

# COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

North American Church Ministries Publication

April-June 1986

## Living By Faith



# WITNESS



Linda Terrill, R.N., Florida Hospital

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Solusi College changed Jennifer's life. “For the first time I took the Bible seriously,” she explains. Jennifer learned more of Ellen White's teachings during a health course taught by missionary Ben Wheeler.

# -changed my life!”

She realized the seriousness of her mother's drinking problem as she read *Ministry of Healing* for the class.

The girl then wrote to her mother from Solusi, offering hope and encouragement that eventually bore fruit. After much prayer Ruth M'thini confided her problem to the church pastor, who then rallied the church to visit and pray with the woman. She gave her heart to the Lord after nine months and became a strong, active church member.

Mother and daughter, with new found faith, prayed together for Mr. M'thini, urging him to trust God and look for new employment with Sabbaths off. He was baptized along with 628 others in September, 1984 during an evangelistic effort conducted in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

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Collegiate Quarterly (ISSN 0744-2939). Published quarterly by Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687, U.S.A. One year subscription in U.S.A., \$6.50; single copy, \$1.65. One year subscription to countries outside U.S.A., \$7.90; single copy, \$2.00. All prices at U.S.A. exchange. Second-class postage paid at Nampa, ID. When a change of address is desired, please send both old and new addresses.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Collegiate Quarterly, P.O. Box 7000, Boise, Idaho, 83707.

Send editorial inquiries to Union College, 3800 South 48th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68506, U.S.A.

Send circulation inquiries to Pacific Press Publishing Association, P.O. Box 7000, Boise, Idaho, 83707, U.S.A.

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**The artist for this quarter is Patwick of Pacific Union College. Before studying the lesson, please see page 128 for explanatory comments on the illustrations.**

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Lesson 1, March 30 - April 5

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# The Questioning of Faith

"Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4, RSV).





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# Fuel for Faith

## Two Books on Faith and Doubt

"Doubt is the fuel on which faith feeds and . . . challenge is the agent that keeps it vivid."<sup>1</sup> These words by church historian Martin E. Marty in his book *By Way of Response* broke new ground in my thinking about faith. Could it be that doubt in some sense is positive?

Later, when I interviewed Marty for *College People*, I asked him to elaborate on the statement. He responded, "I guess I would say that with all the things that happen in the world, from nuclear threat to personal tragedy, a person who walks through life without any wounds is a little hard to believe. To do that you have to build such a set of shells around yourself that one would have to ask, Are you a real person? To carry that over to the realm of faith, if you spend your whole life building such thick cuticles over your body, or thick walls around yourself, that you never look at those disturbing aspects of reality on which doubt prospers, you're not a full human being. The Christian believes that God as a God of love triumphs over evil in the world, but that makes sense only if you've first walked through the valley and seen what the evil is. And so when someone tells me, 'I've never had a doubt,' I have to ask, Have they looked out of the window, have they looked in their heart, have they ever thought things through deeply?"

"I'm not interested in people who have nothing but doubts. That can be a very selfish way of dealing with things. But it's my understanding from the Bible and from the greats of Christian history, that the really titanic figures, the geniuses, the saints, the mystics, the heroes and the heroines, are people who let doubt speak to their heart and took advantage of the struggle. It is then that they formulate the great hymns, the great statements of faith and the great actions."<sup>2</sup>

Habakkuk and Hebrews, the biblical documents we will study this quarter, bear out Marty's point. Both are great statements of faith born out of honest struggle with doubts and challenges. Though the two books are different in many ways, the central concern of both is what it means to live by faith. And as we study them, we will find them pointing us to a faith that does not insulate itself from tough questions and disturbing doubts, but instead uses such challenges as fuel for staying vital and authentic.

## Habakkuk's Setting

Habakkuk, our study for the first three weeks of the quarter, was written during tumultuous times. Seismic shifts in world power were shaking the entire Near East, including the kingdom of Judah. The brutal Assyrian empire had been dominant for centuries. But in 612 B.C. the Babylonians, with the help of the Scythians and the Medes,

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Habakkuk  
1:1-2:4

sacked Nineveh, Assyria's capital. A third superpower, Egypt, then tried to thwart Babylon's resurgence by allying with what was left of the Assyrian empire. The Egyptian forces swept northward, but were decisively defeated by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar at Carcemish in 605 B.C.

Though Egypt continued to make threatening noises, Babylon was now in firm control of most of the Near East. Meanwhile, corrupt, oppressive and foolish leadership was turning Judah away from God and into idolatry. Despite warnings from the prophet Jeremiah, the kings of Judah repeatedly reneged on promises of loyalty to Babylon and sided with Egypt. The result would be three invasions from Babylon, captivity for most of the nation, and destruction of the temple.

In this setting of the inter-

national upheaval, political intrigue, social injustice and spiritual apostasy (ca. 608-598 B.C.), Habakkuk raised the perennial question of *theodicy*—the justification of God's ways. How can a loving, sovereign God allow tragedy and violence to prevail unchecked in His world?

