exactly according to the blueprint he saw on the mountain. He had to carefully make sure that it was built only in that way and absolutely not otherwise.

The tabernacle on earth was a copy and a shadow of what Moses saw on the mountain. But Christ doesn’t serve a copy and shadow on earth, but He serves in the true tabernacle. He doesn’t serve in a copy, but in a better, higher, more perfect heavenly place.

Why should you be connected with priests who serve in a copied sanctuary, while you are allowed to be connected with Christ in the true heavenly sanctuary?

Now read Hebrews 8:1-5 again.

Reflection: What is the main point of the letter?

Heb 8:6-13 | The Old and the New Covenant

6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first [covenant] had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; 9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. 10 "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 11 "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. 12 "FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." 13 When He said, "A new [covenant]," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

V6. This section is about "a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises". The "ministry" of the high priesthood of the Lord Jesus is related to that. His ministry is "more excellent" than that of the high priests under the old covenant. That took place on earth and was temporary, while the ministry of the Lord Jesus takes place in heaven and is everlasting. His ministry as a High Priest is that of a Mediator. A mediator is someone who mediates between two parties that have made an agreement or covenant.

A covenant is a contract between two parties with obligations for each of the parties. The two parties are God on the one hand and His people on the other hand. This covenant originates from God. He determines the obligations, both which He should fulfill and which His people should fulfill. He freely takes His own obligations, while He imposed them on man in the form of commandments. God's commandments are the conditions of how man is able to deal with God. On that ground God fulfills His promises.

What is now meant by "a better covenant" and by "better promises"? If something is 'better', it means that it is better in comparison to something else. You read further about 'a new covenant' in comparison to a covenant that God made with His people when they departed from Egypt. The better covenant is better, compared to the old covenant. That was made by God with His people at mount Sinai. Thereby God determined the conditions that the people had to fulfill in order to receive His promises. That promise was the blessing in the land of promise. But the people didn't fulfill their obligations and therefore the promised blessing could not be given.

Now there is 'a better covenant' with 'better promises'. This better covenant is also accompanied by obligations that are to be complied and also by promises of blessings that the believer receives when he complies with the obligations.

And now the role of the mediator becomes clear. He acts on behalf of both the parties. As "mediator" the Lord Jesus has all features that are fitting to the Being of God. So He knows exactly which holy conditions He has to fulfill. He also has the nature of those on whose behalf He is acting (of course with the exception of sin, Heb 4:15). Therefore He can also perfectly meet with the need of man.

Under the new covenant all holy conditions of God are fulfilled by the Mediator. Based on Who the Mediator is and what He has done, God is able to freely give His blessing to everyone who is connected to that Mediator. Therefore the big difference between the old and the new covenant is that under the first or old covenant the blessing was dependent on man's doing, while under the second or new covenant everything is exclusively dependent on God.

V7. That a second or a new covenant was needed meant that the first one had not delivered the result that was desired. The first covenant was not “faultless”. That was not due to the first covenant, the law, but it was due to man. The second one is indeed faultless, for it is totally outside of man’s responsibility. There was found what was searched for to enable man to yet partake of God’s blessing. This is found in and through the atoning work of Christ.

V8. The Lord already announced this new covenant through Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34). The announcement of that was on the one hand a tremendous promise, but on the other hand it was an admonition to Israel. After all, if they had complied with the obligations of the old covenant they would have received that which was promised and a new covenant was not necessary.

It is important now that you notice with whom the old covenant was made and with whom the new covenant will be made. The old covenant was made with Israel at mount Sinai. That becomes evident from verse 9. According to verse 8 the new covenant will also be made with Israel. It is not made with the church, unlike what you probably hear or read sometimes. The church surely enjoys all privileges that belong to the new covenant, because its foundation is the blood of Christ. Though the church enjoys all the privileges in the spirit, in a spiritual way and not in the letter, like Israel soon will literally and tangibly enjoy that blessing on earth.

The new covenant will be formally made with Israel in the millennial kingdom of peace. Then the house of Israel, the ten tribes, and the house of Judah, the two tribes, will be united as one nation. If you read through Jeremiah 30-31, from which the writer quotes here, you will see that those chapters are filled with information about the return of Israel to the land where the promises of God will be fulfilled. In the quotation here it appears who will do that. You read seven times: ‘I will.’ That is the adequate guarantee for the fulfillment of the new covenant.

V9. That sounds and is totally different than the old covenant at mount Sinai. There all the people of Israel said three times that they would do all that the Lord had spoken (Exo 19:8; 24:3,7). But even before they received

God's conditions in the law they already had broken them by making the golden calf (Exo 32:1-5).

Then God "took them by the hand", for they couldn't live up to the obedience that they had threefold committed themselves to. He led them through the wilderness to the land. But because they continuously broke His covenant, God couldn't care for them anymore to bless them. He had to set them aside.

But He didn't do that for ever, for God Himself comes with a new covenant. And that new covenant is "not like" the old covenant. A new one but according to the old covenant would have the same miserable result.

V10. This new covenant is different because it is not dependent on the responsibility of man, but on the grace of God. In that grace the Son of God fulfilled all conditions through His work on the cross.

This new covenant is made with Israel "after those days", those are the days after the dispersion and distress of Israel. 'After those days' the days of the millennial kingdom of joy and righteousness will come under the Messiah. They will be able to enjoy the outward blessing because inwardly also a great change has happened to them. The law was imposed on the people of Israel under the old covenant as a heavy yoke that they could not bear (Acts 15:10). In the new covenant Israel has been inwardly purified and reconciled and has received a new nature that desires to do God's will.

As a result of God's work God will put His "laws into their minds", which means that their whole mind will be determined by that. God will also work that His laws will be written "on their hearts", which means that they will obey them with love and that all their actions will be characterized by it.

The law will not then be a yoke anymore, but they will cherish it in their heart as it was with Christ (Psa 40:8) and they will be able to fulfill the law. They will obey, not out of fear for punishment, but out of love to God. Then the relationship between the people and God will be restored. God will be the God of His people and they will be His people.

V11. The new covenant, the law in their mind and heart, will mark all the relations of the people. It will be the principle of both the social and the religious life of Israel in the millennial kingdom. Under the new covenant there

is no middle class of lawyers anymore who will have to present the law to their countrymen to know the Lord, which is to involve Him in everything of their lives. In the millennial kingdom that will not be necessary at all.

Everyone will act from a personal relationship with God and not through mediators. In civil relationships everyone, in his dealing as “fellow citizen”, will be guided by the knowledge of God and from the fellowship with Him and not by selfishness. Everyone will deal with others as “brother” in the religious life to honor God together according to the knowledge he has of God and from the fellowship with Him. A self-willed religion will not occur.

V12. In that marvelous situation there is nothing that can bring a separation between God and His people. God has cast all their sins in the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19) and will never come back on it again. The fact that He will remember their sins no more is something else than that He forgets them. It means that He will not pay attention to those sins anymore because they are removed through the work of the Lord Jesus. That is the basis of His graceful dealings in future. What will be true for the people in future you’re already allowed to acknowledge now: the assurance of the forgiveness of your sins.

V13. After the extensive and instructive quotation, the writer concludes this chapter by repeating to say what he also said before this quotation in verse 7. There he spoke about a ‘first’ and a ‘second’ (covenant); here he speaks about a ‘new’ and an ‘old’ (covenant). If you speak about ‘a new’ you declare the previous one to be ‘old’. Something that is old, has had its time. It is visible from its look that something is out of date; it is “obsolete”. That’s what was the matter with the first covenant.

It is also said additionally that it is “ready to disappear”. The best way to interpret this, is to see it as an allusion to the coming devastation of Jerusalem in the time this letter was written. That devastation was going to happen in the year 70, which made it completely impossible to maintain something from the Old Testament.

Now read Hebrews 8:6-13 again.

Reflection: What are the differences between the old and the new covenant?

Hebrews 9

Heb 9:1-10 | The Earthly Sanctuary

1 Now even the first [covenant] had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. 2 For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which [were] the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. 3 Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, 4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5 and above it [were] the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. 6 Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, 7 but into the second, only the high priest [enters] once a year, not without [taking] blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. 8 The Holy Spirit [is] signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, 9 which [is] a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, 10 since they [relate] only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

In chapter 8 you saw how the new covenant was placed opposite the old one. In chapter 9 you will see how the true heavenly sanctuary is placed opposite the allegorical, earthly sanctuary. In verses 1-5 first a description of the preparation of the earthly sanctuary is given after which, till verse 10, the service in the earthly sanctuary is described. From verse 11 you look into the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ has entered once for all and what are the wonderful results of it.

Another striking thing is that there is mention of the tabernacle and not of the temple. The reason is that the description of the tabernacle and the service therein better fits the way Christians are seen in this letter. They are seen here as a people of pilgrims on earth who are on their way to the promised land. That doesn't mean that there is a certain difference

between the preparation of the tabernacle and the service that took place therein on the one hand and the temple and its preparation and service on the other hand. According to their character the services in the tabernacle and in the temple were the same. While the description given is essentially that of the actual state of affairs in the temple, the writer always speaks of the tabernacle.

V1. He starts with demonstrating the connection between the first, old covenant and the regulations for the service in the earthly sanctuary where that service took place. He speaks about “the earthly sanctuary” and not about a ‘worldly sanctuary’. A worldly sanctuary would mean that it happened in a worldly way and that it is adapted to the taste of the world. What he wants to say, is that it is a sanctuary that belongs to the tangible, visible world.

V2. In the description the writer takes his readers to the tabernacle and leads them in mind along the several objects. First he stands still at “the outer” tabernacle, which means the first part of the tabernacle. This part is called “the holy place” (Exo 26:1-30). In that part the priests were allowed to come daily to perform their services. In the holy place were the lampstand (Exo 25:31-40) and the table with the bread of the Presence on it (Exo 25:23-30).

V3. After the first part behind the first veil there is another part “behind” what is called here “the second veil”. That part is called “the Holy of Holies” and was the actual dwelling place of God. It was only accessible for the high priest only once a year.

V4. In the Holy of Holies there were also some objects, namely the altar for burning incense (Exo 30:1-6) and the ark (Exo 25:10-16). The ark is called here “the ark of the covenant” to indicate once more that it is about an old and a new covenant. The ark was the meeting place between God and the people under the old covenant. Opposite this center of the old covenant Christ stands as the center, the heart of the new covenant.

The glory of the ark is indicated by mentioning that it was “covered on all sides with gold”. There were still more glorious things connected to the

ark. In the ark there were a golden jar holding the manna (Exo 16:33) and Aaron's rod (Num 17:8-10).

When you read the quoted verses it will strike you that of both the jar and the rod is said that they were placed *before* the ark. Here it is said that they were *in* the ark. That can only mean that they ended up in the ark later. How that has happened we do not know.

The contents of the ark is completed by the two tables of stone, here called "the tables of the covenant" (cf. 'the ark of the covenant'). The tables were in the ark from the beginning, because God had said so (Deu 10:5; 1Kgs 8:9).

V5. In his 'guided tour' in the earthly sanctuary the writer finally contemplates "the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat" (Exo 25:18-22). The two impressive angel images formed one whole with the mercy seat. Between the two cherubim that formed the throne of God was the place where God dwelt. They looked down on the mercy seat and the tables of the law and they were the symbolic representatives of God's judgment power to judge everything that was not in accordance with God's holiness.

The writer would have wanted to speak in detail about the meaning of the interior or the exterior of the tabernacle, but that was not possible. Of course it is also wonderful to be able to understand the spiritual meaning of those objects. That is certainly allowed and that is even the purpose of it if you read and study the book of Exodus, but that is not the point of the writer here. His purpose is rather to separate his Jewish readers from this whole earthly routine, because that whole temple service, including all its objects, has lost its meaning to God.

For them however, the temple with all its objects and the service connected with it still exerted a potential attraction. That is the reason why the writer demonstrates the emptiness of the earthly sanctuary and the uselessness to still ascribe any value to it. Though the teachings about the symbols are indeed very useful, the point of the writer is the sharp contrast between the symbols and Christendom. Again and again he shows the contrast: symbols – reality, earthly – heavenly, temporary – eternal; imperfect – perfect, and says that a mixture is not possible.

V6. After the writer has shown how everything was prepared, he then speaks about the service of the priests. Their service in the holy place, 'the outer tabernacle', consisted of taking care of the lamps and the offerings of the incense on the altar twice a day and the changing of the bread of the Presence once a week. This service happened on a regular basis, which is indicated by the word "always".

V7. That is a contrast with the service of the high priest of whom you read that he was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, "the second", just "once a year". This 'once a year' was on the tenth day of the seventh month, that is the day of atonement (Lev 16:29-30). And when he entered it, it was "not without [taking] blood". First he entered with the blood of the bull to offer that "for himself" (Lev 16:6,14). After that he entered with the blood of the first goat to offer that "for sins of the people committed in ignorance [that means: the sins that were committed unintentionally]" (Lev 16:15).

V8. The description of the tabernacle is not made up by the writer. He is simply following the instructions that the Holy Spirit has made known about it in the Old Testament. He also learns from the description of the tabernacle the teachings of the Holy Spirit that, as long as the first tabernacle with its closed veil is still maintained, there is no free access to God. His readers had to be fully aware that a return to the earthly service meant that they were closing again the way to God for themselves.

Had the veil not been rent and had the way to the sanctuary not been opened through the work of the Lord Jesus (Mt 27:51)? Each believer is allowed to come into God's presence on the basis of what the Lord Jesus has done. You too have a permanent access to God, a direct access to the place where He is, in the light. Would you want to exchange that privilege for a service that may be appealing to eye and ear, but takes you outside God's presence?

V9. The whole earthly tabernacle or temple service was "a symbol for the present time" to compare all the parts of that service with the heavenly tabernacle. The word 'symbol' literally means 'throw next to' with the meaning of throwing an object next to another object to compare these objects with each other. The purpose is that you compare both the building and the service that takes place in it, with the heavenly sanctuary and the

service that takes place there. As was fitting for an earthly sanctuary, tangible literal gifts and sacrifices – also at the time this letter was written – were offered.

The readers had to become fully aware that no sacrifice in the first part of the tabernacle had ever been able to make the worshiper perfect in conscience. He who returned to the old service would lose his perfect conscience and be continually accused again by his conscience. Someone who is perfect in conscience knows God and knows to be accepted by Him. He who has a perfect conscience, knows that he has been purified from all evil once for all by the work and the blood of Christ.

V10. The whole service according to the law with its offerings and regulations can and could never ever have that effect. They were all regulations for the outward man, the flesh, the body, and not for the inward man or the conscience or the spirit. In that way “food” had to do with the difference between clean and unclean animals (Lev 11:2) and “drink” for example refer to the prohibition for the priest to drink alcohol (Lev 10:9). Also the “various washings” have nothing to do with the inward man, but only with the outward man. In that way washings were necessary at births (Lev 12) and after leprosy (Lev 13-14).

All these outward regulations were imposed on the people by God “until a time of reformation”, that is the millennial kingdom of peace. When that kingdom comes, God’s earthly people will be cleansed from all sins by conversion and new birth and will be connected to God. The outward service will then not be an empty form anymore, not a religious event without content. It will be a service that will take place from a new heart which is fully in accordance with God’s thoughts.

Now read Hebrews 9:1-10 again.

Reflection: What does the writer want to make clear with this summary of the earthly worship service?

Heb 9:11-15 | Christ, High Priest and Mediator

11 But when Christ appeared [as] a high priest of the good things to come, [He entered] through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 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 serve the living God? 15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were [committed] under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

V11. The first word “but” indicates that what now follows is a contrast with what is written in the previous part. The word “Christ” presents the Person by Whom the whole earthly service, which is described in the previous verses, has lost its right to exist. The earthly service has not made any man perfect in conscience (verse 9) and also hasn’t brought a perfect situation (Heb 7:19). The only One Who is able and Who will indeed do that is Christ.

He has appeared as High Priest to guide His people into the rest of the promised millennial kingdom of peace. In that kingdom of peace, which is the future world, He will reign and bless His people with the “good things”. These good things “to come” exist in everything that will please the Messiah when He reigns. You recognize these good things in the bread and the wine with which Melchizedek met Abraham (Gen 14:18).

We have now already received the good things that are still to come for Israel: the eternal salvation, redemption, inheritance, covenant, a perfect conscience, free access to the heavenly sanctuary, fellowship with God. For the believing Hebrews and for you Christ has already appeared as High Priest. To us His service is not connected to an earthly sanctuary characterized by weakness and imperfection, but to the heavenly sanctuary.

The heavenly sanctuary is greater and more perfect than the earthly one. That heavenly sanctuary and the service He performs there, is not the result of men's work. In no way it is connected to the first creation. Therefore that sanctuary and the service that takes place there is guaranteed inviolable from any form of corruption, thus securing the blessing. With that blessing Christ as the true Melchizedek will soon come out of the heavenly sanctuary to His people on earth.

V12. The writer uses again the most powerful words in order to absolutely exclude any possible chance of the slightest doubt concerning Christ and His work. The assurance of the blessing is in the "own blood" of Christ with which He entered the holy place. That also stands opposite the earthly service with its animal sacrifices of which the blood could not take away sins (Heb 10:4). How could the blood of *animals* ever possibly take away the sins from *men*?

Christ entered the holy place to be there forever. His blood that was shed once for all eternally keeps its value and power. The work is finished and its value can never change. Because He always remains there, the access has been opened once for all and therefore we always have access to God in the light. We can enter, because Christ entered and we are able to enter because we are perfect in conscience.

He has obtained "eternal redemption". That redemption concerns the believers of all times. Even the whole universe will partake of it. It is about the rights that He as the Son of Man, Who will soon rule over the world to come, has obtained. Through His sacrificial death He has laid the foundation for the redemption of all believers and of all things (Col 1:19-22). The blood that forms the foundation is now in the sanctuary.

The blood has eternal value and therefore the redemption is also an eternal redemption. *Redemption* goes further than *forgiveness*. Forgiveness deals with our sins and it means that God doesn't impute our sins to us anymore because they have been removed by the Lord Jesus. Redemption deals with our own selves. It removes us from our former situation and brings us into a whole new position, connected to Christ.

V13. The writer wants to present the contrast between the cleansing rituals in the Old Testament and the cleansing by the blood of Christ with more emphasis. The blood of goats and bulls is connected with the day of atonement (Lev 16:3,14-15). The ashes, mixed with the water of purification, came from the red heifer (Num 19:9). These means were literally applied on the body of a person who had become unclean by a sinful manifestation or contact. By the sprinkling with the prescribed means that person became clean again. That cleansing concerned only his body, but on that basis he was allowed to be among God's people again. It did not say anything about his innermost being. These means also had to be used again when the person committed a sin again. The cleansing was only temporary.

V14. The blood of Christ and its functioning and the result of it are completely different. As far as heaven is above the earth, as far is the distance of what Christ has done and the value of His blood beyond the earthly cleansing rituals. In that way the Holy Spirit was present in each aspect of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and of His whole preceded life. The Lord Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35); He was anointed by Him (Acts 10:38); He was led by Him (Lk 4:1) and He acted through Him (Acts 10:38). Here we read that He "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God".

The value of the blood of Christ is that great because this blood is from Christ Who has offered Himself to God and that *through* the Holy Spirit. He is seen here as Man, Who, for the sake of all people who would believe in Him, offers up the sacrifice to a holy and righteous God in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ was an Offeror Who was able to offer a spotless sacrifice to God, because He was perfectly clean, righteous and without sin. He was the Offeror and the Sacrifice, Whose blood was brought into the sanctuary. And that's the point here.