Habakkuk is divided into three clear sections:

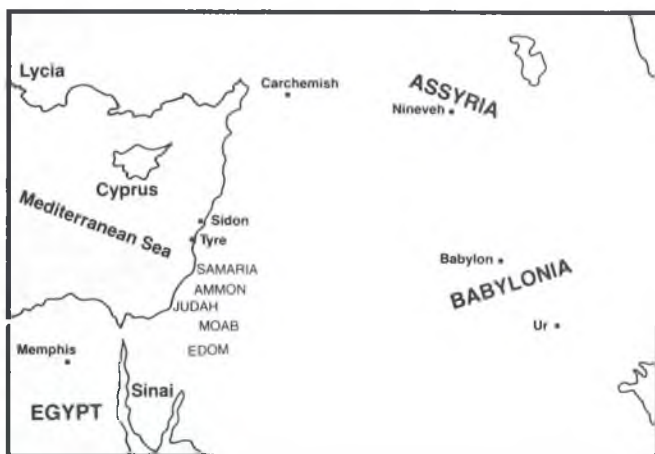
**1. The Questioning of Faith** (a dialogue between God and the prophet—1:1-2:4).

**2. The Affirmation of Faith** (five woes against the wicked—2:5-2:20).

**3. The Celebration of Faith** (a canticle to Yahweh—3:1-19).

In our study of Habakkuk's struggle, which is so true to the human experience, we will find, not easy answers, but strength and wisdom for living by faith in the absence of such answers.

D. F. M.



1. Martin E. Marty, *By Way of Response*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1981) p. 104.
2. "Interview with Martin Marty," *College People*, January 1982, pp. 28-30.

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# Faith's Wait

LOGOS

**Theme:** Though suffering and injustice may raise doubts and questions that are never fully resolved in this life, God's people live by their faith in Him.

## 1. Habakkuk's First Complaint (read Hab. 1:1-4)

*"How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out 'Violence!' but you do not save?" (1:2, NIV).*

God, Santa Claus, and the Good Fairy are not one and the same as many would like to assume. God is not making a list, checking it twice, and neither is He turning pumpkins into coaches. In other words, wishing hard enough, praying hard enough, is not going to manipulate Him into supplying one's every desire and whim.

However, while viewing God like a vending machine is one thing, understanding Him as an omnipotent God whose very existence is founded in love and justice, is another. Eventually, in our non-comprehending mortality, the question will and must come, "God, why?" especially when He makes such statements as: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy" (Psalm 103:8, NIV). "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear" (Isa. 65:24, NIV). And, "No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders" (Isa. 60:18, NIV). Are we faced with a contradiction when, despite these statements, the reality around us is injustice, violence, and corruption? Such was Habakkuk's dilemma. He knew the attributes of his God, and he saw the depressing reality all around, and the two didn't seem to mesh.

*Is it wrong to question God about how He works in the world, or are we to meet everything with mute acceptance? Can our complaints change how God works?*

## 2. God's Response and Habakkuk's Second Complaint (read Hab. 1:5-17)

*"Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told" (1:5, NIV).*

This is probably not the answer Habakkuk expected or wanted. To the question, "Why violence and destruction?" comes the reply, "You're not going to believe this but the Babylonians, a ruthless people bent on violence, are going to come and bring punishment on Judah!" This ruthless and violent power, comprised of "guilty men, whose own strength is their god" (v. 11, NIV), is going to be the agent of God's justice. That God would use these heathens who didn't even acknowledge Him must have been hard for Habakkuk to understand. One can sense the gravity of Habakkuk's despair as he responds with a second complaint (vv. 12-17). He alludes to God's power and government, "O Lord, are you not from everlasting?" (v. 12) and then he compares men to creatures of the sea who have no

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order, no ruler. They are subject only to a wicked foe who catches them with hook and net, and by these acts of cruelty the oppressor prospers.

*In view of the tragic situations in today's world, such as genocide in Cambodia, the violence in Lebanon, and the starvation in Ethiopia, is Habakkuk's outlook relevant and valid for modern Christians?*

### 3. The Lord's Answer (read Hab. 2:1-4)

*"I will stand my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint" (2:1, NIV).*

When bewildered and confused about God's working, there are two possible responses: a complete renunciation of the divine, or a stubborn resolve to give God the benefit of the doubt and see the situation to the end. The latter was Habakkuk's response: "I will stand here and wait to see what he will say."

Habakkuk takes his stand in a tower. Whether literal or figurative, this illustrates an important point: God's answer comes only to those whose feet are on a firm foundation of confident expectation. Why? Because, though God's revelation is available to all, it is not received by all. One must be willing to rise above the trouble and to be alert and attentive as the watchman on his wall. Taking this stand, however, does not solve the dilemma, it merely places one in the attitude to receive God's message.

It is in this attitude that Habakkuk waits and God comes. God instructs that the vision must be written plainly. The vision must be preserved because it deals with future events, and more importantly, it acts as a record of God's working. "The written word establishes a point of authentic response against which unfolding events may be checked. . . . It is as if God were saying to the prophet, 'This is my deliberate purpose backed by my own integrity. Write it out that all may know what it is that I will do, to the end that you yourself may be protected when it seems as if my promises are not being fulfilled.'"<sup>1</sup>

It is a common human trait that desires immediacy—immediate action, immediate gratification, immediate change. Human frustration with the divine often finds its root in this. We cry for help and because it may not come within our timetable, we conclude it will not come or it will come too late. But God's schedule seldom conforms to our own. This does not indicate a lack of concern, rather an omniscience we cannot share. It is of this that God reminds Habakkuk. He is instructed to wait. And though his questions were never fully answered by God, God did not ignore him, or leave him without hope. Though he didn't fully explain the trials, he showed Habakkuk how to survive them. "The righteous will live by his faith," by a patient trust and obedience, though understanding may only be partial.

*Must everyone struggle with God as did Habakkuk? Why don't answers or solutions come easily?*

E. R. M.

1. *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6, George A. Buttrick, ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956) p. 987.

# Can There Be Honest Doubt?

by Hyveth Williams

Everyone experiences doubt. In Habakkuk's case, it was doubt about the wisdom of God's plan which allows the wicked to prosper (1:1-4).

Doubt is something Christians are afraid to express, possibly because it is often defined as skepticism, which poses a definite danger to the Christian, according to Ellen White. "Skepticism, in most cases, is the love of sin"<sup>1</sup> (see 1 John 1:6). However, doubt is more often defined as uncertainty and indecision, resulting from inconclusive or intangible evidence.

Habakkuk's doubt would fall in the latter category since "he sincerely loved the Lord and earnestly longed for the triumph of righteousness" but "could not understand why God seemingly permitted the apostasy and crimes of Judah to go unchecked and unpunished."<sup>2</sup> This type of doubt is presented in the Bible as a healthy exercise of man's reasoning power, which God encourages (Isa. 1:18). "God never asks us to believe without giving significant evidence upon which to base our faith." As a matter of fact, it is so important to God that we question and search out His truths that He "has never removed the possibility of doubt" in His dealings with man.<sup>3</sup>

Imagine how much more personal and meaningful a truth once doubted but pursued and discovered is to the one who undertook that quest.

"There are many things apparently difficult or obscure, which God will make plain and simple to those who seek an understanding of them. . . . *God invites us to prove for ourselves the reality of His word, the truth of His promises. He bids us 'taste and see that the Lord is good' Psalm 34:8. Instead of depending upon the word of another, we are to taste for ourselves.*"<sup>4</sup>

Habakkuk's doubt was presented in all earnestness and innocence. God still seeks an earnest and questioning heart (Isa. 7:10-16). It is the child who continues to ask "why?" to whom answers are given. God's invitation is (A)sk, (S)eeK, (K)noCK = ASK (Matt. 7:7, 8). Where there is no inquiry resulting from honest doubt or uncertainty, there can be no discovery of the depths of God's love and forgiveness.

I once knew a Man with bloodstained brow  
I wondered why but never asked how  
I heard upon a tree He did die  
But never would I ask Him why.  
Today my heart is so unsure  
Could it be that I should have doubted more?  
For when my curiosity is high  
I ask, until satisfied, the question "WHY?"

## REACT

If you were Habakkuk, would you be satisfied with God's answer in 2:3, 4? Are we still waiting for God's answer to suffering and injustice today? Or, has more of the answer been revealed since Habakkuk's time?

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Habakkuk 1:1-4

He "has never removed the possibility of doubt."

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 111.  
2. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1048.  
3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 105.  
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 111, emphasis supplied.

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# After Anger, an Answer

by Barry L. Casey

## EVIDENCE

Key text:

Habakkuk 1:5-11

Habakkuk's problem is a familiar one: he cannot bear the evil and suffering he sees around him. Let me rephrase that: it's not that he cannot bear the evil—people do what they have to do—but it's that he *will* not accept it as the divinely ordained state of affairs. The oracle of Habakkuk is short, angry, and honest. The passage for today (Hab. 1:5-11) is part of what biblical scholars call a prophecy of judgment, set within a larger passage of complaint on Habakkuk's part.

These kinds of complaints were a common and accepted part of Hebrew worship. They were not considered irreverent or sacrilegious, but were necessary for a people who believed God actually did something in their history. Because God took human actions so seriously, God's people took divine actions seriously. And when things seemed to contradict what God had commanded them to do, the people wanted an explanation—they *demand*ed an explanation!

The problem which cried out for explanation was that God was using barbarians to discipline the people of Israel. The Chaldeans were simply awful people. They took delight in destroying pregnant women; they showed no mercy to the wounded and the disabled; they swept in like wolves on their prey and then were gone, leaving the dead for vulture's food. The thing that made Habakkuk choke was that God Himself had raised up these savages to do His dirty work (Hab. 1:6).