The result is that the conscience of the believer is cleansed from "dead works", through which he is now able "to serve the living God". Dead works are all works that are not done in fellowship with the living God, but from one's own idea about serving God. Therefore, serving the *living* God is opposite to *dead* works.

‘Serving’ here has the meaning of serving as a priest. On the basis of the sacrifice that the Lord Jesus offered to God in Himself, all believers are now able to bring offerings to God. They serve God by honoring Him. The believers bring worship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24) by telling God what they have seen in the sacrifice of His Son.

All things will be judged by the question: ‘What does God, the Living One, think about it?’ The living God has no interest in ‘church attendances’ as such, but sees if there is any interest in His Person. Imagine that someone visits you, but only pays attention to the way your house is decorated and doesn’t look at you at all. That’s the way many people deal with God and His service. They do not realize that the Lord Jesus offered Himself to form a company of worshipers who would be able to draw near to God in the sanctuary with a fully cleansed conscience.

V15. This drawing near to God was impossible under the old covenant. To make that possible a new covenant was necessary. This new covenant concerns Israel and Judah and still has to be made with them, but God has already appointed and revealed the Mediator. This One has accomplished the work on which the fulfillment of the promises could be based. The sacrificial death of Christ delivers us from the transgressions of the old covenant and is the foundation for receiving the blessings of the new covenant: “the eternal inheritance”.

The transgressions under the first covenant could not be removed by the sacrifices under the first covenant. But the blood of the new covenant that was shed through the death of Christ, has completely blotted them out. They don’t press like a burden on the believer anymore, which is the case with those who remain connected to the old covenant. He who is connected to the Mediator of the new covenant, is redeemed from the transgressions. They are “those who have been called” and are able to receive the eternal inheritance on the basis of that redemption.

It is a great privilege to belong to the called ones, which also includes the receiving of the eternal inheritance. There can be mention of an eternal inheritance because the atonement is perfect. Sin has been removed and will be completely removed from the sight of God in accordance with the nature and the nature of God Himself. Christ, the Mediator (Heb 12:24),

mediates between a holy God and the defiled man. Moses was also a mediator, but then of the old covenant. But he didn't die for the people. As a sinful man, neither could he. What Christ did, He did not do in connection with the old covenant, for within that system there was no room for true cleansing and service. The service of Christ is connected with a new covenant. That makes everything totally different and perfectly certain.

Now read Hebrews 9:11-15 again.

Reflection: Which aspects of Christ and His work do you find in these verses?

Heb 9:16-28 | The Purification and the Appearance

16 For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. 17 For a covenant is valid [only] when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. 18 Therefore even the first [covenant] was not inaugurated without blood. 19 For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, "THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU." 21 And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. 22 And according to the Law, [one may] almost [say], all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. 23 Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a [mere] copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this [comes] judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without [reference to] sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

V16-17. These verses form a parenthesis. In verse 15 the writer spoke about the death and the inheritance. He is now explaining how these two are connected to each other. The one is not separated from the other. Then it was like that and it is still like that nowadays.

An inheritance is something that someone bequeaths when he dies. He who has possessions he bequeaths will usually make a testament. In a testament the 'testator' describes who will receive his possessions when he dies. That means that his death must have taken place before the heir, the one who is called the beneficiary in the testament, can enjoy the possession that is promised to him in the testament. Therefore it is said in these verses

that a testament only is valid when the testator dies. In order to execute the will of the testator, that one's death has to be absolutely sure.

Now the exceptional thing in this situation is that Christ is both the Testator and the One Who is entitled to that inheritance. As God He is Testator and as Man He died. As the Son of God He is also "the heir of all things" (Heb 1:2). Considering that He shares that inheritance with you (Eph 1:11; 3:6) and that you belong to the ones He called and who will receive the eternal inheritance (verse 15), it can only bring you to your knees to worship Him. These are things that are beyond human understanding, but in faith you will accept that they are true. It is exactly the glory of Christ and the mystery of His Person that make us draw near to Him in worship.

A testament or covenant therefore only is valid when death has occurred. That is not something that was only valid in connection with the new covenant. Also in the old covenant or Old Testament it was already like that. The Old Testament contains an abundance of examples of the necessity of the occurrence of death before men were able to stand in relationship with God. Just think of the whole offering service. Yet again a person either undergoes the judgment himself or sees how his sins are blotted out because an Other underwent the judgment for him.

V18-20. To illustrate his teachings the writer quotes another example that was familiar to his readers. Moses had passed on the words he heard from the Lord about His covenant on the mountain, to the people (Exo 24:3). The people then responded solemnly to obey this covenant. Thereupon Moses offered the offerings and sprinkled blood on the altar and on the people and the book (Exo 24:6). The blood is the blood that God commanded as His answer on the promise from the people. Threat came from this blood. God made known what would happen to Israel if the people would trespass the words of the Lord.

The blood of the new covenant speaks a totally different language. The believers of the New Testament are sprinkled with it. Atonement, forgiveness and blessing come from that blood (1Pet 1:2; Heb 12:24). In the value of that blood we, who are not any better than those who were under the old covenant, are able to stand before God.

V21. The sprinkling mentioned here, happened on the day of atonement, though not by Moses, but by Aaron. The point of the writer is to demonstrate the meaning of the blood under the old covenant and how everything was ruled by it. It clarifies the fundamental role of the blood, both in the old and in the new covenant.

V22. "Without shedding of blood" there is no forgiveness possible, nor redemption (verse 12), nor cleansing (verse 14). By saying that with blood "almost all things" are cleansed, it is clear that the writer is aware of exceptions, as, for example, for a poor (Lev 5:11-13; Lev 15:10; Num 31:22-23,50; 16:46).

There is almost nothing that modern theologians hate more than the very thought that without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. It means that humanity consists of hopelessly lost creatures on whom the death penalty lies and that only through death it is possible to remove this death penalty, through which lost creatures are able to receive forgiveness. How necessary the death of Christ was indeed!

V23. With "the copies of the things in heaven" the whole earthly tabernacle with its service is meant. They are an illustration of the better, true, "heavenly things". The symbolical things had to be cleansed, for they were touched by sinful people. That cleansing happened through blood. However, as a consequence of the fall of man also the heavenly things, that is the created heaven, are defiled (Job 15:15) and have also to be reconciled (Col 1:20). In connection with that cleansing the writer speaks about "better sacrifices". The blood draws our attention to the *work* of Christ; the sacrifice draws our attention to Christ *Himself* and the sacrifice He offered.

V24. Christ has entered "the true one", that is the heavenly holy place or sanctuary. The earthly sanctuary was the "copy". It was nothing more than a copy, an image or picture of the heavenly sanctuary. Christ has not entered the earthly sanctuary, but the heavenly one. He entered it in a different way than Aaron entered the earthly one. Aaron remained just a very short time in the sanctuary. Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary in order to appear in the light of God on our behalf. As a result of that we are able now to be there too. He represents us before God.

V25. Christ entered the holy place, the sanctuary, on the basis of His one-time sacrifice. That is perfect. Therefore repetition is not necessary. The day of atonement was totally different. There the prescribed sacrifices had to be offered each year. You can derive from the repetition that that was inadequate. The high priest had to enter the sanctuary over and over again with blood and indeed with strange blood, which means with other blood than that of himself. That is a great difference with the Lord Jesus Who on the contrary, entered the sanctuary with His own blood.

V26. The writer again demonstrates clear what the consequence would be if the one-time sacrifice of Christ had not been adequate. He would then have had to come from heaven numerous times, again and again, to suffer. This proves the foolishness and also the reprehensibility of the mass sacrifice of the roman-catholic church, in which Christ is sacrificed again and again. If that one sacrifice of Christ wouldn't be adequate, when then would His sacrifice be adequate? It is one of both: either the sacrifice of Christ was perfectly accomplished once for all or it will never ever be perfect. In the latter case an equally endless repetition would be required as this was the case under the old covenant.

But Christ came only once and has accomplished a one-time work that never has to be repeated ever (1Pet 3:18). The time of suffering was determined by God. It would happen at the consummation of the ages. Only when many ages had proven that there is no good to be expected from man, God sent His Son.

The corruptness of man has been fully exposed, with its lowest point the rejection of the Son of God. At the same time this great purpose of God to put away or abolish sin, was made known in the manifestation of the Son. He is the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). The complete fulfillment is still to happen, but the foundation for the ultimate, definite and complete abolishment is laid by the Lamb when He died.

V27. Everyone will die once. That is the inevitable consequence of sin through which death entered the world (Rom 6:23). With death the consequences of the earthly life are irrevocably and eternally established for everyone. He who dies in unbelief will end up in Hades, the place where pain rules (Lk 16:19-31; 1Pet 3:19), and finally in hell (Rev 20:11-15).

Man is not given a second life on earth. A circle of life and death, the so-called reincarnation, is a fabrication from the devil. People who ignore God love to believe that. Still, with death everything is not finished yet. There is an “after this [comes] judgment” that will be executed by Jesus Christ (2Tim 4:1; Jn 5:27).

V28. Like all people Christ has also died only once, but with what wonderful, heavenly, everlasting and irrevocable consequences for the believer! He has two great assurances: the forgiveness of his sins and the return of the Lord. Christ died in the place of everyone who believes in Him. He bore their sins (1Pet 2:24; Isa 53:12). When He appeared as Man on earth it was to die. Now He is in heaven, after He accomplished His work, He appears before God’s face for us.

When He appears for the second time on earth, it is then for them who eagerly await Him. This is not about the rapture of the church, but His appearing on earth. The remnant of Israel will eagerly await Him and we also are looking forward to see Him. We love His appearing (2Tim 4:8).

When He then comes it will have nothing to do with His work regarding sin because the problem of sin has already been solved once for all at His first coming. When He comes the second time, it will not be in humiliation, but in glory. Then the full salvation of the kingdom of peace will be realized by Him.

Now read Hebrews 9:16-28 again.

Reflection: Why is the value of the blood of Christ so great?

Hebrews 10

Heb 10:1-9 | I Have Come to Do Your Will

1 For the Law, since it has [only] a shadow of the good things to come [and] not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those [sacrifices] there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; 6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND [sacrifices] FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. 7 "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'" 8 After saying above, "SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND [sacrifices] FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE [in them]" (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

V1. The word "for" indicates that the writer continues his argument. He compares the many imperfect animal sacrifices of former times with the one and only perfect sacrifice of Christ. He speaks about "the Law" because that is the basis of the whole religion appointed by God for His people Israel in the Old Testament. Of that whole service he says that this "has [only] a shadow of the good things to come". By that he wants to say that the law surely says something about good things that will be enjoyed in future in the kingdom of peace by God's people and by the whole creation.

However, it is just 'a shadow' of it, which means a vague reproduction. This Old Testament worship service is "not the very form of things". A 'form' shows more reality than a shadow. We can say that a form is a faith-

ful reproduction of reality, but still a form is not reality. That becomes clear from what follows.

As proof the writer refers again to the sacrifices that were yearly offered on the day of atonement. It is precisely its repetition that proves that a sacrifice that was offered had made no one perfect who drew near to God. By offering the same sacrifices again and again the thought of the necessity for forgiveness and atonement was surely there. At the same time, however, it made it clear that the whole service was imperfect. It did not make those, who performed the service, perfect before God. The sacrifices did not make someone, who brought the offering, perfect in conscience in the light of the forgiveness of his sins.

V2. If there was brought a sacrifice that was sufficient for the one who offered it to get a perfect conscience, then it wouldn't be necessary anymore to bring another offering. The whole offering service then would have lost its reason of existence. Such an offering would have then made the offeror perfect in conscience: that is a conscience that is cleansed by forgiveness of sins. The result would be that there is no more fear for God concerning any sin.

V3. But what do you see with Israel? There you see that by bringing these offerings again and again every year, the sins on the contrary are continually "a reminder". There is in fact no sufficient offering. That makes the doctrine and the practice of the mass sacrifice of the roman-catholic church condemnable. In the mass sacrifice the roman-catholic church repeats the offering again and again and its followers are left in uncertainty about the forgiveness of sins.

V4. The blood of animals or a mass sacrifice could or can never ever do anything about the guilt of man. It is not possible that sins are taken away by that. The words 'take away' have a powerful meaning. It is the utter removal of sin so that it is no longer part of the situation. It is utterly reprehensible to attribute that effect to any sacrifice a human being brings.

V5. You might ask the question: but why did God prescribe the offerings to His people Israel and what is the purpose and meaning of it? The only meaning of the animal sacrifices is in the reference to the sacrifice of Christ.

This is apparent from the beautiful way in which the writer makes the transition from the animal offerings to the offering of Christ.

For this he uses some verses from Psalm 40 (Psa 40:6-8). The writer, guided by the Holy Spirit, is telling something here that you do not read in Psalm 40. He declares that these verses were spoken by the Lord Jesus, right before He became Man and so came into the world. This quotation also makes clear that this psalm is actually about the Lord Jesus, although David is the poet. Through this quotation it is explained to you what Christ said to God when He accepted to do the will of God. Here you also have a proof of His existence before He became Man.

Although the name of Christ is not mentioned, 'He' cannot possibly be a reference to anyone else. After all, Christ became Man and came into the world like that. He speaks to God about sacrifices and offerings that were offered under the old covenant, of which He says, God has not desired them. Of course that does not point to God's commandment to bring those offerings, for God indeed wanted His people to bring them. But God did not desire them or even purposed them to be offerings that could really take away sins.

He surely could forgive each Israelite who came with such an offering (and a sincere heart) because He saw Christ in that offering. He Himself actually made Christ available as the true offering by preparing Him a body. That means that it was God Who wanted Christ to become *Man*. And what is the task for a man to do toward God? To obey.

By becoming Man the Lord Jesus committed Himself to execute the entire will of God. If you take one more look at the verse in Psalm 40, then it will strike you that it is written there: "My ears You have opened." In Hebrew it is literally said: "My ears You have dug". 'Dug' here means prepared to obey. The Holy Spirit, however, as He more often does, has used the Greek translation (Septuagint) of Psalm 40:6-8. In the Septuagint 'My ears You have dug' is translated as "a body You have prepared for Me". Because this translation renders the true meaning it is quoted here by the Holy Spirit. You may say that by doing so the ear is identified with the body.

You probably know the saying: to be all ears. That was the case with the Lord Jesus. His body was prepared to do anything with it that God wanted Him to do. The opened ear was the means through which He listened to the will of His God and the body was the means through which that will was performed. The Lord Jesus has taken a body that He will never give up anymore.

There are two more verses that deal with the 'ear' of the Lord Jesus. The one verse speaks about the 'piercing' of the ear (Exo 21:6) and the other one speaks about the 'opening' of the ear (Isa 50:4). In these three verses about the ear you can see the sequence regarding His life on earth. They deal with

1. His coming into the world: His birth as Man (Psa 40:6-7),
2. His going through the world: He opened His ear morning by morning (Isa 50:4) and
3. His leaving the world: He gave His life for His own to serve them forever (Exo 21:6).

V6. The body of the Lord Jesus is therefore the true sacrifice (or peace offering) and grain offering. After His agreement to do God's will the Lord Jesus speaks to God about two more Old Testament offerings. Now He mentions "whole burnt offerings and [sacrifices] for sin". He also indicates as to them, that God could not be satisfied with those offerings regarding the removing of sins. He determines that the whole offering service of the Old Testament could create absolutely no situation at all in which God could bless man.

V7. When that became evident by the complete failure of man, the Lord Jesus offered Himself to fulfill the will of God. He did that with the perfect knowledge of what is written about Him in the Old Testament. After all, the Old Testament speaks everywhere about Him and about His coming on earth (cf. Mt 5:17; Lk 24:27).

He knew that the right moment finally had come now and that it was fully according to the time that God had appointed (Gal 4:4). It was the right time according to the will of God to perform His counsel that was written in the scroll of the book. The will of God here is: to provide for His people

forgiveness, perfection and access to the sanctuary and finally the entrance into the kingdom of peace.

Although His coming was established in the counsel, Christ still perfectly offers Himself freely to fulfill all things. He declares that He will do the will of God. Such a statement from anyone's mouth would be boasting. With Him it is perfection. There is no doubt whether He would be able to do it or not. What He declares in heaven He does on earth.

V8. In this verse the writer explains the quotation. He repeats what the Lord Jesus said "above", which means when He came into the world (verse 5). Then He said that God's will couldn't possibly be fulfilled by animal or vegetable offerings, although they were appointed by God Himself as offerings. They couldn't form a basis for God's plan with man and creation.

V9. Therefore it is that great that a "then" follows with the commitment of the Lord Jesus: "Behold, I have come to do Your will." God's plan will be performed by Him Who is coming and Who will bring the perfect offering. And He did that!

By what He did, He took away "the first" and put something else instead. The 'first' is everything that was appointed by God in the Old Testament for His people. The insufficiency of any of that was evident. When the Lord Jesus came He took the place of the whole service. Everything God had asked of man in that service is perfectly accomplished and fulfilled by Him. He takes the place of all types that God had prescribed; He is the replacement of all of them. The 'shadow service' made room for reality and therefore there is no room for the shadow service anymore. Every basis of its existence has been taken away.

However, He not only took away 'the first', He actually has also established "the second". He also changed the principle, through which man is now able to draw near to God. To be able to draw near to God the law demanded perfect obedience. On that basis it was impossible to draw near to God. Now that the Lord Jesus has perfectly fulfilled God's will, He is the basis of our connections to God. Through Him as the new and perfect

offering there is a new covenant with a new priesthood that enables us to draw near to God in a new, heavenly sanctuary.

Now read Hebrews 10:1-9 again.

Reflection: Which differences do you see between the former offerings and the true offering?

Heb 10:10-18 | Sanctified by the Will of God

10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," [He then says,] 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer [any] offering for sin.

V10. So the Lord Jesus has fully accomplished God's will. He thereby created a completely new situation. The old imperfect system has been replaced by what He Himself did. He is the center of God's blessing. The will of God can be executed, because of what He has done and because of Who He is. And what is that will here? God wanted a new generation of priests that would be able to draw near to Him in His holy presence. The Lord Jesus has taken care of that by accomplishing God's will. He has met all of the holy conditions of God.

In that way He has given to God a righteous foundation to sanctify us. God has "sanctified" or separated us for Himself on the basis of the offering of His Son. The power of the offering is eternal. Therefore our sanctification is "once for all", which means continuous, everlasting, forever. We belong to God forever, in accordance to the powerful effect of this sacrifice.

God's will was the sacrifice of Christ. God's will was also that we would be sanctified by the sacrifice of Christ. 'Sanctified' means 'set apart' and means here that we are made fit to be in God's presence, to be in His sanctuary. Isn't it impressive that considering that, God had prepared a body for the Lord Jesus? Only by preparing Him a body the Lord Jesus was able to offer Himself as 'a sacrifice'. With that in mind He said, when He

instituted the Supper, of the bread after He had broken it: "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk 22:19). Every time when we celebrate the Lord's Supper we may remember that.

V11. How totally different did the Old Testament services happen and how disappointing were the results. In the tabernacle and in the temple the priests *stood* continuously before the altar. Thus they exerted their ministry standing, which indicates that their work was never finished. They were not allowed to rest from their work. Time after time new sacrifices had to be offered: daily, weekly, monthly and annually. It was a cycle of offerings which was repeated over and again. And added to that the offerings the Israelite had to bring personally whenever he had sinned again.

The conclusion of the writer is simply shocking: they can never possibly take away sins. With this conclusion he erased the whole Jewish service. If someone from the readers would ascribe any value to it, he would enormously dishonor God and damage himself as well. That goes also for you and me. You shouldn't *want* to have anything to do with it either. And you surely will not want to if you carefully take a look at what's the opposite of that whole insufficient service.