Now, this is not a problem for a person who believes everything can be explained through politics or economics or whether the Chaldean generals received the proper toilet training as infants or not. Some philosophies of life tidy up all the messy parts by reducing the variables to only what can be observed. But the Hebrews took into account the presence (or absence) of God in human history and that complicated things a lot. If you believe, as did Habakkuk, that God is wholly *omnipotent* and *completely* and *fully righteous*, then the *reality of evil* is a kick in the head. If God is good, why does He allow evil to hurt and destroy? If He is so powerful, why can't He prevent it from happening at all? And what are we to do when we find out that God has not only allowed the evil to fall on us, but has planned for it to crush us? Who needs enemies with a God like that?

And yet Habakkuk will not give up on God. Because he has demanded an answer in the past he continues to ask in the present. Because he has determined to be faithful to God he demands that God return the favor. "How long, O Lord, have I cried to thee, unanswered?" he shouts (Hab. 1:1, NEB). We can imagine him sighing and shaking his head, but just as firmly holding his ground in asking for answers.

Does he get an answer? Do any of us get answers to the universal question of the reason for evil and suffering? Not really: God hardly ever answers this question directly in the Scripture. What seems to matter most is that in asking the question we are still engaged with God. Habakkuk's anguish and determination confirm that in the

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Barry L. Casey writes from Takoma Park, MD.

"Love God,  
fight with God,  
make up  
with God,  
but never  
simply shrug  
and walk away."

---

Old Testament, the human-divine relationship called for either love or hate but never indifference or apathy. Love God, fight with God, make up with God, but never simply shrug and walk away.

Strangely enough, the Scriptures also indicate that in the struggle to understand and to ask the question *some* kind of answer emerges. It isn't one we can plug into every situation. It isn't one which will satisfy people who reduce reality to only that which they can explain. Rather, it is an answer which can only be lived from day to day by faith. We discover the answer by living in the hope of an answer—no matter how long it is in coming (Hab. 2:1-3).

### **REACT**

Does God welcome our expressions of anger at him? In what ways might such expressions be beneficial or harmful?

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# An Open Dialogue

by Hyveth Williams

## HOW TO Key text: Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

Habakkuk is perplexed. He has learned that God plans to use a nation more wicked than Judah as an instrument of punishment. He finds it difficult to reconcile his understanding of God's mercy with this plan for divine justice. He appeals for mercy. Unashamedly, he pours out his deepest fears and even protests against God's plan (Hab. 1:12-2:1).

Habakkuk's reaction to God has some practical applications for our times:

1. If you are concerned about the way God is working out His purposes, **don't deny your concerns**. Speak honestly, openly and specifically to God about your feelings. God encourages honest questions from an earnest seeker.

2. After you have expressed your concerns, **keep silence** before God (see Hab. 2:20). This means showing God respect by giving Him opportunity to respond in His own time. And when He does, accept His answers for He is the only one who is truly faithful and just (Heb. 10:23). When you wait on the Lord, wait in faith.

Don't treat God like a welfare provider—the one to whom you quickly and carelessly hand a list of things you want done and then rush madly away from to be caught up in your own life. You wouldn't approach the president of the United States without due respect. Before you entered his presence you would carefully rehearse what you plan to say, and then you would state it clearly and concisely. But how inconsiderate we often are of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

3. **Listen for the voice of God**. We should not be like the man who seeks the counsel of man. Sometimes we ask everyone else what their opinion is about God's actions and never seek God's counsel. When we try to make decisions there are so many voices clamoring for our attention that we can't hear the still, small voice of God.

We also have a misunderstanding of what the Holy Spirit's voice sounds like. We have been programmed to expect the Cecil B. DeMille, Hollywood version—thunderous rushing water, heavenly chorale of 1,000 voices of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir interspersed with rolling drums and clashing cymbals preceding a voice amplified several hundred times as it passes through an echo chamber. Therefore, when we hear a still, small voice, which often sounds like our own, whispering in the secret places of our minds, "this is the way, walk ye in it," we reject it.

Determine this day that you will develop an acquaintance with the voice of God—not just a passing acquaintance, but an intimate knowledge (John 10:27). And when He speaks, you act—always trusting.

How to know the voice of God? Diligently study the Bible, speak to God as a friend, wait patiently, listen respectfully, follow through faithfully and you will hear the unmistakable sound of His still, small voice.

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Hyveth Williams is a master of divinity student at Andrews University.



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# The Gift of Being Faithful

by Barry L. Casey

## OPINION

Key text:  
Habakkuk 2:1-4

In the key text for today (Hab. 2:1-4) we see both God's way of answering Habakkuk and perhaps something of an answer for all who wait for the coming of the Lord. Habakkuk has taken God to task for the inexplicable way in which God has chosen to discipline His people. God has responded with an answer that is really no answer at all (Hab. 1:5-11)—at least not an answer that Habakkuk is going to accept without a challenge! Back he comes with more questions (Hab. 1:12-17), almost as if he is reminding God of what it is that God is supposed to be doing.

But Habakkuk is no fool. He knows God well enough to realize that God keeps His promise. If God says He will answer, Habakkuk will wait for that answer. So while Habakkuk may be an angry man he also knows the virtues of patience and endurance. In words which might be the response of all who "wait upon the Lord" he determines to stand by his post and listen for the word *when* it comes, not *if* it comes.

Even more interesting is the relationship between God and Habakkuk (Hab. 2:1): "I will watch to learn what he will say through me, and what I shall reply when I am challenged" (NEB). Apparently even a prophet, one who sees into the very councils of God, is not always certain what the message from God will be, or what to say when pressed to defend his interpretation of God. When God *does* answer it is simply to reassure Habakkuk that a vision will come, that he should wait for it, and that if it is delayed he must not give up (see 2:3). As we await fuller revelation, God wants us to be faithful to Him as He is faithful to us.

And that brings us to Habakkuk's most famous verse: "The righteous man will live by being faithful" (Hab. 2:4, NEB). Luther was so sure he had hit the theological mother lode with this verse that he added the word "alone" to the end of it. There's no question that this is a good verse to stake one's eternal life on. But I think we don't have to wait for it to take effect in the future: the emphasis in the verse is decidedly on the present. Righteous people live (that is, are spiritually and socially vital) by *being* faithful, not by *having* faith.

The difference between being and having is the difference between one's nature and one's activity. If today I have faith and tomorrow I don't, then in what sense am I spiritually alive and vital? If, on the other hand, faith is not an activity which one picks up or lays down, but is rather the form of life given to us, then we truly are alive in God. That is the kind of assurance and confidence Habakkuk lives within. It is this kind of faith which must be a gift of God, for we cannot earn or buy or even deserve faith which can be quantified. With this kind of faith we can tell Death and all its attendant demons of destruction, despair, and hopelessness, literally to go to Hell. The righteous live and move and have their being in the assurance that Death has lost its sting, the grave has lost its victory. For a people facing the Chaldeans or a people facing nuclear holocaust these are words to live by.

**"Luther was sure he had hit the theological mother lode with this verse."**

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Barry L. Casey writes from Takoma Park, MD.

# The Affirmation of Faith

"The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him"  
(Habakkuk 2:20, NIV).



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# God and the Underdog

by Doug Stuva

I have a thing for looking at people in restaurants. I used to do this while I was on break from playing dishwasher at a cafe in Kearney, Nebraska. Of course, they didn't give me any free food with my 20 minutes, but at least I had time to watch people.

I never found out the guy's name, though I saw him two or three times during my short stint at the cafe. I guessed he was 13. Thirteen and overweight. No, 13 and fat!

But that's OK. His obesity didn't make any difference to me. Trouble is, I knew it would make a difference to others—specifically, his peers.

Maybe he was well-adjusted and mature and would handle the verbal and possibly physical abuse kids would shovel at him. Maybe I was wondering about him needlessly.

But maybe the names and faces and the being left out and being chosen last—all the

things adults take for granted—*would* leave scars. And scars, by definition, last a lifetime.

I don't know why I picked him to worry about. Maybe because he was the underdog.

That's one thing I've always liked about God—He's often on the side of the underdog. He's on the side of the guy who doesn't have a chance.

In Exodus He's on the side of the underdog. In Daniel He's on the side of the underdog. In Jesus' death on the cross, He's on the side of the underdog.

Then there's this assignment I received to write on Habakkuk 2:5-20. There were some notes written in the margin of these verses in one of my older Bibles, but if I had ever read them, I sure couldn't remember when. So I did. I found out God is on the side of the underdog in Habakkuk, too.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Habakkuk 2:5-20

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A former *Collegiate Quarterly* editor, Doug Stuva teaches English and journalism at Mandan High School in North Dakota.

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# Woe!

**LOGOS**     **Theme:** Though evil may appear to succeed for a time, it contains the seeds of its own destruction, and faith affirms God's control over human affairs.

**1. Woes to the Plunderer and the Oppressor (read Hab. 2:5-11)**  
"Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion!" (2:6, NIV).

Habakkuk 2:5-20 is a series of five woes. Scholars disagree as to whom these woes are directed, whether the Assyrians, Babylonians, or the Greeks. But it stands to reason that since the Babylonians are identified in chapter 1, this section refers to them, too. Moreover, these woes are a further answer to Habakkuk's dilemma expressed in chapter 1. He found it hard to comprehend that the Lord would use the violent heathen from Babylon to execute judgment on His chosen people. Through these woes, God tells Habakkuk that the wicked power cannot forever succeed, for inherent in evil are the seeds of its own destruction.