V12. To demonstrate that to you the writer places opposite to all those priests who daily brought the same sacrifices the Priest Who offered only one sacrifice for the sins. And because this was a perfectly adequate sacrifice, He "for all time", which means permanently, uninterruptedly, continuously, "sat down". That shows the perfect rest which is the result of His work. Christ does not have to stand up anymore to bring such a sacrifice again.

And where does He sit? "At the right hand of God." Therein God's perfect recognition and the acceptance of His work are expressed. That He Himself went to sit there indicates the glory of His Person. He does not arrogate this place Himself, but He knows that He has fully responded to God's will and can therefore be there. God gave that place to Him (Psa 110:1).

V13. But Christ does not remain seated forever. From the moment He went to sit and after that ("from that time"), He is waiting until the moment He will rise again. When He rises it will not be to offer Himself again, but to

realize in judgment the final and definite results of His sacrificial work (Isa 33:10-12).

You also saw this in the concluding verses of the previous chapter (Heb 9:26-28). The reason there to appear for the second time is also not to die again for the sins. There His second appearance is related to the salvation of the believers. Here it is in relation to the subjection of His enemies. The Lord Jesus is waiting for that.

The writer again refers to the impressive verse from Psalm 110 (Psa 110:1). There you hear how God promises Christ to make His enemies His footstool. The Lord Jesus is waiting for the fulfillment of that promise patiently and persistently (2Thes 3:5; Rev 3:10). Only at God's time He will rise and not earlier.

V14. The word "for" indicates the reason why Christ was able to take the place at the right hand of God. He "has perfected for all time those who are sanctified". Here you have the content of the will of God. Through the offering of Christ everyone who is sanctified is made perfect in conscience, a conscience that is free from any burden of sin and fear for the judgment. Those who are sanctified are those who are separated for the service to God, the priestly service in the sanctuary. On that place you are put and that "for all time". That means that there never is any moment, in which you, as one who is sanctified, will not stand in the complete value of the work of Christ before God.

Perhaps you feel at times that some doubt rises whether you are really a child of God. You still disappoint yourself so often. Then read this verse and believe what it says. Doubt is only taken away by faith that God has perfectly accepted the work of the Lord Jesus and that its testimony is given in writing by the Holy Spirit in the Scripture.

The value that Christ and His work have to God, determines how God sees every person who has confessed his sins and has accepted Christ as the propitiation for his sins. Therefore it doesn't depend on your feeling or view, but on your faith in God and what He has said about His Son. If you do not believe what God says here in His Word, you make Him a liar (1Jn 5:10). Therefore do not allow anyone to rob the assurance of your salvation

by erroneous teachings, in particular Christians who take the law as rule of life. Throw your anchor in God's Word.

V15. Added to this testimony of God in His Word the testimony of "the Holy Spirit" is given, Who also "testifies" to the perfectly accomplished offering and its effect. You will experience this testimony inwardly in your heart if you believe God's Word. There is always a perfect match of the Word and the Spirit. Both the Word and the Spirit always point at the Lord Jesus and His work. You can read the Word, while the Holy Spirit gives you the inner conviction that what you read is the truth.

V16. The testimony that the Holy Spirit gives here is based on the Word and it is from the book of the prophet Jeremiah. It is the testimony to "us", who are first of all the Hebrew readers from that time and then the remnant in future. The quotation from Jeremiah relates to that. In chapter 8 (Heb 8:10,12) this quotation was already given attention to. It is a good thing to read the explanation about that again. It mainly deals with the effect of the new covenant in the millennial kingdom of peace. Here the quotation is rather meant to indicate that under the new covenant an inward work of the Holy Spirit is happening in the heart and in the mind of the believers.

It is wonderful to see that each of the three Persons of the Godhead has His own place and His own share in order to present you as believer perfect before God.

1. *God* is the source of your salvation. It was His will to sanctify you.
2. He was able to sanctify you because *His Son* has accomplished the necessary work for that purpose.
3. Of God's will and of the work of the Lord Jesus you obtained knowledge and you took part of it through the testimony of the *Holy Spirit* in your heart.

You can also put it like this: The assurance that God will remember your sins and lawless deeds no more, is

1. because of the irreversible will of *God* and
2. because of the perfect sacrifice of *Christ* and

3. because of the absolute testimony of the *Holy Spirit*.

V17. Before Christ accomplished the work sins were remembered or reminded (verse 3). After all, there was formerly no offering that could blot out sins radically. But through the offering of Christ they don't exist anymore to God. If God doesn't remember the sins anymore, then every necessity for a new offering is missing.

V18. This verse is the conclusion from the quoted prophecy from Jeremiah 31 and from the whole previous argument. Because the one offering has worked forgiveness no other offerings can be offered anymore to work forgiveness. What has been forgiven does not need an offering for sins anymore. No sin has been left that still needs forgiveness and therefore an offering for the penalty of all sins is already paid in full. Therefore each right of existence of the Old Testament offering service has been nullified. It has no value and meaning anymore.

Now read Hebrews 10:10-18 again.

Reflection: Are you entirely sure that God has sanctified you once for all through Christ and His offering?

Heb 10:19-21 | Confidence to Enter the Holy Place

19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since [we have] a great priest over the house of God,

In the previous verses and chapters the writer taught about the personal glories of the Lord Jesus and the perfection of His work. He made clear that through Christ and His work the foundation was laid for a new covenant. The old didn't bring anything to perfection, but through Christ and what He has done, God will fulfill all of His promises.

V19. After these extensive and profound teachings the writer starts the practical part. This order you always find in the letters. The teachings in this letter make clear that on the ground of the perfection of the work of Christ you are without sin in God's eye. It has also become clear that Christ entered the true sanctuary to sit there at God's right hand because His work is finished. That means that because of that, you also are allowed to enter "the holy place" or the sanctuary with full "confidence".

The questions about your sins are answered and they exist no more. The sins were imputed to Christ. The fact that He is now in heaven, is the proof that your sins have been blotted out forever. Therefore you are able to appear with confidence in the presence of God because your conscience is entirely free from sins forever. You honor the Lord Jesus by confidently entering the sanctuary. That is a pleasure to God.

The only hindrance to enter now is unbelief and to continue looking at yourself. You will surely still observe many imperfections on yourself. The question, however, is not how you see yourself, but how God sees you. He sees you, from the moment you confessed your sins, perfect in Christ. And what happens if you still do sin at times? Then it is not a matter between you and God, but between you and the Father.

The Lord Jesus knew that you, also as a believer, would be committing that sin. For what sins did He bear God's judgment? Only for the sins from before your conversion or also for all those sins you would, unfortunately,

still commit? When He died, He saw your whole life. For everything in it that was not according to God, He bore the judgment.

In this letter it is about the holy God and the sinful man and what the Lord Jesus has done to enable that man to be in God's presence. You should therefore look upon Christ and also upon God and how He values His work. The knowledge that all your sins were born by the Lord Jesus will not make you a superficial Christian. Exactly the awareness that He had to suffer for all your sins, will make you desire not to sin. In case it happens, it concerns, as said, your relationship with the Father. If you sin you will not be able to enjoy fellowship with the Father. Therefore it is necessary to confess each sin as soon as you become aware of it. Then fellowship with the Father will be restored.

This distinction between your relation to God and your relation to the Father is important. Regarding the relation to the Father we will go into details when we get to the letters of John. For this moment it is enough that you know of this distinction. Now the point is that you fully consent to God's appreciation of the perfect work of His Son, which also made you perfect before God.

For that reason the power of the word "therefore" (verse 19) is, that what follows is the conclusion of what is previously said. It is also the transition to the practical walk of life of the Christian that then follows and takes place from the fellowship with God in the sanctuary.

In the Old Testament a free entrance into the sanctuary was impossible. Such an entrance was not even presumed. But to the believers, who are connected to the new covenant, that free entrance in God's presence is reality. You are allowed to enter freely the open heavenly sanctuary to worship.

Isn't a peak of this letter reached by this? The sanctuary is open for "brethren" (and of course the sisters are included), those are all who are connected to the Lord Jesus and whom He calls 'My brethren'. You are in the sanctuary if you know to be in God's presence in the Spirit and enjoy in Christ the full love and confidence of His fellowship. Then you tell God what wonderful things you've discovered in the Lord Jesus. It is not about

the words you then use, but whether your heart is really full of Him. The way to God has been opened and paved for you by the blood of Jesus. By that blood you are washed and also the way to God's heart is cleansed.

I wholeheartedly hope that you extensively make use of that confidence by drawing near to God in the sanctuary and to speak with Him about the Lord Jesus. It is your personal privilege to do that. In great parts of professing Christianity individual believers are kept at a distance because others are drawing near to God on their behalf. That is the case when a reverend or bishop speaks to God on behalf of the believers.

Such believers think that they can only draw near to God through the means of a representative. In such a situation the Christian goes back to the Old Testament system and he behaves like a Jewish worshiper. But even where believers do know this privilege, people still can ascribe too much value to certain persons who (according to them) 'are able to say everything much better' or who (according to them) know the Bible better.

If you would ask a group of believers the question: 'Who among you wants to go to heaven?' then, I believe, everyone would raise his hand. But if you ask the same group: 'Who among you wants to go to heaven *now*?' then there is high chance that a silence descends and that the hands of just a few would go up, possibly of those who have enough of life on earth. God is inviting you and each of His own to come NOW into the sanctuary and to come as often as you want.

V20. You are allowed to enter "by a new and living way". The word 'new' has the meaning of 'just opened' and implies that the character of that way always keeps its meaning. It is a way that remains fresh and new because the work through which that way has been opened never gets out of date. It is also a 'living way' because it is connected to the Lord Jesus Who is the Life. It is a living way, not in the sense that that way leads to life, for the way is walked by those who have life already. The characteristic of this way is life. As a believer you are allowed to walk this way in the footsteps of Him Who lives.

This illustration of that 'way' to the sanctuary makes your entering the sanctuary a continuous fresh and new experience. It makes you forget the

time that has passed between the fulfillment of the work, already so many ages ago, and now. It will be like that forever as if it just happened that He bore your sins in His body on the cross; as if He just said: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). God's eye is forever focused on His Son as a Lamb that was just slain. That is the exceptional way John describes the Lamb that he sees "standing as if slain" (Rev 5:6).

This way has been "inaugurated" by the Lord Jesus. 'To inaugurate' is to take into use something new. Christ has entered the sanctuary as the First One, as Forerunner on the basis of His blood. On the basis of His blood you are now able to enter also and that is "through the veil, that is, His flesh". In the Old Testament God dwelled behind the veil. It was impossible that an Israelite could ever enter there. Only Aaron was allowed to do that and then still only once a year. But God Himself has shown that the way to Him is free by tearing the veil in two from top (thus from Him) to bottom (Mt 27:51). Through the flesh of Christ, that is His body, your sins have been paid for in full and therefore the way to the sanctuary has been opened for you.

V21. And when you enter the sanctuary by that opened way, you encounter there "a great priest". That is no one else than the Lord Jesus. He is available to you. He commits Himself to you. He is the High Priest, but here He is not presented like that. As High Priest He is the foremost among many priests. However, by presenting Him as 'great Priest' it is emphasized that to God there is only one Priest. He is 'great' in the glory of His Person and in the glory of His service in the sanctuary. If you are also allowed to draw near to God, it is only in Him.

He is the great Priest over "the house of God" (Heb 3:6). By that both the sanctuary and the family of priests is meant. His service in the sanctuary is perfectly to the honor of God and because of His Person pleasant to God. The service of the priestly family is also pleasing to God only because of His Person. How great He is!

Now read again Hebrews 10:19-21.

Reflection: Are you often to be found in the sanctuary?

Heb 10:22-27 | Draw Near to God

22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled [clean] from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging [one another]; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. 26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

V22. The way to the sanctuary is open. The confidence to enter it has been given. Now the writer is stimulating you to actually draw near to God. On the basis of your Christian position you have access to the sanctuary. So really make use of that privilege. To give you the full joy of that privilege the writer points out some conditions that are connected to drawing near to God in the sanctuary. Those are not meant to yet take away the confidence. It's not only *that* you should draw near, but also *how* you draw near.

You will surely agree that drawing near to God in the Holy of Holies cannot happen indifferently, without considering the Person Whom you're drawing near to. First of all there should be a "sincere heart" or an upright mind toward both God and men. To draw near to God in a way that pleases Him you ought to know your Christian position and value and enjoy that in your heart. In other words: You will rejoice in what you have become in Christ and thank Him and God for it. You will come "in full assurance of faith". Should you still have any doubt whether your relation to God is alright, then you will not be able to draw near to Him.

To really draw near to God in full assurance, full confidence or faith is necessary. Full assurance of faith completely rests in the love of God. With "having our hearts sprinkled [clean] from an evil conscience" the writer refers to the consecration of the priest (Exo 29:20; Lev 8:23). In the consecration of the priest a part of the blood of the consecration offering is put on the lobe of the right ear of the priest, and on the thumb of the right hand and on the big toe of the right foot. This picture shows that the hearing

(ear), the action (hand) and the walk (foot) are to be cleansed in order to be able to do a priestly service for God.

The writer here summarizes, as it were, ear, hand and foot in the heart because the center of all this is the heart. What you hear, what you do and where you go are out of the heart (Pro 4:23). Therefore, your heart may not be plagued by “an evil conscience”, for that draws you away from God. Through the sprinkling of the blood (Heb 12:24; 1Pet 1:2) your heart is clean and your conscience is perfect. But you should continually examine whether that is also the case in practice.

Not only the hearts are clean, but also the “bodies”. Not only should your inner being be in accordance with God, but also your outward attitude should be alright toward God. That asks from you to live up to that continuously. By your stay in and walk through the world you continuously get defiled. Therefore it is necessary to undergo the daily washing of the water by the Word (Eph 5:26). By reading the Bible you are cleansed.

V23. The previous conditions have to do with your drawing near to God. Though you're also dealing with the world in which you live. Toward the world it is important that you hold fast “the confession of our hope without wavering”. In the sanctuary you receive the strength for it. There you see that all promises of God will be fulfilled by Him, while you still don't see anything of it at this moment in the world. In the sanctuary however you see Christ in Whom everything that God has promised is ‘yes and amen’. Therefore entering into the sanctuary is an enormous encouragement for your testimony in the world.

There is no better way to prevent yourself from wavering than the remembrance of God's faithfulness. “He Who promised is faithful.” Your hope is not built on something within yourself, but on the faithfulness of God. That indeed gives firmness!

V24. There is another aspect. It's not only about your own trust in God, but you are also called to look after others and others are also called to look after you. It's an important thing to stimulate each other. To appreciate and stimulate your brothers and sisters it is necessary to see them in the

sanctuary, in the true light of Christ. That will determine your dealings with them.

Being gentle to each other is a good thing, though that is not enough. It says "to stimulate". In it, drive and effort resounds. True Christian fellowship in the sanctuary has the effect that we stimulate one another to have feelings of love for each other and to do "good deeds" what makes the other indeed experience that love (1Jn 3:18). We are to intensify the love to each other, for love is the right Christian mind and good works are the fruits of it.

V25. Beside your personal contacts, whereby you consider one another, there is also the own assembling together. There Christ is in the center to start the song of praise. The writer appeals not to forsake the own assembling together. There the confession of faith is made in a public and communal way. By forsaking the meeting you might pretend you are personally holding fast the confession, while you are avoiding to publicly unite with God's people in the hardships that are connected to the confession of this faith to the world.

The writer additionally mentions another motive not to forsake "our own assembling together": "the day", that is the day of judgment, is approaching. Forsaking our own assembling together is a clear sign of the decrease of affection toward one another. Forsaking the own assembling together often ends up in a return to the world or to a worldly religion. The thought of the day of judgment ought to affect the conscience. That thought is to prevent Christians from returning to the world and that they are protected against the influence of people or fear for man.

The own assembling together is a particularly relevant place for us to experience support from each other. The emphasis here is not what we receive in the meeting, but what we can contribute. The readers are reminded of the meetings of the church in the beginning where they were persistent (Acts 2:42), but in which they now are in danger of slacking. Some of them were already used to forsake the assembling. They stayed away without any valid reason.

V26. If a person out of fear for reproach and mockery consciously forsakes the gathering, he sins willfully! The word “for” at the beginning of this verse indicates the connection with the preceding in Hebrews 9-10, while it is also in immediate connection to the previous verse. That underlines the significance of the assembling together. If a Christian forsakes the gatherings it is not only an undignified behavior, but it is also dangerous. It means denying, if not despising, one of the most significant means for edification and comfort. It is also indifference regarding the fellowship of the saints.

Decay and finally falling away often start with abandoning the Christian gathering. He who forsakes the gathering of the church is not really impressed by the Lord Jesus Who is there in the center (Mt 18:20). He who loves the Lord, will love to be where He is. Considering that He also loves to be in the midst of His redeemed people, you will not forsake any gathering without a reasonable cause. Where He is He is always present with fresh blessing and growth.

If someone ever confessed to know the value of that one sacrifice and later abandons that confession, there is no sacrifice in which he could ever take refuge. ‘Willfully’ means freely, by your own free will and consciously. It is the opposite of ignorance. It is about professing Christians, who consciously and willfully are in open rebellion sinning against God. It is about people who have received ‘the knowledge of the truth’ and therefore have not had only a shallow impression of Christendom.

Such people were profoundly aware of the differences between the old and new covenant. They embraced the new, but they returned to the old, to the sacrifices that couldn’t take away sins, as it is already demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter. Such people always show a more bitter resistance than ignorant people. They are falling away from the only adequate work of Christ in order to willfully give in to sin again, to accept sinning as a habit again.

V27. The only thing they can expect for sure is a ‘fearful’ or terrifying judgment that will be revealed in the fury of a fire. Instead of being people who have held firmly to the confession of the truth under pressure, they became adversaries. He who abandons the knowledge of the truth he once

received, adopts the character of an enemy. Such a person is not one who is erring, for a person who is erring can possibly be restored again. For a stubborn enemy there is no hope for restoration.

Now read Hebrews 10:22-27 again.

Reflection: In this section there are some exhortations. Which are they? Are there some that you are to take to heart in particular?

Heb 10:28-39 | He Who Is Coming Will Come

28 *Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on [the testimony of] two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. 32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, 33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. 34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. 35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. 37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. 38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. 39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*

V28. We are in a section in which we are again warned against falling away. The consequences of falling away are presented in the most horrific way. After all it is not about a detail! It is about rejecting the only offering that God has given in His Son and to which offering the apostate at first consented. That is nothing else than deliberate rebellion against God. Rebelling against God, while knowing His will, was and still is a serious matter to God. Just take a look at the law of Moses. Whosoever rejected that law, in other words: trampled and despised it – so not accidentally transgressed it – died without mercy (cf. Num 15:30-36). Death penalty followed “on [the testimony of] two or three witnesses”.

V29. If God already punished rebellion under the old covenant that severely, how much severer will the punishment be if a person rebels against the

new covenant. The severer punishment is the eternal judgment, while in the Old Testament it concerned a corporal punishment. But the severer punishment is fitting for gravity of that sin. It is ultimately about nothing less than trampling the Son of God, the eternal Son, and despising His work.

You may say that transgressing the law was purely disobedience. How serious that might have already been, yet it is more serious to despise the grace of God and what He has done in His Son. It is rejecting the whole counsel of God's plan of salvation with a contempt that gives no hope for conversion. To trample something under foot indicates a contemptible treatment. This is how one who is only a Christian in name treats the Son of God when he, after having first acknowledged Him as the Son of God, later on exchanges Him for a tangible religion. It is the grossest form of denial that anyone can do to Him. By such a treatment the Lord Jesus is held for liar and His work as meaningless.