The first woe deals with plundering. The warning comes, "Because you have plundered many nations, the people you have left will plunder you" (v. 8, NIV). Conquest overtly for the sake of plunder is no longer done in modern times (though perhaps we have only become more skillful at "legitimizing" war). Yet our age is rife with examples of those who acquire wealth unjustly. One need only to look as far as corporate exploitation of the third world for evidence that Habakkuk's first "woe" is applicable today.

The second woe, against the oppressor, is closely tied to the first. "Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain" (v. 9, NIV). Oppression—economic, political, religious, or otherwise—is abhorred by God, and his judgments will not be withheld. Again, modern examples, unfortunately, are not few.

*What modern examples of oppression can you think of? What is the Christian's responsibility towards oppression, exploitation, and injustice, especially where these enter the realm of politics?*

*Are Christian ethics compatible with business practice? Could an "unfriendly takeover" be considered unjust gain?*

**2. Woe to the Violent (read Hab. 2:12-14)**

"Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!" (2:12, NIV).

Violence is never a successful solution to a problem. Yet man has never been able to learn this lesson. During the approximately 5,000 years of recorded history, only about 300 years have been peaceful. The maxim "violence begets violence" is only too true, as exemplified by Lebanon, Afghanistan, and all the other "hot spots" around our world. When will the lesson be learned? When will it be understood that "an eye for an eye will make the whole world blind"? The full realization, sadly, will come to all only when "the

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earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord' ” (v. 14, NIV).

*Christ said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you” (John 14:27, NIV). What effect does this peace have on our outward actions? How actively should a Christian seek world peace? With our apocalyptic outlook, should world peace even be a Christian concern? Why or why not? By what methods should peace be sought?*

### **3. Woe to the Exploiter (read Hab. 2:15-17)**

*“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk’ ” (2:15, NIV).*

This exploitation is not economic as in the second woe, rather it is the exploitation of the person. It is an attack on an individual's self-esteem, self-worth. It is to make a person vulnerable and take advantage of him or her. God has ascribed to each individual, no matter how seared by sin, the image of the Creator. Thus an attack on the created is in essence, an attack on the Creator.

*What impact, if any, does realization that God's image is in all individuals have on the issues of abortion and the treatment of the mentally handicapped, the insane, and of criminals?*

### **4. Woe to the Idolatrous**

*“Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, “Come to life!” Or to lifeless stone, “Wake up!” Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver, there is no breath in it’ ” (Hab. 2:18, 19, NIV).*

This final woe, dealing with idolatry, is a summation of the other woes. In idolatry the cause of the other woes have their root—not in the act of worshiping the inanimate, but in the principle behind the act. Idolatry is that which attributes the power of God to what is not God. This is the ultimate in human arrogance. It involves a reversal of moral polarity—calling evil good and good evil. When such a reversal happens, all moral standards are destroyed and moral judgment becomes individualized, changing by the moment. Thus violence, extortion, and exploitation are presumably justified. But the idolater, and the true worshiper whose faith is being tested, need to hear the affirmation that “the Lord is in his holy temple.” The appropriate response to that truth—to “be silent before him” (v. 20)—means an end to idolatry, and to oppression, exploitation, and violence.

*Is idolatry a danger for the Christian? How might we be prone to it in personal lifestyle or in regard to institutions such as nation and church?*

E. R. M.

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# Oppression by Neglect

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Isaiah 58:6-10

In 1895, a time when repression of black people in the United States was particularly severe, Ellen White wrote from Australia to the church leadership in Battle Creek a stirring letter about the needs among southern blacks. Though the conditions she describes and the terminology she uses have changed, her message contains timeless truths about the Christian's responsibility concerning the oppressed and exploited.

"How much self-denial will our institutions manifest in binding about their imaginary wants? Will they continue to spread themselves and obtain more and still more conveniences for their better accommodation, while the means to be expended for the down-trodden colored race is so little and meager? . . .

"We have been eating of the large loaf, and have left the suffering, distressed people of the Southern regions starving for education, starving for spiritual advantages. By your actions you have said, Am I my brother's keeper? . . .

"The colored people might have been helped with much better prospects of success years ago than now. The work is now tenfold harder than it would have been then. But who will continue to dishonor God by their indolence, by their neglect, by passing by on the other side?

**"Christ's  
followers are to  
learn all about  
the woes  
of the poor."**

"Do not, I beseech you, look upon the hard field, groan a little, set two or three at work in one locality, a few in another, and provide them only enough for the bare necessities of life. Those who labor in the Southern field will have to stand amid the most discouraging, hopeless poverty. . . .

"In the past, some attempts have been made to present the truth to the colored people, but those among the white people who claim to believe the truth have wanted to build a high partition between themselves and the colored race. We have one Saviour, who died for the black man as well as for the white. Those who possess the spirit of Christ will have pity and love for all who know not the precious Saviour. They will labor to the utmost of their ability to wipe away the reproach of ignorance from white and black alike. . . .

"The colored people have been neglected because the vexed question of how to build a wall of distinction between the whites and the blacks has been in agitation. Some have thought it the best way to reach the white people first, for if we should labor for the colored people we could do nothing for the white population. This is not the right position to assume. Christ's followers are to learn all about the woes of the poor in their immediate vicinity and their own country be they white or black. . . . Those who have a dark, disagreeable life are the very ones whom we should bid to hope because Christ is their Saviour. . . . All who possess the spirit of Christ will have a tender, sympathetic heart, and an open, generous hand."<sup>1</sup>

## REACT

How would you apply Ellen White's counsel to today's world?

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1. Letter 5, 1895, to "My Brethren in Responsible Positions in America." Published in Ronald D. Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970), pp. 90, 91.

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# The Exodus God

by Desmond Tutu

## The Liberation Exodus Motif

... Yahweh, is a God of grace, of compassion and mercy. He is not a God far away or an impotent God. He is moved by the agony and suffering of His people and cannot be the Aristotelian unmoved mover dwelling in an unassailable Olympian height. No—listen, the Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their outcry against their slave masters. I have taken heed of their suffering and have come down to rescue them from the power of Egypt . . ." (Exodus 3:7, 8).

This act of saving a rabble of slaves, this highly political act called the Exodus in the Bible, became a paradigmatic event, one which came to be seen as the founding event of the people of God, what constituted them His people, and other divine events were described in the light of this event, as the Christians later were to describe everything in their salvation history in the light of the death and resurrection event of Jesus Christ. God showed Himself there as a saving god, as a doing, an active kind of god . . . and He showed Himself to be a god of liberation, the great Exodus god, who took the side of the oppressed, the exploited ones, the downtrodden, the marginalized ones. He was no fence-sitter. He took sides against the powerful on behalf of the widow, the orphan and the alien—classes of people who were often at the back of the queue, at the bottom of the pile. I could multiply biblical references to prove this point, e.g. Deuteronomy 10:18-20. . . .

The prophets waxed indignant at injustice and oppression in Israelite society because they were God's spokesmen, and such a god whom you could not really worship properly unless your socio-political conduct was consistent with your faith in Him [See Isaiah 1:15-17].

## Some New Testament Evidence of the Liberation Exodus Motif

The imagery of deliverance, of rescuing, of being set free—this imagery forms an important, indeed a crucial part of how the New Testament describes the saving and atoning work of Jesus. He Himself, revealing the terrible cost of redeeming us and effecting reconciliation between God and us and between ourselves, as well as with the rest of creation, speaks of Himself and His later work on the cross as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45; 11). He inaugurates the Kingdom of God, His Father, by taking on the forces of the evil one. His mighty works of healing the sick, exorcizing the demon-possessed, opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf—these are signs to those who have eyes to see that the Kingdom of God has broken into human affairs. God has intervened decisively on the side of man. . . .

The crown of all the New Testament evidence occurs in Christ's characterization of His ministry in the words of Isaiah:

## EVIDENCE

**Key text:**  
**Exodus 3:7, 8**

**"You could not really worship properly unless your socio-political conduct was consistent with your faith."**

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**Winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1984, Desmond Tutu is the Anglican bishop of Johannesburg, South Africa.**

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The spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me. He has sent me to announce Good News to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the acceptable Year of the Lord. (Isaiah 61:1-3)

And that acceptable year in the Old Testament was the Year of Jubilee, the year setting slaves free (Leviticus 25).

In His ministry Jesus aroused the wrath of the religious establishment by hobnobbing with those who were called sinners, the prostitutes, the tax-collectors who collaborated with the hated Roman overlord and were despised for so doing (Mark 2:15-17). "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:7-10). He was revealing the self-same God who was biased in favor of the poor, the oppressed and the outcast, and Jesus ultimately died for being on that side. . . .

### **The Role of the Church**

The Church is constantly tempted to be conformed to the world, to want influence that comes from power, prestige and privilege, and it forgets all the while that its Lord and Master was born in a stable. . . . The Church forgets that His solidarity was with the poor, the downtrodden, the sinners, the despised ones, the outcasts, the prostitutes, the very scum of society. These were His friends whom He said would go to heaven before the self-righteous ones, the Pharisees, the scribes, the religious leaders of His day. The Church thinks to its peril that it must sanctify any particular status quo, that it must identify with the powerful and uphold the system which will invariably be exploitative and oppressive to some extent. When it succumbs to the temptations of power and identifies with a powerful establishment, then woe betide that Church when that system is overthrown, when the powerless, the poor come into their own! . . .

**"The Church must be biased in favour of the powerless."**

The Church must be ever ready to wash the disciples' feet, a serving Church, not a triumphalistic Church, biased in favour of the powerless to be their voice, to be in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, the marginalized ones—yes, preaching the gospel of reconciliation but working for justice first, since there can never be real reconciliation without justice. It will demonstrate in its very life that Jesus has broken down the wall of partition, and so in its common life there will be no artificial barriers to any Christian being able to participate fully.