The latter appears from the denial of the blood of the covenant. Through this blood the confessor was sanctified, which means: set apart outwardly. It is the same sanctification that also applies to the unbelieving husband whose wife came to faith (1Cor 7:14). He confessed to be hiding behind the blood, like all members of the company he joined, though he didn't believe in the power of the blood. At a certain moment he accounted it unholy. It is not surprising that such a person also insults "the Spirit of grace". The Holy Spirit showed him grace when he entered professing Christianity by making him a partaker of His work in the church. But now he ignored the grace with a gesture of contempt.

V30. By speaking about "we" the writer places himself among those to whom he writes. He sees all of them, including himself, as confessors. They all had the same confession. But there was a chance that there were some among them for whom the confession was only a matter of the lips and not of the heart. With regard to them he speaks these serious words. He wants to appeal to their conscience, so that they still may open up their hearts to receive the truth and that they will not turn to a religion that is rejected by God and which will surely cause them to die in their sins.

They all knew God as the One Who judges. None of them was ignorant about that. God's vengeance implies that He will righteously measure what a person is worthy of. He will repay and judge in a righteous way.

V31. He who falls away from the living God (Heb 3:12), will surely fall into the hands of the living God. How totally differently does the believer look at the hands of God. He loves to entrust himself to them (2Sam 24:14) because he trusts that God is perfectly righteous and full of love.

V32. After his severe exhortations the writer appeals encouragingly to the readers again from verse 32. He has expressed his fear for the falling away of a very few, but for the many of the company he doesn't have that fear. He saw the fruits of the new life with them. He reminds them of that by taking them back in spirit to the former days. He speaks about them being "enlightened". By that he meant that they had discovered what Christendom meant more than Judaism. When they discovered that, they accepted the new.

They were prepared to endure "a great conflict of sufferings" that it caused. Suffering goes hand in hand with accepting the Lord Jesus. There is not a single ground for the thought that the church will take possession of everything by a worldwide advancement of the gospel. It is a good thing to think of that always.

V33. The writer speaks about two forms of suffering. There is a suffering that they individually experienced and a suffering they experienced by sympathizing with the sufferings of others. The suffering they endured by themselves consisted of "reproaches and tribulations" which were caused to them by their unbelieving fellow countrymen. Besides, these fellow countrymen were watching them like "a public spectacle" (cf. 1Cor 4:9). This suffering was visible for their surroundings. The other form of suffering is sharing in the sufferings of others. This is not personally, but it is spiritually sharing with others who endure it personally (Heb 13:3; Mt 25:36,39). They had encouraged, probably visited, those who were kept in captivity because of their faith.

V34. They were robbed from their possessions. Resentful Jews did that by plundering or confiscation. But they did not grieve about it. On the

contrary, they “accepted joyfully” their loss. Did they still recall how that happened? Because they were convinced that they had a possession, which they could never lose, namely “a better possession and a lasting one”. It is a treasure in heaven where thieves cannot ever come (Mt 6:20; 1Pet 1:4). When the eye is focused on that then there is power, courage and perseverance to continue the path of faith till the end. The suffering they endured was simply because they had chosen the right path.

V35. Because of that, “therefore”, they were not to throw away their confidence with which they were proceeding the path of faith. At the end the reward was surely awaiting them: the eternal inheritance in the promised land.

V36. It was, and it is for you, a matter of endurance. A lack of endurance results in falling away from faith. Endurance means remaining in the circumstances one finds oneself without escaping them. By endurance you partake of “the promise”: the inheritance.

Therefore “the will of God” has to be done. Always when ‘the will of God’ is spoken about in a letter it is said in relation to the content of the letter. The will of God here has to do with the faith in the testimony concerning Jesus as the Messiah, Who was crucified, Who has died and raised, which caused that the sins are taken away. It is also His will that you look at a High Priest in heaven at the right hand of God, while on earth you possibly have to endure tribulation and persecution. It is God’s will that you endure in that until you will be with Him.

V37. And that will only last “a very little while”, for Christ is coming soon and will fulfill everything that has been promised. His offering fitted you to partake of the fulfillment of the promises. The reason why you still have to wait and why you were not immediately transferred to heaven right after your conversion is that the faith you are confessing is tested as to its trueness. He is coming and will not delay. If ‘delaying’ becomes a central matter in your life you will become unfaithful to the Lord (Mt 24:48-50) and from the good servant you are now you will turn into an evil servant.

V38. To prevent that, it is necessary to live according to the principle of faith. The writer quotes here for the third time in the New Testament a

verse from Habakkuk (Hab 2:3-4). In each of the three quotations the emphasis is different.

1. In the first quotation, the emphasis is on 'righteous' (Rom 1:17);
2. in the second, it is on 'faith' (opposite the law) (Gal 3:11) and
3. in the third, it is on 'life' (opposite to perishing in the wilderness, falling away) (Heb 10:38).

As long as the coming of the Lord is delayed, the righteous should live from the power of his faith. He who lives as a righteous one has nothing to fear for and will surely endure. God speaks here of "My just". This resonates the affection God has for everyone who lives from the faith in Him in a world that is against Him.

V39. He who is a Christian by name will turn off and be rejected by God. Shrinking back is withdrawing from the path of faith, leaving that path. That can happen for example because of fear for men, which causes the necessary endurance to disappear. It can also happen by ignoring the Word of God and not looking upon the High Priest alone anymore. Such people do not please God. They return to the dead works from which they had turned off under the confession of the power of the blood of Christ. In the next chapter God will present people who do please Him.

The writer does not assume that his readers are such apostates, just as he himself is not, for because of the word "we" he is using, you see that he again includes himself. I suppose that you too are not of the kind that shrinks back and who from fear abandons Christendom and has to meet such a terrible judgment.

I suppose that you belong to those who "have faith to the preserving of the soul", which means that you live by faith and in that way you preserve your soul until the end of the journey.

Now read Hebrews 10:28-39 again.

Reflection: Do you sometimes fear for falling away from faith or do you know of another person who does? What is your reply to that fear?

Hebrews 11

Heb 11:1-4 | Living by Faith (I)

1 Now faith is the assurance of [things] hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

You're at the beginning of a wonderful and an enormously encouraging chapter. It is full of examples of persons, who lived by faith. Their lives have proven the power and the working of faith. Therefore the whole chapter speaks about nothing else than faith. All these examples are quoted by the writer to show the Hebrews, and also you, what a person who lives by faith, is capable of.

This faith is not different from the faith that brought you to God and with which you put your confidence in God for the forgiveness of your sins. That was the beginning of your faith. But faith always remains active. Faith in God is: trusting Him, regarding Him as faithful, having the assurance that He helps and that He does what He says. The future becomes present by faith and in that way what is invisible becomes visible. And the difficulties you are faced with are the challenges for faith. Difficulties are, as it were, food for faith, difficulties are the very causes for faith to prove itself.

V1. This verse has also been called the definition of faith, but this is not correct. Faith cannot be defined. Faith is the effective power in view of the future and in view of the present. Faith fixes the eye *forward*, to what has been promised and is absolutely sure that it will be achieved: it "is the assurance of [things] hoped for". Faith fixes the eye *upward*, to God and Christ: it is "the conviction of things not seen". Faith looks forward and upward.

In verses 1-7 you see that faith is the most important thing in the relationship between man and God and indeed from the beginning till the end. It is about creation, sin and offering, life and walking to the pleasure of God, the testimony toward the world, the judgment on the world and finally the millennial kingdom of peace. In all these aspects the Son is central. Creation shows the Son as Creator. The offering shows the Son as Redeemer. A life and a walk to the pleasure of God is perfectly seen in the Son. When He was in the world He has given a perfect testimony of Who God is. The Son will judge the world and He will also establish the millennial kingdom of peace.

Furthermore, creation points forward to the recreation of which the Son is the Heir. On the basis of the offering all things will once be subjected to the Son. In the taking up of Enoch (verse 5) you see a picture of the rapture of the church, the heavenly people of God. The church is connected to the Son and shares in all that belongs to the Son and what He will receive in the kingdom of peace. Noah (verse 7) is a type of the earthly people in the millennial kingdom, of the believers who will inherit the world through judgments.

The common thread through everything is faith. This theme connects everything together. If you summarize verses 1-7, you can say the following. Faith sees

1. that the visible things came from what is not visible;
2. that the sacrifice is the only ground to exist before God;
3. that a walk to the pleasure of God is possible by believing that He is (looking upward);
4. that a new world is awaiting (looking forward).

V2. This is the faith that "the men of old", men and women of faith from the Old Testament, the former generations of Israel, had. They demonstrated again and again that they were sure of what they hoped for and were convinced of what they did not see. Therefore they gained approval from God. God gave in their conscience His approval. God still does that in everyone who lives in daily trust in Him whatever circumstance he is in.

V3. After the two introductory verses you get examples of the effect of faith. The first example implies that only by faith you are able to understand how the worlds were prepared, namely by the word of God. There is here no mention yet of men and women of faith from the Old Testament. Here it is about you, about your insight in the preparation of the worlds. Everything you see, is not made of something else that is seen, but emerged from the Invisible. This principle goes for everything that has to do with the practice of faith. In the life of faith nothing emerges from something that is seen around us, but only emerges from the unseen God Who also prepared the worlds.

God has spoken and as a result all that is visible came into being. That's how it works when God speaks. His speaking is full of authority and effect. He speaks and it is done (Gen 1:3; Psa 33:9). In that way He "prepared" the worlds (the world of the stars, the world of angels, the world of men), which means that He has put them in order, classified them; He put everything in its right place. The only way you can "understand" or inwardly, spiritually see this, is by faith. Faith determines that God placed everything exactly there where He wanted it to be (Rev 4:11). There is no gradual development, evolution, in creation.

In this third verse all the erroneous arguments of the human spirit, who have endlessly looked for and are still looking for the existence of things, are judged and eliminated in one phrase. The one invented system is still more foolish than the other to explain the things that become perfectly simple when faith acknowledges God. The universe is not a cause that is creating. It has been created itself and it functions through a law which God has imposed on it.

V4. God uses His creation as a platform on which the working of faith is displayed. Then He created man on that platform. With that man He wanted to have fellowship, contact. Through sin that has entered the world, this fellowship is cruelly disturbed. Due to this man was not able anymore to draw near to God. But even worse: man who fell into sin could not exist before God.

God should remove him from this platform. But in His love and mercy God gave a way. He made a Lamb available as a sacrifice for fallen man,

so that on this righteous ground he could still exist before God. In Abel the example of the power of faith in the sacrifice is presented.

Abel had the insight of someone with a conscience that was taught by God. He acknowledges God's judgment over sin. He goes to God and confesses to be a sinner. But he comes with a substitute, an offering which he, as it were, places between himself and God. In this way he obtains the testimony that he was righteous. This testimony is in accordance with the righteous judgment of God. God had to execute judgment. He judged the offering and due to that Abel could go free. Not only the offering is accepted, but Able himself too who came with the sacrifice.

If you draw near to God through the offering of the Lord Jesus, God testifies to the offering that it is righteous and He also testifies to you that you are righteous. Your righteousness has the value and the perfection of the offering, which means of Christ Who offered Himself to God. To God you are now according to the perfection of the work of Christ. What that means you already have read comprehensively in this letter.

So the first man of faith is Abel. In him you see a believer who actively presents himself to God on the ground of a substitutionary offering. Also his brother Cain is mentioned. He also brought an offering, but the offering of Abel was better or more than that of Cain. Abel's offering had added value. The added value was the fact that Abel killed an offering according to the example that God had given after the fall of man (Gen 3:21), while Cain came with his own good works that also came from a cursed earth.

Abel's sacrifice was, as it seems, not because of a special sin, but he offered it because of the awareness that man could only exist before God on that ground. The sacrifice of Abel was accepted. Possibly the fire from God fell on it, visibly, like what happened at the tabernacle (Lev 9:24), at the temple (2Chr 7:1) and with the offerings of David and Elijah (1Chr 21:26; 1Kgs 18:38).

Cain acknowledged the existence of God and desired to gain His favor, but he did not acknowledge to be a sinner. He turned his back to God. The difference between the persons who brought the sacrifices is faith. Abel's faith *and* his sacrifice made God declare him righteous.

Abel had to pay his life of faith with his death by the hand of a murderer. His testimony on earth was ended that way, but the message that was sent through it did not. That echoes through the ages in a way that was not possible in another way. God uses the work of satan entirely against the will of satan to the greater glory of His Name.

Now read Hebrews 11:1-4 again.

Reflection: What do you do with faith? How does that affect you?

Heb 11:5-8 | Living by Faith (II)

5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please [Him], for he who comes to God must believe that He is and [that] He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned [by God] about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

V5. In the example of Abel you have seen that the death of an innocent substitute was the means that God accepted you. With Enoch you see a next step. He who is declared righteous, walks in faith. The name Enoch means 'taught'. He who is taught in the value of the offering, learns how to walk by faith and is taken up by that same faith. As a principle you are freed from the power of death through the offering of the Lord Jesus. Everything that belongs to the old man, is taken away by that offering (Rom 6:6). The devil, who had the power of death, is rendered powerless (Heb 2:14). The victory over death is that perfect that if it pleases God you can go to heaven without passing through death.

That happened to Enoch and that's what will happen to the church at the rapture (1Thes 4:15-17). Elijah also went to heaven without dying (2Kgs 2:1,11). Enoch and Elijah both lived in a time of great wickedness. Like Elijah Enoch was a prophet of judgment (Jude 1:14-15). In the first place this judgment came by the flood. But its prophecy extends to the end of time, the return of Christ. A person who lives with God, obtains understanding of the future where Christ is the Center.

Now it is said of Enoch here "that he was *pleasing* God". When you read in Genesis 5 what is said about Enoch, you read that He *walked* with God (Gen 5:24). As the writer does more often in this letter he quotes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. In the Septuagint 'walking with God' is translated into 'pleasing God'. The writer takes that

over here under the guidance of God's Spirit. That implies that 'walking with God' is identical to 'pleasing God'.

If you think of walking you should think of the whole way of living. Enoch involved God in all aspects of his life. God was the object of his walk. It also has been presented in such a way that Enoch in his walk with God had come that close to heaven that God said: 'Come in.' I believe that we should also be like that as members of the church. The rapture of the church should not surprise or overwhelm us, but should be in continuation of a walk with God. A walk with God can only bring you closer to heaven.

Enoch obtained the witness of God that he was pleasing to Him "before his being taken up". His faith was revealed during his life that preceded his being taken up.

V6. Without faith a walk like that of Enoch is impossible. A person who does not believe is absolutely incapable of walking in a way that God looks at with joy. The walk of Enoch pleased God because that walk reminded Him of the walk of the Lord Jesus when He was on earth. To God the future is present. He looked ahead to the walk of the Lord Jesus. Therefore He reports it. This is how it ought to be with every believer (1Thes 4:1).

You can only walk with God if you believe "that He is". That is something different and goes much further than believing that He is *there*. Demons also believe that God is there, that He exists (Jam 2:19), but that doesn't affect their evil resistance against God at all. To believe 'that God is', means that you really experience His presence in your life and that His presence is the main thing in your life. It means that you believe that He is interested in your walk and knows about your walk. You draw near to Him and you seek Him because you trust Him and know that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. Seeking fellowship with the Lord is abundantly rewarded.

V7. The characteristic of the faith of Enoch is that he had a hidden relationship with God. With Noah you see how his faith made him a public witness of God toward the world. God gave Noah an indication about things he couldn't yet observe with his natural eyes. God told him about the flood He had to bring on the world because of the incorrigible and evil conduct

of man. When Noah heard that, he became a preacher of righteousness (2Pet 2:5; 1Pet 3:19). At the same time he continued to listen to God.

The result of that was that he not only preached, but he indeed took action. His testimony existed of a deed of obedience. On God's command he built an ark. That was a remarkable testimony that he didn't expect anything from this world anymore, for it was going to perish by the waters of judgment. By building the ark he also showed that he fixed his hope on a new world. He could see both the judgment and the new world only by faith. That made him "an heir of the righteousness" that is characteristic for a world that is purified from evil through the judgment of God. He was going to inherit the world as a truly righteous man (Psa 37:29).

This example serves to encourage the Hebrew believer (Heb 2:5) and us. The Hebrews were possibly asking themselves why they were a minority if they were right. The example of Noah was meant to encourage them. Only eight people were saved (1Pet 3:20), while the rest of the world perished. Noah and his family are therefore a picture of the Jewish remnant. They represent the remnant of Israel that will go through the great tribulation (presented in the flood) and with the coming of the Lord Jesus will enter the millennial kingdom of peace. These events will follow in the history of salvation after the rapture of the church that is presented in Enoch.

It was not fear and anguish that led Noah to build the ark, but his respect for God's Word. In the same way your walk in faith should also be the result of the respect that you have for what God has said. From your walk it will be apparent how you respond to what God says to you in His Word.

Another remarkable thing is that Noah does not only prepare an ark for himself, but for his household. This implies that God wants to save a person *and* his household. That is an extra responsibility for the head of the family.

This particular verse about Noah delivers a number of aspects of faith that are worthy of being mentioned:

1. First there is the ground of his faith: he is warned by God.
2. Then you read about the territory on which his faith is focused: things that were not yet seen.

3. Then you notice the practice of his faith: he was moved with reverence for God.

4. Then you see the work of his faith: he prepared an ark for himself and his household.

5. Then the result of his faith follows: he saved his household.

6. His whole conduct was a witness of faith: he was judging the world.

6. Finally he received a reward of faith: he became an heir of righteousness.

You could say that in verses 1-7 in the several events and people the *general principles* of faith are presented. In the section that now follows, verses 8-22, the main point is the *perseverance* of faith. The examples show believers who walk as pilgrims in the power of faith that God will fulfill His promises, even though that fulfillment still seems to be so far away.

You read in this section seven times the expression “by faith”. The examples that the writer brings forward are the patriarchs who were so familiar to the Hebrews. Concerning Abraham you read four times about faith. That was

1. with his call and obedience (verse 8),

2. in connection with his sojourning (verses 9-10),

3. when it comes to life from death (verses 11-12) and – after a parenthesis in verses 13-16 –

4. when he is tested (verses 17-19).

The other three times are

1. about the faith of Isaac who by faith proves his knowledge of God’s ways (verse 20),

2. about the faith of Jacob at the end of his path of faith, which was full of experiences (verse 21) and

3. about the faith of Joseph who looks forward to the redemption of God’s people (verse 22).

The application to the Hebrews and also to you, is clear. Each man or woman of faith of the past illustrates certain aspects of faith that should also characterize the Hebrews. It altogether refers to the future age and particularly to the heavenly side of it.

V8. The previous men of faith were not called to abandon anything, but Abraham has to do that. When God calls him, he goes, even though he doesn't know where he will end up. The faith of Abraham shows a full trust in God. He had nothing to focus on, he knew nothing nor a name of anything or any particularities of the land he was guided to. God was sufficient for him. He did not ask: 'Where do I go?' His faith was not mixed with his own calculations. He trusted in the word of the God Who cannot deceive.

The life of Abraham is the great example of the New Testament believer (Rom 4:11) who is also called (Rom 8:30; 1Cor 1:2; 1Pet 2:9). The crucial point of the calling is the promise. To obtain the promise you have to give up everything. You only do that if you trust that He Who calls you, is everything and that He has a better world for you: a world filled with His glory in Christ.

The obedience of Abraham was immediate. It was not motivated by the attractiveness of what was presented to him, but by the glory of Him Who spoke (Acts 7:2).

Now read Hebrews 11:5-8 again.

Reflection: Which aspects of faith do you encounter in this section and which of them are of importance to you?

Heb 11:9-16 | Living by Faith (III)

9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign [land], dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, [as many descendants] AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. 13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that [country] from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better [country], that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

V9. When Abraham comes to the place where God has led him, he doesn't receive anything (Acts 7:5). That is a new exercise of faith. That same exercise you have too. You have been converted and know that it implies that you belong to the Lord Jesus Who has all power in heaven and on earth. But what do you see of that at this moment? At this moment you are a stranger on earth without civil rights. This is not your home. An English song we often have sung with young people says it well: 'This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through.' However, you may look forward to soon, when the Lord Jesus will take possession of the world. Then you will possess the world together with Him.

Until that time the promise of that possession gives you the strength to live here as a stranger. The sojourning of Abraham is underlined by the fact that he dwelt in tents. A house is the symbol of a permanent residence, while a tent indicates the temporary character of a dwelling place. Also his son Isaac and his grandchild Jacob were living like that. They also, as fellow heirs of the same promise, have not received what was promised.

In case Abraham expected that they would then at least receive the fulfillment, it would then be a new exercise of faith.

V10. Abraham is not discouraged by that. He remains focused on what the Lord has promised. Although he has nothing, his affections have a firm character. He longs for a better land and clings directly and completely to God. If you trust in God and give up everything for His sake you will always gain more and you will learn more from the ways of His might. Abraham has learnt by faith to look for something beyond a fulfillment in his days that is better than a possession on earth. Hadn't he seen the God of glory (Acts 7:2)? That caused an unprecedented, and in the Old Testament not revealed, extent to his faith. That's what you see here. Abraham looked higher than an earthly people and an earthly land. He saw a heavenly city, that is the heavenly center of the future age, the millennial kingdom of peace.

It is a "city which has foundations". This stands opposite to dwelling in tents on earth. Of that city God is both the "architect" – or technician, artist, designer, someone who designs building plans – and the "builder". Then it must be a perfect city. This cannot be other than that every grandiosity of nowadays cities, designed by imperfect people, pales in comparison and loses any appeal. It must be a joy too to live in God's city. Every citizen will feel at home there. All things of and in that city bears the character of its Architect and Builder.

V11. Here the question is whether it is about the faith of Abraham or about that of Sarah. For a long time there has been the thought that it is about Sarah, though it seems not impossible that it is about Abraham. Because I find it difficult to make a well-founded choice, I would like to say something of both.

When Sarah heard the message that she was going to give birth to a child, she did not immediately prove to have faith in the promise (Gen 18:12). After all, she was ninety years old (Gen 17:17) and therefore too old to even be able to become pregnant. But in the description of the birth of Isaac you read that it was Yahweh Who took care of Sarah and He did for her as He had promised (Gen 21:1-2). It therefore also looks like Sarah after all indeed had faith in the promise of God. In his first letter Peter supports

that thought by presenting her as a woman who trusted in God (1Pet 3:5-6). Her faith drew its strength from the faithfulness of God to His promise. Therefore she gained ability to become pregnant.

But from this occasion also the faith of Abraham becomes apparent. Of him you don't read that he had any doubt about God's promise. In fact you read that he did *not* doubt the promise of God (Rom 4:19-21). He himself was well aware that conceiving a child was impossible. After all, he was a hundred years old (Gen 17:17; 21:5). However, for his faith it was not a hindrance at all to trust God that He was able to provide him with descendants. No, on the contrary, because the fulfillment of the promise of descendants was physically impossible, he focused himself on God alone. Abraham considered God faithful and able, for He had promised it.

V12. Therefore this one man received innumerable descendants. Of this one man it is also underlined that he was "as good as dead". That emphasizes that God gives life from death. The son of Abraham, the son of the promise, comes, as it were, from the death and by that therefore also all his descendants.

This points forward to what God has done with the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the beginning of an entirely new situation, the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promises altogether that will find their accomplishment in the millennial kingdom of peace. Then the descendants that are in the heavens, "the stars", and on earth, "the sand", will enjoy God's blessings in full measure.

V13. As it is said, the writer interrupts his argument in verse 13 to continue that in verse 17. In this interruption he makes some remarks about the faith of life of the patriarchs. They not only *lived* in faith, they *died* in faith too. During their life they did not receive what was promised to them. Nevertheless they did not lose what was promised when they died. They took that along with them into their graves. "Having seen them ... from a distance." Their faith saw forward and they embraced in faith what they saw in faith. They also witnessed to that. They "confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth", which means that they openly testified to this faith; they did not keep it for themselves (Gen 23:4; Psa 119:19).

In their way of life you see that they had no home on earth, but that they were strangers and exiles on it. They did not demand their rights, for they didn't have any and they neither pretend to have any. This is different with many Christians.

V14. The confession of those who died in faith was not a lip confession which was contradicted by their practice. In their practice you saw what they confessed with their mouth. They clearly showed what they were looking for, which means that they were longing for, a country of their own. You only do that if you're sure that you haven't come there yet.

V15. Their pursuit did not make them think of returning to the country they had left. The lusts of the flesh, the attractions of the world, the obligations of family relationships, the daily business worries of life, could have altogether been in different ways and on different times enough reason for them to return, but they did not.

The difference between Lot and Abraham is a good example of this. Lot went on the journey with Abraham to the land that was promised by God. But he had no desire for it. Once he has come there and then sees another beautiful area, he chooses that one (Gen 13:10-11). Abraham could have returned, for he was not thrown off his country. He freely departed from there. Nevertheless, Abraham remains longing for the city of God.

V16. The patriarchs did not desire to go back to their old country, but they were looking forward to a heavenly country, that is a better country. By longing for that, they honored God. He offered them a better prospect and they believed what He said. Their faith was that great that they became aware that His promises meant more than the literal description indicated. Behind the description of the wonderful promises they saw Him Who will fulfill them and Who is at the same time the center of it.

Many things in Christendom are 'better' than in Judaism, to which now also 'a better country' is added. This country is not heaven. It is about the resurrection. It is the place where the risen and glorified saints will live forever and ever. Within the framework of this letter this heavenly country is the 'future world', or 'the future age', and then the heavenly side of it. This is the millennial kingdom of peace, the day of the Lord Jesus, to which the

patriarchs have been looking forward (Jn 8:56). The faith of the patriarchs saw the reality, not just something vague.

God is not ashamed of such believers. He joyfully bears their name as 'family name', so to speak. It is after all true when you read that He is the 'God of Abraham'. Do you think that He would joyfully bear your name as 'family name' also? He surely would if you also see the reality of that heavenly country and heavenly city and if you live up to that. His city is ready to welcome you. God took care of that. It is the inheritance that is prepared in the heavens and that is well reserved for you there (1Pet 1:4).

Now read Hebrews 11:9-16 again.

Reflection: Which characteristics of faith are reflected in Abraham's life and what can you learn from that?

Heb 11:17-23 | Living by Faith (IV)

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten [son]; 18 [it was he] to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19 He considered that God is able to raise [people] even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. 21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, [leaning] on the top of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones. 23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

V17. After the parenthesis of verses 13-16 the writer is now going to say something about the individual patriarchs and how they believed God. The first is again Abraham. You have already paid attention to several proofs of his faith. Those are impressive proofs. But now the writer quotes an example of his faith that is unprecedented. This proof of his faith is again connected to the son he and Sarah received.

When he and Sarah were too old to beget children he persisted in believing that God was still able to give him a son. God after all promised that, didn't He? And because God is faithful to what He promises, it is a matter of waiting for His time to give what He has promised. For Abraham, it is truly true that what is impossible with men is possible with God (Mk 10:27). But now God is asking him to offer up his son. That is a test of unprecedented gravity.

The first time he was promised a son, which he received by faith. Now God is asking him to offer up this son, though this son was the heir through whom God was going to realize His promises. This couldn't be true, could it?! This test of his faith was much heavier than the previous one. Still Abraham offered up his son as a burnt offering when God asked him to (Gen 22:1-10). With this offering up Abraham put all promises he had accepted on the altar. He was promised to have descendants and also a land, but he gave this all back to God in Isaac when He asked for it. He offered up "his only begotten son" (Gen 22:2).

V18. He did not do that impulsively. He pondered on the question God asked him. He must have struggled with the question how God could ask him that. It did not match with the former commitments, did it? God was going to realize His promises through Isaac and not through another son, for example Ishmael, right? No, God explicitly mentioned the name of Isaac when He said: "In Isaac your descendants shall be called."

V19. Therefore he had considered, that is: he had formed a conviction by consideration and calculation. Then there could only be one answer and that is that God would raise Isaac from the dead. Therefore he says in Genesis 22: "And I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you" (Gen 22:5). That means that he believed in the power of God, a power that great by which He can "even" raise dead people.

Abraham's faith is therefore that great because it is not likely that Abraham had an example of someone being raised from death. Through his consideration of what God had said about His might to carry out His word he came to this conclusion. true faith is not 'wishful thinking' or a visualizing things through which you 'claim' what you want, as long as your imagination is strong and persistent enough. True faith always clings to some statement of God in His Word. God is honored by such a faith.

When Abraham tied up his son Isaac on the wood and took the knife to slay his son he did not know that God was going to say him that he did not need to offer up Isaac (Gen 22:11-12). To God the proof was delivered of the faith of Abraham in Him as the God of the resurrection. In a certain way Abraham received Isaac back from death. It is true that God spared Abraham a pain that He did not spare Himself. God gave His Son in death.

To the Hebrews this example of Abraham's faith is of great encouragement. After all they also lived that long in faith that their wonderful national inheritance was a gift from God. Now they are to abandon that. They moved away out of it, but what they had abandoned was still alluring them. To really separate from it and to abandon it, it is necessary to believe in a God Who had better promises for them than everything they had abandoned.

V20. Also Isaac has done things that were only possible through faith. He has blessed his sons concerning future matters. From the blessings with

which he blessed each of his sons, his faith in God's promises becomes apparent. It appears from the blessing with which he blessed Jacob that Jacob is in the line of the promises. He transfers the blessing of Abraham to Jacob: the promise to posterity and to the land.

He also blesses Esau, but with another blessing. From the blessing for Esau it appears that Isaac kept him out of the line of the promise consciously. That too testified to his faith. Although in his weakness he preferred Esau to Jacob, regarding the blessing he associated to God's thoughts. It is important not to be guided by human weakness in your judgment on God's promises, but by God's thoughts. Then you will always end up well.

V21. With Jacob his faith also appears from the blessing he blesses with. Jacob too blesses two sons. They were not his own sons, but they were two of his grandchildren, the sons of Joseph. And like Isaac he blesses the younger with a greater blessing than the elder. Those are the sons of Joseph, the one distinguished among his brothers (Gen 49:26; Deu 33:16) and who was given the birthright (1Chr 5:1-2). In the blessing of both his sons Jacob gave Joseph the double blessing of the firstborn (Deu 33:17). Joseph is a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus, *the* Firstborn Whom God will bring into the world soon (Heb 1:6).

In connection with Joseph Jacob becomes a worshiper. In faith he sees how the counsel of God and His ways lead to the fulfillment of His counsel coincide in the true Joseph. It is God's purpose that the Hebrews and we honor and worship Him for the fulfillment of His counsel and the ways He goes for that. The staff of Jacob is the symbol of his long history. He leant on it as a pilgrim and as a cripple. At the end of his life he still leans on it, not to walk anymore though, but to worship. Our life path ends with the Lord. Then we shall worship Him for all the grace with which He surrounded us to bring us into the land He promised us.

V22. Jacob's faith was connected to the person of the true Joseph, Joseph's faith was connected to God's people and God's land. In faith he saw the redemption of the people from Egypt and the entrance into the land of Canaan. All the glory he had in Egypt became nothing compared to the coming glory of Israel under the government of the Messiah Whom he saw forward in faith. He wanted to be there and with that in view he com-

mandated that his bones were to be taken from Egypt to the promised land. What a proof of his faith in the resurrection!

The Hebrews also had to learn to forsake the world (of which Egypt is a picture) and to look forward to everything they gained through their connection with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And that applies to you too. His death is your death and His resurrection is your resurrection. In His resurrection all will be made alive who are connected to Him to share in His kingdom (1Cor 15:20-28).

V23. The section we have had, has shown faith in action with the view to the future, which means faith as the “assurance of [things] hoped for” (verse 1a). In the next section in verses 23-38, the writer presents a number of examples of faith that clarify how faith operates as “conviction of things not seen” (verse 1b). In other words: after faith that looks *forward*, we now have faith that looks *upward*.

Faith that looks upward trusts that God is present in hardships and that He gives strength to endure. Here you see the energy of faith that rests in God in the midst of circumstances. This faith overcomes the power of the devil and the attractions and difficulties of the world.

The first example is Moses. A comparison between the faith of Moses and that of Abraham makes the difference between ‘forward faith’ and ‘upward faith’ wonderfully clear. You may say that the faith of Abraham was connected to the future world and that of Moses to the present world. The faith of Abraham looked forward to the future world and the faith of Moses overcame the present world. The similarity is that neither has experienced the fulfillment of God’s promises in his life.

Before he goes into details regarding the faith of Moses, the writer refers to the faith of Moses’ parents. By their faith they defied the command of the mighty Pharaoh. Ordinarily people are to obey legal law, but this is a situation that God is to be obeyed rather than men (Acts 4:19; 5:29). The faith of the parents discovered in this child something exceptional to God. “They saw he was a beautiful child”, not beautiful just like that, but beautiful in the sight of *God* (Acts 7:20). Therefore they did not deliver him into the hands of murderers, but they hid him at home.

That was not an easy thing to do, especially because their home was, as it seems, close to the palace of the king. Nevertheless, they counted on it that God was going to take care of him.

This is a beautiful example for all young parents who are aware of the bloodthirstiness of the world in which they live and in which their children also have to learn to find their way. Faith counts on God for protection and makes effort to protect and guide the child on its life path.

Now read Hebrews 11:17-23 again.

Reflection: Which aspects of faith confidence in God, regarding the future, are presented here? What do you learn from that for the practice of your faith life?

Heb 11:24-30 | Living by Faith (V)

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though [they were passing] through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

V24. By faith the parents of Moses overcame the fear for the world. Moses grew up in a totally different environment and situation than his parents. Nevertheless you see in his life that the same faith is active that you've seen in his parents. Because his circumstances were that different, his faith appeared differently. His great enemy was the favor of the world and his faith overcame that enemy.

You see that the first years of his education by his God fearing parents has had profound effect on him. Consequently, "when he had grown up" – grown up indicates both his maturity and his high position in Pharaoh's court – he refused "to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter". This refusal is not a sign of 'ungratefulness' for everything he had enjoyed at the court. He was stolen and was turning back to his roots, because that was the place where God wanted to use him and not at the court.

Natural feelings or rational considerations did not keep him at the court. He did not reason that God had regulated everything so wonderfully that he ended up in such an influential position. That couldn't have been for nothing. He could have used his influence in the court in favor of his people, couldn't he? But Moses did not want to be a favorite of Pharaoh while his people were oppressed and killed. He wanted to be with his people, to be one of them.

It has been said: 'The providence of God brought him at the court of Pharaoh and his faith brought him out of it.' With the expression 'the provi-

dence of God' is meant that God guides events and circumstances. This is how Moses ended up at the court of Pharaoh. But the departure of Moses is not a result of the providence of God. Moses left the court of Pharaoh on the basis of a choice that is based on his faith.

V25. Moses refused something, but he also chose for something. In faith he chose the path of God's people. He was convinced that the future belonged to that people and not to Egypt. Visibly he chose for the worst he could choose: for the most despised people of the country, for unwanted strangers who were oppressed and had to do heavy slave labor. The people themselves were at their wits' end.

Moses saw the sorrow, the shame and the suffering of Israel in the light of God's choice. Faith chooses always what God has chosen. It always stands on the side of God, even though the choice seems to bring only losses. Faith chooses for God, because it knows God's purposes of goodness for His people and it knows that He saves them for the day of might and glory.

Moses could have enjoyed sin, for sin is something you can enjoy. But he was conscious that sin is only temporary, passing and never gives real satisfying joy. The sins that are meant here are not what we call 'gross sins', but sins that are coherent to a successful life in the world. Think of enjoying respect, of having might, influence, fame and wealth.

V26. You will only abandon those sins if you replace them for something different and something greater. That is what Moses did. He exchanged the treasures of Egypt for "the reproach of Christ". To him the reproach of Christ was "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt". What an insult for Pharaoh and what a victory for Christ! But what would you prefer? That your name is engraved on an Egyptian tombstone or that you're noted in the book of God? It is evident what Moses has chosen. As a result, instead of a mummy, he became a famous Godman.

Moses made that choice because he fixed his eyes on nothing else than "on the reward" alone. He looked ahead to the heavenly land of promise. In that light he learnt to discern between the material treasures of Egypt and the spiritual treasures in Christ. To be with Christ on earth indeed means reproach, but in Him God made all the promises yes and amen (2Cor 1:20).

Therefore when you choose for the suffering of reproach of and with Christ you're on the right side and on the right path to the right aim. Reproach goes hand in hand with the path to the fulfillment of the promises.

V27. Faith is the inner power that enables to overcome both hindrances – the wrath of the king, the Red Sea, Jericho – and the desires –the pleasures of sin, the riches of Egypt. Faith realizes the mediation of God without seeing Him and in that way it delivers from all fears for the power of man. That faith caused Moses to leave Egypt, after he killed the Egyptian man.

In the book of Exodus his departure is described as a flight. He fled out of fear for Pharaoh because he killed the Egyptian man. At the same time the killing of the Egyptian man was the public confession of Moses that he belonged to God's people. Seen from that point of view he left the court in faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king". The slaying of a man made him flee, the faith in God and his solidarity with the people made him leave. He openly acted as an Israelite and was therefore exposed to the same wrath of the king as the people were.

However, he did not fear the wrath of the king because he was seeing "Him who is unseen", Who is endlessly much greater than the king of Egypt. He "endured" as seeing Him Who is Invisible all those years that he was in Midian. All this time he carried on trusting God to fulfill His promises. For you here also is the power to persevere on the path of faith, together with the other members of God's people who also had to endure the reproach and wrath of the world.

V28. As a final feat of Moses' faith the writer mentions the celebration of the Passover. It is remarkable that the celebration of the Passover is not ascribed here to the faith of Israel but to that of Moses. Could it be that the writer wants to make clear that Israel celebrated the Passover on the basis of Moses' faith?

The celebration of the Passover by Moses in Egypt was a unique deed. All other times that it was celebrated later on, happened outside the country, by a redeemed people and as a remembrance. That one first time happened because of the actual threat of the judgment of God. God had given this means to escape from it. It seemed despicable and useless, but in reality

this was the only way that true protection could be realized against the judgment. Only he who believed God did use it.

Attached to the celebration of the Passover was “the sprinkling of the blood”. Sprinkling did not happen in Egypt; there the blood was ‘put’. The putting of the blood happened only once and later on, in the sacrificial service, it was changed to sprinkling. The meaning in both cases is to put under the value of the blood to be protected against judgment in this way. In Egypt the firstborn were protected against the judgment. As firstborn also the Hebrews and all believers, “the church of the firstborn” (Heb 12:23), have escaped judgment on the basis of the blood.

V29. Next are two facts of faith concerning God’s people. The first fact happened at the beginning of the journey through the wilderness and the second happened at the end of it. The journey in the wilderness itself is not mentioned. In fact, that was not the result of faith, but on the contrary, of unbelief.

Faith brought them out of slavery and in the land of promise. The people did not only need the Passover lamb to be absolutely free from judgment, but they also needed to pass through the Red Sea to be definitely and absolutely liberated from Egypt. When Israel was passing through the Red Sea, it was because of faith. When the Egyptians did that, it was the arrogance of the flesh. The enemy is swallowed by the judgment exactly at the same place where the people find their redemption. The place where the judgment occurs is also the place of redemption. You see this on the cross where Christ died.

V30. When redemption is accomplished and liberation is achieved it does not mean that the difficulties are conquered. But for God the difficulties have disappeared. What is a difficulty to man, to God it isn’t. Israel has experienced it when they entered the promised land. Jericho was the obstacle for Israel to occupy the land. Thus on the path of faith for the Hebrews, and for you, there are obstacles that must be overcome on the journey to the promised land. Those victories are also achieved only by faith in what God says.

When the walls of Jericho fell down, it was not just because they encircled the city for seven days. The walls fell down because they encircled the city on the basis of *faith in God's Word*. After seven days the walls were still as thick and impregnable as on the first day. They only fell down after seven days because by their faith in God.

Now read Hebrews 11:24-30 again.

Reflection: What characteristics of faith do you see in this section and what can you learn from it?

Heb 11:31-40 | Living by Faith (VI)

31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. 32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed [acts of] righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 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. 35 Women received [back] their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 ([men] of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

V31. Not only is the faith of the people and its effect seen at Jericho. The capture of Jericho is also the cause for the manifestation of the faith of one individual from that city. The faith of Rahab shows that she chooses the people of God, while the power of her people was still completely intact and nothing of the claimed victory was yet to be seen with the people of God. But Rahab felt that God was with them. That determined her choice: a choice that was against the natural choice for her own people. In that way she is an example for the Hebrews who also had to choose *for* the apparently weak people of God and *against* their unbelieving, disobedient fellow countrymen.

What Rahab does, looks like treason, but it is a deed of faith. In that way she turns away from the world and from a life in sin to join the people of God. Her people knew from the great deeds of God, but they did not want to bow their knees to Him (Jos 2:10). They resisted and rebelled. She disassociated herself from that. She made peace with the people of God by taking action to protect the spies. In that way she identified with them

and disassociated herself from her fellow countrymen who are here called “those who were disobedient”. By accommodating the spies, she put her own life at risk. She connected her own fate to that of them. Her faith was abundantly rewarded. She even received a place in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus (Mt 1:5).

V32. The writer could be going on like that, but he doesn't pay attention to details anymore. Time would fail him if he did. Guided by the Spirit he mentions in general sense a number of examples. In those examples it becomes apparent how persevering their faith has been in all kinds of ways and how it has sustained believers in all kinds of suffering. One thing they all have in common: no one of them has received anything of what has been promised, as that also applied to the Hebrews to whom this letter is addressed.

Because the writer of the letter only mentions the names, I don't want to go into detail about the history of the persons he mentions. You should read their history. Then it will often become clear to you why he mentions them. Sometimes it will also surprise you, after you have read their history, that he mentions them. But when God's Spirit quotes names of believers from the Old Testament in the New Testament, it is – with one exception, that of Elijah (Rom 11:3-4) – always in a positive way. God sees further than what is described in outward history. He sees what is in the heart for Him, even when its practice sometimes falls short of that.

Let us take a look at the list. When the people are in the land, the time of the judges begins. Four of them are mentioned. Gideon and Barak have done their faith job in little strength. Also Samson and Jephthah have dealt in faith, but their work was obviously not flawless. In both couples the most important one is mentioned first, while chronologically the order is the other way around. Of all judges it is common that their liberations were only temporary. None of them were able to create a lasting peace.

After the time of the judges the time of the prophets and kings follows. Of the prophets Samuel is mentioned and of the kings David is mentioned. Here also the chronology is reversed. First David is mentioned, then Samuel. David was the king after God's heart and Samuel was his forerunner.

The prophets spoke to the conscience of the people. They rather died than preaching a lie and they rather went with a good conscience to heaven than that they lived with a bad conscience on earth.

Although David was a king after God's heart, he too didn't manage to bring the people into the rest (Heb 4:7-8). The ultimate rest was for him also a matter of faith, of which the fulfillment was going to happen through Him, Who was both his Son (Mt 1:1) and his Lord (Mt 22:41-45).

V33. After these names a number of deeds follows that were done by faith. I will try to add an example to each deed:

1. "conquered kingdoms": judges and David;
2. "performed [acts of] righteousness": maintaining righteousness by judges and kings;
3. "obtained promises": this is possibly obtaining what was promised, but also to be promised something;
4. "shut the mouths of lions": Daniel (Dan 6:22-23), Samson, David, Benaiah;
5. V34. "quenched the power of fire": the three friends of Daniel (Dan 3) who indeed quenched *the power* of the fire, but not the fire itself, for others were consumed by it;
6. "escaped the edge of the sword": David, Elijah (while others were killed by the sword, verse 37);
7. "from weakness were made strong": Gideon, Jonathan; they proved that the weakness of God is stronger than men;
8. "became mighty in war": Asa, Jehoshaphat;
9. "put foreign armies to flight": many judges and kings;
10. V35 "Women received [back] their dead by resurrection": the widow of Zarephath, the Shunammite.

In the just mentioned situations faith appeared to be effective in favor of the believers and sometimes even in a wonderful way. Now examples of situations follow in which faith is also effective for those who heavily suf-

fer and are even killed. This suffering and death would be foolishness if death were indeed the end of everything.

1. They “were tortured, not accepting their release”: enduring cruel torture, while to faith an unacceptable offer to stop the torture is rejected; they believed in “a better resurrection” and were looking forward to that;

2. V36. “experienced mockings and scourgings”; Jeremiah, heroes from the Maccabees;

3. “chains and imprisonment”: Jeremiah; Joseph;

4. V37. “were stoned”: Stephen, Zechariah, Naboth;

5. “were sawn in two”, according to tradition: Isaiah by King Manasseh;

6. “were tempted”: were put under severe mental or physical pressure to deny their faith; were forced to compromise or to abjure something, in any case to deny their Lord;

7. “were put to death with the sword”: mass murder by the sword (Dan 11:33b; Acts 12:1; Jer 26:23, while others escaped the sword, verse 34);

8. “went about in sheepskins, in goatskins”: Elijah, John;

9. “being destitute”: hunger and thirst;

10. “afflicted”: were ruled by strangers;

11. “ill-treated”: general torture;

12. V38. “of whom the world was not worthy”: the world didn’t assign any value to people who lived this way;

13. “wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground”: these places have provided refuge to many men and women of faith without a home, while they were hunted as if they were wild beasts.

V39. God has seen and noticed that all these believers persevered in faith till the end. They didn’t receive on earth what they were promised. They still don’t have, even not in paradise where they are now.

V40. They shall obtain what is promised only when the Hebrews and we also will obtain it. And when will that be? When Christ comes and

establishes the millennial kingdom of peace. That is “something better” what God has provided. The ‘better’ is always connected to Christ as the glorified Man in heaven. He obtained that place there from God, while He is rejected on earth.

To that Christ you are connected, while you live on earth. Abraham lived in faith on earth with a heavenly mind in his heart, while he was looking forward to a heavenly city. But he was not connected to heaven through a Christ Who is really seated there in glory and he didn’t share the rejection of Christ on earth. That is *our* share. Therefore the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than the greatest among those who preceded (Mt 11:11). Therefore God has waited to fulfill His promises. He didn’t want the Old Testament believers to be made perfect without us, which means to come to the wonderful place of taking part in the kingdom of Christ.

It is the privilege of all believers of all times to partake of the kingdom of Christ. But it is first of all the privilege of those who have partaken of the rejection of Christ. That are only the believers who are partakers of the church and not the believers from the time of the Old Testament or from the time after the rapture of the church.

The writer doesn’t go into detail about the special position of those believers. That is not the subject of this letter. From other letters we know that the church is connected to the Lord Jesus in a special way (e.g. Eph 1:10-11). In that way all who have lived in faith will be made perfect and God will fulfill His unchangeable promises to each of them.

Now read Hebrews 11:31-40 again.

Reflection: How did people manage to do such deeds of faith? How do you manage to do such deeds of faith?

Hebrews 12

Heb 12:1-4 | The Author and Perfecter of Faith

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

V1. In this letter you have already had many persons brought to your attention. In chapter 1 it was the angels, in chapter 3 Moses and Aaron. Also Joshua and Levi were mentioned. They were excellent people. But each time the writer sets them aside by then focusing attention on Him Who is so much more than the angels and Moses and Aaron and those others.

It is also like that with the many persons in the previous chapter that he here calls “so great a cloud of witnesses”. In the following verses this cloud disappears from the view to make room for “Jesus”, Who transcends everyone and everything. Stars shine, till the sun rises. The believers from the Old Testament are stars that in great faith, though also in weakness and in part, have trusted in God. The Son is the sun. He has perfectly and continuously trusted in God. With Him there is no reference to a certain work of faith, an exceptional deed out of which His confidence of faith appears. His whole life was altogether confidence of faith.

You are surrounded by that great cloud of witnesses that you saw in the previous chapter. The previous chapter closed with the message that they had not received the promise yet and that they were still not made perfect. That goes for you too. Therefore their example is presented to you as an exhortation to imitate them. It is as if they are calling you from the Scriptures to continue the path of faith unabated and unhindered and not let anything distract you from the goal. But it is not so much about them watching

how you do that, but rather about their giving their testimony to you.. Their witness is the inspired report of the various lives in the Scripture and points to God's faithfulness in whatever and wherever they trusted Him.

That cloud of witnesses around you makes the writer call you to be freed from each hindrance. Lay aside every encumbrance [or: throw off each burden] and sin as useless and harmful weight. If you fix your eye on Jesus, it will be easy, but if you don't fix your eye on Him it will be impossible. Looking at Jesus determines what a 'burden' is. With 'burden' the point is the daily and often good things of the earthly life that a walker may enjoy, but the runner cannot. Those are not the difficulties of life, for you cannot lay those aside, but you can indeed prevent that they keep you occupied in such a way that you have no room to see anything else. A burden concerns the earthly things which you freely take, but which you can also freely lay aside.

You are allowed to enjoy earthly things, for the Lord has given them. You are allowed to enjoy good food and good health with a heartfelt gratitude to the Lord. You may also start to see those things in themselves and invest a lot of time, money and energy to get or keep them. If that's the case with you, then I hope that you acknowledge that and lay that attitude aside. Start to view those things again in the proper perspective. In this context I sometimes hear someone ask the question: 'What evil is in it?' But I think that the question should be: 'Is it a weight, a burden, something that pulls you down, or is it a wing, something that lifts you up?'

Laying aside sin is different. Sin is anything you do independence of God. Here you read that sin so easily entangles you. To be entangled means that you are wrapped by something. In the picture we have here you can imagine your legs being wrapped by something that hinders you to walk or even causes you to fall. If for example, a sinful thought comes up, then you have to deal with that immediately by 'laying it aside'. In case you keep on going with that thought, then that has the result that you lose sight of God and His plan with your life, which means that your race has ended. In the race the point is perseverance. The point is that you should not become sluggish or weak during the race. To prevent that you should pay close attention to the goal.

V2. The point is that in your mind your goal should be Jesus all the time. The writer exhorts us to fix your eye on Him alone. 'Fixing on' here literally means 'to look away', which implies to abandon all other things and fix your eyes on one object alone. The name 'Jesus' reminds us of Him Who in humiliation on earth also has run the race, but Who has achieved the goal already. He has endured all difficulties and has overcome by submitting Himself to the path that the Father had determined for Him. He is the Author, the Chief. He leads you on the path of faith until you achieve the final goal, the perfect salvation. He is the great example in the race. He transcends all things. He is also the Perfecter, the Completer, the Accomplisher. He guides the believer along the path of faith to perfection.

He passed the whole way in perfection and He entered the glory. Through His example and His strength He brings the believers to the glory. The Lord Jesus also had a glorious goal in mind when He went His way here. He was looking forward to the joy of the heavenly glory at the right hand of God. He persevered on that way. He endured the cross persistently. This doesn't point to the work of atonement on the cross, but to the reproach and shame that are the part of the believer from the side of the world. It is the same as what He desired of someone who wanted to be His disciple: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Lk 14:27). He has set the perfect example in His life regarding this.

The Lord didn't despise the cross. He "endured" it; He accepted it as the will of His Father. He indeed "despised" the shame that men put on Him – although He was certainly not insensitive to what men did to Him. Now He is in glory He doesn't have to go a path of trust anymore. He has sat down, once for all. There will come an end to the path of faith for you too.

His place is "at the right hand of the throne of God". He is entitled to that because of His perfect life on earth. There is also the thought that after the suffering the kingdom, the throne, comes. He is already connected to the throne. Him is given all power in heaven and on earth. He shortly will openly accept His kingdom.

V3. Consider Him. You can look at Him in His life on earth, for therein He is your example and your Leader. You can also look at Him in heaven,

for there He is your target and the Perfecter. The calling 'consider' means that you consider by comparison. Therefore "consider Him" means that you consider how *He* endured the hostility by sinners and that you, who are now in a comparable situation, may be encouraged by that to keep on going yourself.

The expression "sinners" shows that in fact the whole sinful human race is meant, summarized in the Jewish and Gentile leaders. The Lord had nothing to do with sin Himself, but He had everything to do with sinners who surrounded Him and who tried to hinder Him in His walk. In that way these believers also had to do with families and friends who continually wanted to exert their influence on them to make them return to the old. Incessant "hostility" is hard to endure. The incessancy of it makes you tired. This puts you in danger of giving up the fight.

V4. 'But', the writer seems to say, 'let's be honest: You have not, like He did, lost your life yet to glorify God and to serve Him.' The Hebrews not only haven't lost their life yet, but they have not even shed one drop of blood yet for the sake of the Name of the Lord Jesus, as the Lord Jesus and a lot of men and women of faith did in former times (Heb 11:35b-37).

With "striving against sin" is not meant that you should fight against the sin that dwells in you. The believer is not called for that fight. For that fight the Scripture doesn't give instructions. On the contrary, the Scripture says that you should consider yourself to be dead for the sin that dwells in you (Rom 6:11).

Therefore it is not about the fight against the sin that is *in you*, but about the fight against the sin *around you*. This fight is connected to the hostility against Him that the Lord Jesus had to endure from sinners. *He* absolutely had shed blood in resisting this hostility. *They* were not that far yet, however. *They* were in danger of giving in to the pressure; *He* surely did not.

In the Scripture you find other forms of fight:

1. You read about the fight between the law that is given to man in the flesh, and the new life (Rom 7:23). That fight happens in the believer as long as he remains under the yoke of the law.

2. Another fight that happens in the believer is that of the Spirit against the flesh (Gal 5:17).
3. There is also the struggle in the heavenly places against the spiritual forces of wickedness (Eph 6:10-18).

It is a good thing to consider and be aware of these different forms of fight, for it will help you to be able to deal with a certain fight. Then you will not allow to fight a fight that should not be there at all. That will keep you from the deceit of the enemy, so that you may continue your path of faith striving and triumphantly.

Now read Hebrews 12:1-4 again.

Reflection: What is your daily practice of fixing your eyes on Jesus?

Heb 12:5-11 | God Deals With Sons

5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom [his] father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He [disciplines us] for [our] good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

V5. The writer encourages the Hebrews that they should not give up too easily. For all opposition, resistance and affliction they were enduring, they had an example in the Lord Jesus. By looking at Him they will be able to persevere. But they also have forgotten something, namely a certain exhortation. That was because they had become dull of hearing (Heb 5:11-12).

The point is, that there was external pressure and that they had become forgetful. They had forgotten something that was written in the Scripture and what was meant for them. In the quoted text Solomon is addressing his son, but here it is said that the exhortation is addressed to them, the Hebrew believers. This is an important starting point if you read the Scripture. Then you are to consider that the voice of God addresses *you*. Because the Hebrews had forgotten that, they dealt wrongly with the difficulties that they endured on their path of faith.

Here you learn that when you have to endure trials, because of being faithful, God uses those trials to discipline you. With discipline you may easily think that it happens because there is something wrong and that you should be punished or disciplined for that. That may be the case some-

times, but is not necessarily always so. Here discipline is not corrective but preventative, to prevent deviation. Discipline is also educative here with the purpose that the believer will more and more look like God. He wants you to partake of His holiness (verse 10). With the Lord Jesus this discipline was not necessary. He always perfectly partook of the holiness of God, because He Himself was the holy God.

Just like you're fixing your eyes on the Lord Jesus on the path of faith, in that way your eyes are fixed on the Father if it concerns discipline. He doesn't use a whip to discipline you, but the pruning knife (Jn 15:1-2). He disciplines us (see Job in the book of Job), but He does that as a loving Father. It gives a lot of rest if you consider that what happens to you, is not caused by people, but that it comes from the hand of a loving Father. That is also what the writer wants to tell the Hebrews. He wants them to realize that they are addressed as "sons". In chapter 2 they are also addressed like that, as sons who are on the way to the glory (Heb 2:10). Discipline or education is the proof of sonship.

Now, you may respond in two ways to discipline of your heavenly Father. Solomon said that in his wisdom to his son (Pro 3:11). On the one hand you may ignore the discipline of the Lord. That means that you act as if the difficulties and trials do not bother you. You remain indifferently and stoically under it. They have no special meaning for you. You may also consider them as situations that can happen to anyone. In itself, it surely is; but you are not anyone. You are someone with whom God deals with as a son. God is interested in you and educates you. Therefore He has His purpose with the things that happen to you. And that's why you certainly cannot ignore that.

On the other hand you do not need to take them that heavily that it presses you totally down. It is not that God uses discipline to pour out His full wrath over you. You may experience it like that, but that is surely not true. No, you may know that God acts out of love.

V6. Discipline is a proof of His love and is certainly not meant to discourage you. When discipline serves as punishment, then that means that God wants to convince you of something that is wrong, so that you may remove the wrong things out of your life. That is not necessarily something that

you do wrong, but something that can cause you to do that. After all, some Hebrews were in danger to leave the path of faith.

As it is said, discipline doesn't always mean that one should be punished for something. If you see discipline like that, whether it concerns you or others, you will draw the wrong conclusion. The outward, physical circumstances are not always the result of the condition of the soul. The friends of Job drew that wrong conclusion. They saw what happened to Job and were convinced that he had committed a great sin. But God punished them because of their remarks on this. With Gaius you see how discipline happens regarding the body, while the soul prospers (3Jn 1:2).

That discipline can hurt, is indicated by the word "scourges". Hereby you may think of the thorn in the flesh Paul had (2Cor 12:7). That thorn was painful in the exertion of his ministry. It made him despicable – and this he endured for the sake of the Lord –, but that thorn also kept his flesh in control. This is how God deals with "every son whom He receives". In the word 'receive' joy is sounding through. The word means 'acknowledge with joy'.

A real son is someone in whom his father is well pleased (cf. Mt 3:17). In this way the Father desires to have us as sons, according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph 1:5). We are sons. God has given us this place on the basis of the work of His Son. He also desires that we live up to this in practice. To achieve this He disciplines us, for discipline serves to remove things that are not pleasing to Him out of our lives, so that we may be more pleasing to Him.

V7-8. Therefore, in all discipline you should see the loving interference of God, Who deals with you as with a son. Be sure that this happens to every son. Sometimes it is quite visible, but even if certain believers visibly prosper, they surely partake of discipline, although it is not seen at first glance. "All", those are all believers, are partakers of it. Every son is disciplined by his father. God also dealt with Israel, His firstborn son, like that (Exo 4:22; Hos 11:1; Deu 7:8; 8:5).

If the Hebrews are not partakers of discipline, they should have to worry about that instead of worrying about the discipline they were experiencing

at that moment. If they were not partakers, it would mean that God was not interested in them and that He would have dealt with them as illegitimates. Illegitimates are not real sons. Therefore, if they would have missed discipline, it would mean that they were Christians in name or fake sons. Now they were really disciplined, it was proof that God had received them as sons.

V9. With the word “furthermore” the writer adds a comparison between God and an earthly father. In this comparison it becomes clear that God is so much more than an earthly father. Our fathers after the flesh, “earthly fathers”, also corrected us. That belongs to the education. Because of their correction we respected them. How much more do we have respect to our heavenly, spiritual, Father. That Father is the origin of every spiritual life (Num 16:22; 27:16; Ecc 12:7).

Just like you as a child had to, or perhaps still have to, subject to the disciplining hand of your earthly father, in that way you should also subject yourself to the discipline of God. If you subject yourself to that, you will “live”! The point is not that you should learn to deal with the difficulties of life, but how you can enjoy the true life. Only then you really live the way God has purposed.

V10. Now, your earthly father is fallible, but God is not. God never makes mistakes. The correction of your earthly father is also limited to “a short time”, which are the days of your youth, while God corrects you through your whole life. Ultimately His discipline is never meaningless, but is always for your benefit, for your improvement and advantage. His ultimate purpose with His discipline is that you “may share His holiness”.

Your spiritual well-being depends on that. This involves more than just being sanctified, or set apart, in terms of your position (Heb 10:10). It implies that you separate yourself from evil, just as God is separate from it and that you learn to be totally dedicated to God in everything. He doesn't *demand* holiness here, but He *works* that. Discipline is His means for that. That enables you to have full joy in God.

V11. The first response to discipline is not joy. If discipline were to give joy, it would miss its effect. All positive aspects of discipline that the writer has

demonstrated in the previous verses do not change the fact that discipline itself is not something that makes you happy. It is not pleasant. If that would be the case, it would not mean discipline. On the contrary, the unpleasing thing about it should teach us to change our walk in such a way that we don't have to be disciplined anymore. Therefore the discipline is meant for "the moment". When discipline has achieved its goal, then there is a reason to be joyful. Then it is profitable.

By discipline you are "trained", which means that you are taught how to deal with it. By training you learn how to control something. If you are willing to accept discipline in that way, if you can handle it like that, then it will bring you closer to God. The result is that you will enjoy more of the peace and you will grow in bringing righteousness into practice.

The "peaceful fruit of righteousness" will soon be reality to Israel in the millennial kingdom of peace, after they have gone through the sufferings of the great tribulation. God wants to work that fruit now already through His education in your life (Jn 15:2,8).

Now read Hebrews 12:5-11 again.

Reflection: What chastening do you recognize in your life as God's dealings with you to enable you to partake of His holiness?

Heb 12:12-21 | Pursue Peace and Sanctification

12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that [the limb] which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. 14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that [there be] no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a [single] meal. 17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. 18 For you have not come to [a mountain] that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which [sound was such that] those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, [that] Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling."

V12. The word "therefore" with which this section starts, indicates the connection with the previous part. By this the writer says that you can take courage, because the discipline is for your benefit and it serves a wonderful purpose. Your hands, knees and feet can be strengthened again to continue the path of faith to the wonderful goal (Isa 35:3). Should your hands hang down feebly, discouraged by so much contradiction and resistance, then you know now that God uses the difficulties to put you back to work for Him.

Through physical exercise you get stronger muscles. Through spiritual exercise you get more spiritual resilience. Instead of feeble knees you get strong knees. Strong knees you can bow to pray and stretch to walk.

V13. If you have feeble knees your feet cannot make "straight paths". You will not be able to make firm footsteps on the right course to the goal. It is necessary for your own walk that you establish your way (Pro 4:26).

But your established walk is also necessary for others who are limping. He who is limping cannot have an established walk. Such a person rather stumbles. If you also shuttle hither and thither helplessly, you surely can-

not offer the limping one any support. On the contrary, your wavering can have the result that the limping one totally gets paralyzed and powerless. But if you follow the right path you are of support to those who cannot make it through on their own. If there are good examples that follow the right course, then the limping ones will not drop behind further, but they will continue their way with new courage.

There is not only mention of power but also of healing. Only on the path that God has for us, power and (spiritual) health are to be found. We should walk there where He can be with us.

V14. In the spiritual race we need one another. On the one hand you should walk individually as if you are the only one who could win the prize (1Cor 9:24). On the other hand you walk together with others who pursue that same prize. They are not competitors whom you should be ahead of all the time, but they are fellow fighters with whom you want to cross the finish line together. Regarding your efforts, you should walk as if you are on your own, but what the goal concerns you should realize that you are on the way together with others. You are dependent on them and they are dependent on you. We need one another. We need to care for one another and for the whole companionship of Christians with whom we are on the way.

If you are aware of that you will see that not everyone is at the same pace and also that not everyone is following the same course. If we lose sight of that, there is a great danger that it will cause distance, which means that it will drive a spiritual wedge between the brothers and sisters. That danger can be eliminated by pursuing "peace with all men" (Psa 34:14). Then the runners will slow down a little bit to encourage those who lag behind and support them in any way it is necessary. In that way the whole will stay together.

So you are able to show your connection with your fellow believers by seeking peace with them. But there is one more thing you should pursue and that is "sanctification". In seeking peace you are focused on others, in pursuing sanctification you are focused on God. It is about your relation to others on the one side, the other thing is about your relation to God. Sanctification indicates an action. It means that you are totally dedicat-

ed to God and therefore you separate yourself from everything that is in contrast with God. If you continue to tolerate things in your life that are in contrast with God's holiness, then they will hinder your sanctification. Sanctification concerns the nature of God (verse 10); sanctification has to do with dedication to the service of God.

V15. Interaction with one another is also shown in something else and that is if we carefully see to it "that no one comes short of the grace of God". 'To see to' has some character of the shepherd; it has got to do with overseers who look after the flock (1Pet 5:2). The awareness of God's grace is essential to keep on going on the path of faith. If someone gets disconnected from that and doesn't pay attention to grace anymore, then the reverse of pursuing will happen. Such a person will quit and give up the race; he will no longer join the Christian companionship. 'To come short' has got to do with to lag behind, missing the connection, that a person ultimately will not reach the finish with the platoon.

The point is that you look around to see if everyone is still partaking of the Christian company by keeping the connection with the grace of God. If someone among the Hebrews would be impressed by the opposition in such a way that he lost sight of God's grace, then he would come short. He would therefore run the risk to fall back in Judaism. If you or someone else misses the connection with the grace of God, then the danger is great that you return to the world. By speaking with one another about that grace and by pointing one another to that, we encourage each other that the grace of God is most present in the darkest moment.

If someone falls away from the grace of God and pays no attention to it anymore, because he feels to be tossed to and fro by the hardships he can only see, then a root of bitterness will arise (Deu 29:18b). A root has the character of growing. If this root is not radically removed by paying attention again to the grace of God, it will exercise a corruptible influence. Such a root causes troubles and defilement that grab around more and more. Many people will be infected by it. A root of bitterness does not only separate from God, but it also introduces immoral practices.

V16. Therefore the next step in this process is immorality or fornication. Corporal fornication is an unacceptable and condemnable sexual unifica-

tion of a man or a woman outside marriage. God will judge that (Heb 13:4). Spiritual fornication is the connection of the believer with the world in a way that God is set aside (Jam 4:4).

Therefore it is not surprising that after immorality comes “a godless person like Esau”. The profanity of Esau is that he despised the blessings of God concerning the future and preferred a momentary fleshly enjoyment. He was not interested in the future. He wanted to enjoy here and now. Therefore he gave up his birthright and all the additional privileges. The example of Esau was meant to have a terrifying effect on the readers of the letter.

V17. The writer reminds the readers of Esau’s end. This example says: He who rejects the blessing regarding the future in favor of a momentary pleasure, will later seek the blessing in vain, no matter the tears there are shed. The Hebrews are warned in that way, so that they will not fall away from the living God. He who falls away from the living God, will once realize which blessings he has given up and will want to put everything back in order. But then it will be too late for ever.

Esau had no remorse. He didn’t want to repent, he wanted the blessing. Each person who draws near to God with repentance, will surely receive forgiveness. However, Esau did not cry because he was remorseful about selling his birthright, but because he had lost the blessings that went together with the birthright. He didn’t cry because he was a sinner, but because he was a loser. Such tears will be found in hell.

V18-20. After the serious words about the consequences of falling away from the grace of God, the writer starts to encourage again. To illustrate his encouragement he uses the picture of two mountains. A mountain is a symbol of power. The one is Mount Sinai, which stands for the power of the law and represents the old covenant. The other is Mount Zion, which stands for grace and represents the new covenant.

They did not come to Mount Sinai, as Israel did in former days (Deu 4:11). To that mountain horror, terrifying weather phenomena and death threats were connected. The unbelieving Israel, whom the Hebrews left, was spiritually still there and is still abiding there. But the Hebrews did not need

to be afraid of the words of God. They could fearlessly draw near to God to speak with Him. Under the new covenant there is no fear to enter a territory that could cause them to die.

V21. Under the old covenant even Moses was impressed by the sight and was full of fear and trembling. The fear of both Moses and the people was prompted by the fact that a righteous God, Who made His holy demands known to the people, would come to them with wrath and judgment, if they trampled on those demands. This indeed happened when the people made the golden calf and worshiped it.

Now read again Hebrews 12:12-21.

Reflection: In what way will you be able to pursue and look after the things mentioned?

Heb 12:22-29 | We Have Come to Better Things

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of [the] righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than [the blood] of Abel. 25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned [them] on earth, much less [will] we [escape] who turn away from Him who [warns] from heaven. 26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN." 27 This [expression], "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

V22. The word "but" indicates that what now follows, is in contrast with what is said previously. To the Hebrews it is demonstrated that they haven't come to Mount Sinai with its accompanying horrors. Now it is demonstrated to them what they have come to. This 'have come to' indicates the sphere of the relation we are entering. As the sphere at Mount Sinai was characterized by fear and trembling, the sphere at the "Mount Zion" is one of grace and peace, of inviting love and the absence of every fear (1Jn 4:18). He who has once entered this sphere and experienced its significance can never ever be tempted anymore to return to Judaism, the old system of the threatening Mount Sinai.

In the millennial kingdom of peace the literal Mount Zion is the place of God's rest and the seat of the royal power of the Messiah. But the Hebrews have now already come to that mountain. That means that here it is not about the earthly mountain, but it is about the subject of which this mountain is the symbol, namely of grace and heaven. Mount Zion represents the new covenant with all its aspects: the new kingdom, the new priesthood, the new worship service, the new dwelling place, the new resting place.

The new priesthood is related to Zadok (2Sam 8:17; Eze 40:46), a priest from the line of Eleazar, the third son of Aaron. This indicates the priesthood of the resurrected Christ. The number three refers to the third day as the day of resurrection. The new kingship is also connected to Christ, the great Son of David, who was the king after God's heart (Psa 132:11-14). Christ is the true King-Priest (Zec 6:13). He is the true center of all blessing both in the millennial kingdom of peace in future and now already in spirit for everyone who is on the way to that wonderful situation.

After Mount Zion the writer presents more impressive matters that have come within reach of the believing Hebrews. But faith is necessary to see them. When faith sees them, they will be of great encouragement for the path they still had to go. The writer explains to the Hebrews that they had also come to, that is, brought within the sphere of, "the city of the living God", which is "the heavenly Jerusalem". They had turned their back on the earthly Jerusalem, but they entered the heavenly Jerusalem by faith.

Abraham and other Old Testament believers had seen the city from afar and that encouraged them (Heb 11:10,16). The privilege that the Hebrews had was beyond that: they had already come that far. They knew its sphere and enjoyed the privilege of being in the presence of the living God. That city is the center of the government over the earth that is not publicly exercised yet, but will definitely become reality. In that city death has no entrance, what will be the case in the earthly Jerusalem and also in the millennial kingdom of peace.

The Hebrews are physically still on earth. But when they approach the city in spirit, they discover that there are inhabitants in the heavenly Jerusalem. There, first of all, are "myriads of angels". When you imagine yourself entering the heavenly Jerusalem from outside, you see the angels first. They form the outermost circle of the inhabitants of the city to protect them as it were. That is also fits the task they have toward the believers on earth to whom they have been given to serve (Heb 1:14).

V23. The further description, "the general assembly", has the meaning of a joyful assembly. When the law was given at Mount Sinai, the angels also played a role (Acts 7:53). Through their mediation the law was given. As

you have seen, there was not directly anything joyful about that, but the angels are rejoicing in the sphere of grace (cf. Lk 2:13-14).

After the outermost circle our attention is drawn to the innermost circle. In the midst of the multitude of angels we see the people of God, here called "the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven". Those who had no place on earth, are at home there. On earth their names meant nothing. They were erased from the worldly and religious registers, but that didn't matter to them. It was much more important that their names were enrolled in heaven. That means that they are indelible and that they are familiar to God; that they are known by Him (Lk 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 21:27).

The word 'assembly' is found in this letter only here. It has the sense of the family of God. The further description 'firstborn' indicates the fact of sonship and heirship. This is in connection with the fact that they are called brethren of Christ (Heb 2:11). As firstborn the Hebrews were entitled to the eternal inheritance; they were fellow heirs of Christ, *the* Firstborn (Heb 1:6).

Then we see there "God, the Judge of all". All heavenly citizens are there on the ground of God's justice. They have suffered much injustice, but they have trusted that the Judge of the whole earth will do justice (Gen 18:25). Also the Lord Jesus has entrusted "[Himself] to Him Who judges righteously" (1Pet 2:23). Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be satisfied, because God is the Judge (Mt 5:6).

The "spirits of [the] righteous made perfect" are the first ones who experience that. These are the Old Testament believers who are asleep and who are now having a spiritual existence and who will, at the resurrection, be made perfect. They have finished the walk of faith and are only waiting for the glory. But they now already have their resting place and part in heaven.

V24. Then we see "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant". This new covenant will be established with Israel, but the spiritual blessings of the new covenant are now already enjoyed by all who belong to God's people. What would the future world be worth, both in heaven and on earth, without Him? He is the Mediator between the holy God and the sinful man.

He has made the way for the implementation of the new covenant. This He did through His blood. In that way forgiveness became a part of each who belongs to the new covenant and to whom the blessing of the millennial kingdom of peace is surely guaranteed. The first blood that was shed, was the blood of the righteous Abel (Mt 23:35). However, that blood could not serve as a restoration of the blessings that were lost. On the contrary, a cry for vengeance came out of it (Gen 4:10).

The blood of Christ, however, is blood that speaks a better language, which is the language of forgiveness, because it is the sacrificial blood. It is wonderful that the description of all wonderful things to which the believers have come under the new covenant concludes with what forms the basis: the blood of Christ. In that way also the everlasting duration of the new covenant is established.

V25. After he has presented these glories, which are in connection with the new order, the writer now again continues with some concluding exhortations. God had spoken (Heb 1:1) and is still speaking, just like the blood does. What a foolishness would that be to reject this God. It was already a foolish thing to reject God when He warned them on earth. He had given His instructions in the law and had presented them the way to live and to be blessed. But man did not want to listen.

Ever since the Holy Spirit has come, God speaks from heaven. To reject Him means to reject grace. This is what Stephen accused the unbelieving people of and therefore the people became furious and stoned him (Acts 7:51-59). In this way they rejected God's last offer of grace and sealed their own rejection.

V26. God's speaking by giving the law with which the old covenant was initiated, was accompanied by a quaking earth (Exo 19:18). Also the establishment of the new covenant will be accompanied by a shaking earth, but the shaking of heaven will be added to that. God had announced it like that at the end of the Old Testament (Hag 2:7). The introduction of the millennial kingdom of peace will be preceded by terrible earthquakes during the great tribulation (Rev 6:12) and at the return of Christ there will be signs in heaven (Mt 24:29).

V27. That will result in “the removing of those things which can be shaken”, “things” that are made and that are temporal. The old is removed and something new, which cannot be shaken, will replace it. Judaism belongs to the old order and will therefore disappear. The church belongs to the new order and will therefore remain. In the same way everything will remain what God has said (1Pet 1:25), just like everyone, who has accepted His Word, will remain (1Jn 2:17).

V28. The unshakable kingdom that the Son will establish, will be received by Him from God’s hands (Dan 7:13; Psa 2:8) and we will receive it from Him and with Him (Lk 12:32; 22:29. This kingdom remains forever and ever (Rev 22:5) and it is based on pure grace that we may receive it.

We must hold on to that grace, for otherwise we will slide away. At the same time grace provides us with a clear motive to serve God. Grace is the right mind for that. Therein He finds His pleasure. The believer will serve Him “with reverence and awe”, for He is an awesome and holy God. This is not meant to terrify you, but to fill you with the right reverence.

V29. People who miss this reverence are to be aware that God is “a consuming fire”. The fire consumes everything that is not in accordance with God. This is a serious word to everyone who is in danger to drop out and return to a formality service.

Now read Hebrews12:22-29 again.

Reflection: Explore once again what you are come to, which is where you belong to and thank the Lord for that company and those unchangeable truths.

Hebrews 13

Heb 13:1-6 | Love and Confidence

1 Let love of the brethren continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, [and] those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. 4 Marriage [is to be held] in honor among all, and the [marriage] bed [is to be] undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. 5 [Make sure that] your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," 6 so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"

This concluding chapter contains a number of exhortations for the Christian life. They fit in the sphere of the whole letter, for that is indeed about the path of the Christian on earth. The main theme of this chapter is love. It immediately starts with love of the brethren, which is followed by love for strangers, for prisoners and in marriage.

Although the word 'love' is not mentioned often, you can taste that it is about love, like the love for the Lord Jesus and for God and for the leaders in the midst of believers and for all saints. If you remember that in chapter 11 it is about *faith*, in chapter 12 it is about *hope* and in this chapter it is about *love*, then you see in these concluding chapters great riches for the life of the Christian.

V1. At the end of the previous chapter your focus is on an everlasting 'unshakable kingdom' (Heb 12:28). That's something to look forward to. But there is another thing that remains forever unshakable and that is "love of the brethren". That is what the writer starts his exhortations with here. The reason why he exhorts to love the brethren, may be because of the disappearing of this love.

The company of believers to whom he was writing, was constantly living under pressure. Each of them felt the pressure personally. That can ulti-

mately be that burdensome that one may feel to be left alone. In such a case you no longer feel a connection with your fellow believers. In that case it is important not to accuse your brothers of unwillingness to help you. They might be facing hardships just like you. Just continue to love your brothers and sisters in that case. If they cannot give you what you would love to have, then perhaps you may give them what they need.

V2. The next form of love is "hospitality". 'Hospitality' literally means 'love for strangers'. Brotherly love is love that is inwardly focused, while love for strangers is love that is outwardly focused, both to believers and unbelievers. That exhortation is also needed because in time of tribulation or distress the inclination is present to withdraw. You have enough troubles yourself. Why then should you be interested in the worries of others and even of strangers? This could be the reason for you to withdraw. But that is not right.

Have you ever felt to be a stranger, helpless and looking for someone who cares about you? Anyway, God has cared about you in Christ. Because of that you are obligated to show love to strangers, people you don't know. You can do that by offering them a meal, a bed or another form of help.

In this way you possibly even entertain angels. That's what Abraham (Gen 18:1-8) and even Lot (Gen 19:1-3) experienced. And what about the two who went to Emmaus? Of course the Lord Jesus is not an angel, but to them He at first was certainly a stranger Whom they urged to abide with them. Without knowing that they took the Lord Jesus into their house (Lk 24:29-31). And is it not the Lord Who says that if you welcome anyone who belongs to Him, He acknowledges that as though you have welcomed Him (Mt 25:35,40)? Hospitality is an attitude, a spiritual mind that more often adorns women than men.

It should make no difference whom we welcome. In the world people often want to welcome others for their own benefit. It may deliver you some regard if you welcome someone in your home who has a high status or a person of influence. But our love should be expressed to people whom we do not know and who are in need of help. That applies in a general sense and certainly also to those who went out for the sake of the Name of the Lord Jesus (3Jn 1:5-8). We can also apply that to strangers who enter the

church. How do we welcome them? Do we talk with them or do we look hazily at them? Do we want them to feel accepted and at home or does their presence make us feel uncomfortable?

V3. Again a different form of love is that for prisoners. Of course it is about those who are imprisoned for the sake of the Name of the Lord Jesus. You may show your love to them by paying them a visit. Thus Onesiphorus went in search of Paul when he was imprisoned in Rome. He made efforts to find Paul (2Tim 1:16; cf. Phil 1:7). Such an opportunity is not reserved for everyone. What all believers surely are able to do is what is said here: remember them. That doesn't mean that you just occasionally pray from them, but that you try to empathize with their situation. Paul also asks the Colossians to remember his imprisonment (Col 4:18).

In remembering those who are ill-treated you go a step further. You not only remember the circumstances, but also the suffering of pain. Really empathizing with another person's situation and pain is often difficult. You have to apply yourself to that, make an effort. It's about practicing what is true for the body of Christ, namely, that if one member suffers, all members suffer with it (1Cor 12:26). Now we live in a time of individualism, whereby everyone lives for oneself. This should not be the case among believers. How is your confidence in your brothers and sisters? Do you allow them to get to know you? Are you open for others from the connection you have with them?

Maybe your problem is not so much in this sense, but it is more the multitude of activities. Because of that you are not able to take a closer look at what others are enduring. Or you are not able to consider others, because you think that you also need some recreation. Still the task is to remember others. We receive on a regular basis reports from believers who are imprisoned and/or are ill-treated. Take notice of these reports and try to imagine what they are going through and pray for them.

An application I would want to make, is with the view to those who are captured in a certain way of thinking. In this way they cannot come to true freedom in Christ. If you encounter such people you should try to sympathize with them and stand beside them to help them to get out of it together.

V4. After the brotherly love and the hospitable home, the writer points out the importance of marriage. He wants marriage to be held “in honor among all”. It goes without saying there is no brotherly love and neither a hospitable home if marriage is a farce. Marriage to be held in honor means that there is faithfulness to the institution and the practice of it.

Therefore the writer focuses on the sexual intercourse. Marriage should be held in honor by both married and unmarried people. To the married people this means that the bed, in other words: the sexual intercourse, should only be shared with the man or woman a person is married to. To the unmarried people this means that there should be no sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse before marriage is fornication; sexual intercourse by married people outside their marriage is adultery. Both are an abomination in the sight of God.

In the world marriage has been degraded to a form of living together. The order for you is to keep marriage in its original purpose and to give it substance. You are not to adjust God’s standard to that of the world. To be able to keep God’s standard, you are to continually give it the right place in your thinking and in your heart. If you feel the inclination rise not to take it too seriously, you must judge that. Let yourself be reminded to remain clean in this and also remind others continually of it. Holding on to this institution of God brings blessing; abandoning it brings curse. Fornication and adultery often begin secretly, hidden from others. But God sees it and no one who commits it escapes from His judgment.

V5. Then a warning follows to beware of another form of love that is not of God and that is “the love of money”. Sexual covetousness often goes together with financial covetousness (Eph 5:3; Col 3:5). The love of money is a root of all evil (1Tim 6:10).

The love of money is present if you want more than the Lord gives you. That is for example the case if you participate in strikes for more wages. The order is that you are “content” with the things you have. Isn’t it often the case that you want to have the Lord Jesus together with some earthly securities, like a certain bank account balance and a well paid job? Do you really trust in the Lord alone? You are heartily invited by the writer to do

so. Therefore he reminds you of the promise of the Lord that He will never desert you, nor ever forsake you.

V6. Yet that promise only becomes reality if you say: "The Lord is my Helper." God is saying something about the love of money and you may say, proclaim, that the Lord is your Helper. Do you dare to say that loudly to the people around you? You don't have to seek for nice words. You can, just like it is said here, confidently testify with words that come from the Word, words that God puts in your mouth. If you are attacked you may say what is written in God's Word.

Still, you may often not dare to do that, because you're afraid to be punished for your bold confession. But still it remains true. If people say: 'Where is that God, why does He allow this in your life?', then you can still say confidently: "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"

Now read Hebrews 13:1-6 again.

Reflection: Which forms of love (both positive and negative) appear in this section? What do they mean to you?

Heb 13:7-13 | Let Us Go Out to Him

7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. 10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. 11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest [as an offering] for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

V7. After the exhortations about the conduct of the Hebrews toward those who surround them and about being content with the things they have, they are reminded of encouraging examples. Already in chapter 11 a whole row of examples was presented to them. These are the believers from a distant past. Now the writer points at those who led them who are neither alive among them, but whom they have known among them. These are men who spoke the word of God to them.

They could remember these believers as people who really lived up to what they said and who died in the faith in which they lived. The writer tells his readers that they should carefully consider the result or outcome of their conduct. They persevered till the end. Now the Hebrews are to follow their faith. In their faith the Lord Jesus was centered.

It is also significant for you to follow the faith of people who spoke the Word of God to you. Thereby you could think of the explanation of the Bible by believers who are now with the Lord. By reading their comments you have spiritually grown. Follow their faith. The idea is not to parrot or imitate them. You are not a copy. What you should follow is what was in them, what drove them.

V8. The leaders who have spoken the Word of God to you may not be there anymore, but Who still is, is “Jesus Christ”. He was there yesterday. I write ‘was’, but it is said that He ‘is’ the Same yesterday and today. He is also the Same tomorrow and forever and ever (Heb 1:10-12; Psa 102:27). By ‘yester-

day' you may think of the past, of the days of the Old Testament, but also of the days that He was on earth. As He committed Himself 'yesterday' to His people, so He does now and so He will always do.

When you will be with Him you will not encounter a Christ Who will suddenly act differently. We change, our thoughts change, but He does not change. You really do need Him Who is the unchangeable One in a society in which everything always changes.

V9. Changes also cause unrest. How good is it to have a source of rest in Someone Who is always perfectly stable in the midst of all those changes. Christ is the Rock Who remains perfectly firm and untouched through all kinds of teachings. If your heart finds no satisfaction in Christ anymore you will open yourself for "various and strange doctrines". You will be carried away by them, which may result that you are more and more separated from the Rock. Finally you will lose every connection with Christ and therefore without any hold become a victim of strange teachings. The end will be horrible.

Strange teachings are teachings that are strange to the new things that has come in Christ. They are there in many varieties. These are errors or traditions that are attractive to the flesh (Mk 7:3-8) and with which people can achieve honor. In such teaching Christ is indeed good, but not sufficient. Christ alone is then too limited, too little. Isn't life much broader with many interesting things?

If this reasoning takes a grip on you, you will get carried away from the steadfastness that you have in Christ. You become open to new forms of faith experience with mainly or only emotion. But what you need is your "heart to be strengthened by grace". If you are deeply aware of that, it is a great liberation from each own effort. If you think that it is about the experience in itself, the kick that you get out of it, it will not make your heart to be strengthened. In this way you are only satisfying your religious emotions. It really is not easy to be dependent on grace alone.

Grace means that nothing is expected from you, but that you expect everything from God. Is that too meager, too easy or meaningless to you, then you will seek your salvation in "foods". 'Foods' stand for things that

will perish (1Cor 6:13), what only has a temporal and no permanent value. Here it is about walking in foods and is therefore a reference to the Jewish tangible, temporal worship service. This worship service had brought no profit at all. That's what became clear from this letter. It didn't bring man to God, but only demonstrated all the more strongly the distance from Him.

V10. If I clearly understand this verse, you may read it like this: We, Christians, have a place of worship service where we are allowed to draw near to God to have fellowship with Him, while they who still think that they have to serve God according to Jewish tradition, are totally excluded from that. Here it is about 'eating from the altar'. 'Eating' is a symbol of having fellowship. The 'altar' is a picture of Christ. Those, who hold on to the Old Testament worship service, do not partake of Christ and therefore have no right to 'eat from the altar'.

V11. In this verse we find the explanation for that. The writer points at a ritual these Hebrews were familiar with. When they were still Jewish, they were entirely involved with this ritual. This ritual was yearly performed before their eyes on the day of atonement (Lev 16:27). Now, because they are thoroughly taught by the writer through this letter about the reality of the sacrifice of Christ, they will understand that he is speaking about Christ even now.

What happened on the day of atonement with the blood and the body of the animals that were offered, shows what happened to Christ. First of all the blood was brought into the holy place, the sanctuary, for the purification of sins. Christ Himself entered the holy place with His blood (Heb 9:12). As a result of that the access to the holy place now has also been opened for both Hebrews and Christians and for you, and they and you are allowed to enter it freely (Heb 10:19). Something also happened to "bodies" of the animals. These were "burned outside the camp".

V12. The writer gives the explanation of that now. The burning of the bodies of the animals outside the camp indicates what happened to the Lord Jesus outside the gate, that is the gate of Jerusalem.

It might have been quite shocking to the readers to see this. They must have realized that what the writer showed, makes a murderers' city of Jerusalem. They were still having difficulties with separating themselves from that city. It still had such a great place in their thinking. Now they understood that it was that very city that threw its King out and killed Him. That means that that city means nothing anymore to God and it should be the same to them.

At the same time that place "outside the gate" is the place where Christ has sanctified the people "through His own blood". Therefore that place has a double meaning. It shows what people, and especially the religious people, did to the Lord and that in that place God's counsel, concerning His people, has been fulfilled (cf. Acts 2:23).

V13. And just like the shedding of the blood of Jesus had the consequence that the way to the holy place was opened for His people (Heb 10:19), the blood of Jesus that He shed outside the gate also has consequences for His people. The consequences are sounding in the call: "So, let us go out to Him outside the camp." You show true respect for the work of the Lord Jesus if you, on the one hand enter the sanctuary to draw near to God and if you, on the other hand take the place of reproach on earth.

To go outside the camp, or outside the gate, means outside an organized system of religion. Formerly the camp was the place where God was dwelling and where He ordained everything in the laws and commandments. But when Christ came there, they threw Him out. He who now wants to belong to Him cannot remain in a religious system that is established after an Old Testament model. This is strongly characterized in the roman-catholic church.

The call also implies a warning not to allow anything in the Christian worship service that, by outward rituals, gives the appearance of a better way of drawing near to God. There is an essential difference between the Christian worship service and the way God was served in the Old Testament according to His commands. That difference is caused by the fact that the Lord Jesus is now in heaven and the Holy Spirit dwells in the church on earth. Ever since the Holy Spirit dwells on earth the Christian

worship service is not characterized by an earthly place and earthly means of praise, but by worshiping God in spirit and truth (Jn 4:21-24).

The outward fuss that is still found in protestantism has no right of existence. However, the reality is that more and more elements of the Jewish religion are reintroduced in the Christian worship service. Therefore the call to go out outside the camp should sound louder. Bearing the reproach of Christ goes together with abandoning the organized professing Christianity after the Old Testament model.

In professing Christianity at large you are irrelevant if you do not cooperate with them. But is there a better place on earth than with the Lord Jesus, even if it is a place of reproach? Asaph puts it this way: "Whom have I in heaven [but You]? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth" (Psa 73:25). If you want to be with the Lord Jesus in heaven then you will surely want to be with Him on earth also.

Now read Hebrews 13:7-13 again.

Reflection: Have you gone out to Him outside the camp?

Heb 13:14-25 | Exhortations, Blessings and Greetings

14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking [the city] which is to come. 15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. 17 Obey your leaders and submit [to them], for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. 18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. 19 And I urge [you] all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner. 20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, [even] Jesus our Lord, 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom [be] the glory forever and ever. Amen. 22 But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. 23 Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. 24 Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. 25 Grace be with you all.

V14. The writer substantiates the call to go out to Him by pointing again at the goal of their pilgrimage. The Hebrews didn't have to consider it as a loss when they turned their back on the earthly Jerusalem and the whole religion that was performed there. It had all come to an end because of the rejection of the Lord Jesus. Every desire for it was wrong. Jerusalem was not a lasting city. The city would soon be destroyed (Lk 21:20). That was also the case with the temple (Mt 24:1-2).

They should not look back, but forward (cf. Heb 11:15-16). They were seeking the future city. That was what they continually had to look forward to wholeheartedly, even though it seemed so far away and even though the way was that difficult. If they would let themselves be distracted by what they left, they would go astray.

V15. When the writer has drawn their attention on the right goal again he gives them a wonderful exhortation. Were they thinking that their unbelieving fellow countrymen were better off with an offering service with literal offering animals? Then that thought had to be corrected. In

fact it was a great privilege for them not to, just now and then with special occasions, bring offerings to God, but to do that “continually”. And it had nothing to do with tangible offerings at all, but they were allowed to bring “praise to God”, that is “the fruit of lips”. That goes much deeper, it comes out of the heart and goes to the heart of God.

This is all because of Christ and His work. Through Him you also are able to praise and worship God. That doesn’t happen with outward appearance, but by speaking out about what you have found in the Lord Jesus. God loves to see you coming to Him to tell Him something about His Son. He loves it when you give thanks to His Name. It is a great joy for His heart if you continually praise Him with the fruit of your lips which is meant for Him.

V16. God also loves it when you think of others. Beside spiritual offerings He also wants you to bring material offerings. You may bring the spiritual offerings to Him, the material offerings you may bring to others. “Doing good” is to provide someone with something good, to do a good deed. That is not only giving goods, but it can also be a gesture or a word. “Sharing” has the meaning of sharing your goods with others who are in need of them.

It is about doing good in a general sense and sharing everything with one another. You see that wonderfully in practice with the first Christians (Acts 2:44; 4:34). I am afraid that that state of mind is hardly to be found now, but God still finds pleasure in it. In that way earthly possessions get such a rich meaning and a deep satisfaction. If you are willing to bring these sacrifices, you yourself will be refreshed (Pro 11:25b). God is a giving God. Isn’t it a privilege to imitate Him in that?

V17. Thus, with regard to giving, you may imitate or follow God. On earth there are people you should follow, that means whom you should obey. That are the ones who lead you. Do you see that it is plural? Therefore it is not about a pastor, a person who is theologically trained or someone who makes himself a leader. It is about mature, spiritual believers who are taught and formed by God and whom He has given to His church. Those are the ones you should submit to when they explain to you, based on God’s Word, how things should happen. Then they will not do their work

“with grief”, but “with joy”. You must submit to them. Although this is not in line with the current world, it is fully biblical and it brings blessing.

Many Christian families are reflecting the spirit of this age. Children do not obey anymore, and being submissive is out of the question. Instead of obeying, children are negotiating with the parents. That possibly delivers the child the result he wanted, but it is an enormous loss for the parents. In most cases it also becomes clear in future that such a relationship with each other is an obstacle for a radical conversion of the child. On the other hand, the call to obedience and submission also does not involve discipline demanding unconditional (blind) obedience.

Thank God for brothers who lead you. That will make it easier for you to obey them. If you do not listen to them, it is “unprofitable” for you, and it will be harmful for you.

V18. Pray for leaders whom you know. They need your intercession. If those who rule ask for intercession, they can only do that if they are sure that they “have a good conscience”. For if they do not have a good conscience they cannot stand right before God and they can therefore be of no help to others. They must first take away the burden from their conscience. As far as the writer was concerned, this was not the case.

V19. He desired to meet the believers to whom he wrote this letter. He also knew the power of intercession, for he exhorts them to intercede abundantly, so that he may be able to be with them the sooner.

V20. The writer comes to his conclusion. He directs your gaze to “the God of peace”. A wonderful, soothing expression: the God of peace. He has perfect peace and gives this peace to anyone who trusts in Him. There is nothing that confuses Him. His peace can be your peace, He wants to give that to you (Phil 4:7; Jn 14:27). Through the work of the Lord Jesus He is able to give peace to all who believe in His Son. That peace is everlasting. It is also the peace that will be all over the world in the millennial kingdom of peace. The letter was written with this kingdom of peace in prospect.

Here at the end of the letter you read once more about the basis of that kingdom. That basis is that God “brought up from the dead ... Jesus our Lord”. In that way a new covenant could be made, which also is everlast-

ing. It cannot possibly fail because it is based on the blood of Christ, which eternally holds its value.

Isn't it beautiful to read about the Lord that He is "the great Shepherd of the sheep? As 'the great Shepherd' He was raised from the dead and guides His flock through the world, on the way to that other world, where He already is. It has become His flock because He has been for that flock "the good Shepherd", Who gave His life for the sheep that belong to it (Jn 10:11). And when He comes to establish the millennial kingdom of peace, He will do that as the "Chief Shepherd" (1Pet 5:4).

Note that the writer speaks about the Lord Jesus as "Jesus our Lord". Therein you taste his love for Him, a love that he also assumes to be with the readers by the word 'our'.

V21. The wish of the writer is that the God of peace will "equip you [the believers] in every good thing to do His [this is God's] will". He is not satisfied with less because God does not deserve less. You are on earth to do good in such a way that nothing is lacking. That will be the case if you are executing God's will. God's will is that you are on earth to His honor. He wants you to be with Him in glory. On your way to that He wants you as a sheep of His flock to stay close with the flock and with the Shepherd.

In the light of the letter His will has got to do with bringing into practice what you have become, namely a son and a priest. He wants you to behave as son and that you honor Him as priest.

I can imagine that you may ask yourself how to do that. That won't work, will it? That's the feeling I have too. God knows about that question. He also has the answer to it. That answer consists of the promise of His help. He is "working in us that which is pleasing in His sight" (cf. Phil 2:12-13)! Therefore you only have to open yourself to Him and fill your heart with His Word. Then it will become full of Christ and He will work in you what is well pleasing in God's sight. If thus everything of yourself has faded into the background in that way and God and Christ are great before you, you cannot help but exclaim: "To Him [be] the glory forever and ever. Amen."

V22. In the light of that exclamation the remark of the writer is understandable that he has written to them "briefly". Although the letter is quite

a long one, he dealt with topics that are inexhaustible. He could only touch all his topics very limited (cf. Heb 11:32). Only the essential ones were covered, which was needed for the Hebrews and for us too. We may discover more and more in them.

The total of what he has written, has the form of an exhortation. He exhorts them or encourages them to bear with it. The bearing with the exhortation is important if you want to grow spiritually. It doesn't mean that you just listen to it in a friendly way and then do nothing with it, but that you take the exhortation to heart.

V23. The writer also has news about Timothy. He knew that they were interested in him and that they would be delighted if he would come together with him. It is nice to inform your brothers and sisters about other believers because you know that they are interested.

V24. The bond of the writer with the company to whom he writes, also is expressed in his greetings. He asks his readers to greet the "all of" their "leaders and all the saints". The bond of the believers has no borders, but is international.

From Italy the believers greet their fellow believers in Israel through the writer. The connection is through the Lord Jesus; through Him all believers are a unity, a family.

V25. The writer says goodbye with the wish that grace be with them all. Only by grace it is possible to go the path of faith to the end.

Now read Hebrews 13:14-25 again.

Reflection: What is the will of God for your life? How can you learn to know that will?

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