A Church that is in solidarity with the poor can never be a wealthy Church. It must sell all in a sense to follow its Master. It must sit loosely to the things of this world, using its wealth and resources for the sake of the least of Christ's brethren.

Such a Church will have to be a suffering Church, one which takes up its cross to follow Jesus. A Church that does not suffer is a contradiction in terms if it is not marked by the cross and inspired by the Holy Spirit. It must be ready to die, for only so can it share in Christ's passion so as to share His resurrection.

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# Taking Sides With Christ

by Doug Stuva

## HOW TO

Key text:

Matthew

25:31-46

Moses did it.

Christ did it.

So did Luther.

They all took the side of the underdog.

As we've seen, so did Habakkuk.

Moses took the side of slaves.

Christ took the side of individuals with little hope.

Luther took the side of the ignorant masses who knew no better than to believe what they were told by authority figures.

Habakkuk took the side of the oppressed, the put down, the deceived, the used.

As Christians, so must we.

As Christians, we must do the following:

**1. When the bandwagon is correct, follow it.** If the whole country is throwing itself into a just cause, join it. If everyone is trying to save Ethiopians from starving, help!

**2. Look for hurt and need in directions other than the ones the bandwagons are riding in.** Be concerned about the Ethiopians before it becomes popular to be so. Stay informed, and be willing to stand up for the underdog, even when it is not prestigious to do so.

**3. Look for underdogs in your own personal world.** Look for the underdogs in your neighborhood, your place of employment, your school, your dorm, your class, your family. Most often, helping someone who needs help will never result in publicity, fame, or notoriety. But it will result in persons being better off than they were before you showed you were interested in them.

**4. Be willing to share yourself and your time with underdogs.** If you are serious about helping, your daily schedule will have to change. You might miss a few Monday Night Football games, or a date or two. You may even not have quite as much time available to study for a test. But if you're serious, you'll help anyway.

**5. Don't be condescending.** You've got your hangups. You've got things that make you an underdog in certain ways, too. Don't go out to save the world so the world can be like you. Just make a decision to help in small ways, first; like helping people receive enough to eat, or have a little better image of themselves.

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A former *Collegiate Quarterly* editor, Doug Stuva teaches English and journalism at Mandan High School in North Dakota.

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# Beyond Warnings

by Doug Stuva

## OPINION

Key text:  
1 John 4:18

The thesis of Habakkuk 2:5-20, that evil carries in it the seeds of its own destruction is, of course often correct, and its pronouncement, as in the book of Habakkuk and other biblical passages like Isaiah 5:8-22, often a successful warning to those at fault.

One might also apply this principle to other areas not specifically mentioned by the prophet: the person who smokes too much will get lung cancer; the person who drinks too much will have trouble with his liver; the promiscuous person will suffer from venereal disease; the businessman who rips people off will go bankrupt; the player who cheats will lose.

I remember once, when I was in my early teens, going to a play with my older brother and one of his friends. In my insecurity and desire to be accepted, I kept putting down, or "cutting up" as it was known then, my brother's friend. Every 30 seconds I had something smart to say.

My brother had something smart to say, or yell, too—other than, "That's the last time you're going anywhere with me"—when we got home that night. He told me, in a very loud voice, that if I kept that up, pretty soon I wasn't going to have any friends at all. He said nobody was going to want to be near me if all I did was cut them up. He also told me he was going to take my face off if it ever happened again—my evil definitely carried within it the seeds of its own destruction! And my brother's warning was effective to this one at fault.

Although sometimes effective, however, the principle contained in warnings like those in Habakkuk is *not always* true. Oppressive nations are not always overthrown, nations based on bloodshed and crime often last, and those who humiliate others are not always humiliated. Heavy smokers do not always die of lung cancer, either, and so on.

Also, though they are sometimes effective and in some cases may be a necessary first step, warnings like those in Habakkuk in no way create an ideal situation.

Woeful warnings—warnings of the consequences of certain actions and threats of punishment—may correct behavior, but they do not correct motives, change outlooks, or draw people together. Woeful warnings do not really change minds and lives.

The Christian must not be primarily concerned with consequences and punishments when making decisions concerning behavior, but with what is best for other individuals. The Christian must make choices based on how the results of those choices will affect people.

Christians must make decisions based on love, rather than on fear.

If we are in positions of authority, whether relating to nations, schools, businesses, churches, or families, the ideal is to make political, economic, social, and spiritual decisions based on what is good for other individuals, not on what will save us from being rebelled

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"Woeful warnings do not correct motives, change outlooks, or draw people together."

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against or humiliated, or what might cost us our personal survival. In matters of health and sexual relations, too, decisions must be made on what is best for people, not necessarily on what will save us from disease.

The Christian also must realize a responsibility, not only to make decisions based on love rather than on fear, but to develop his relationships so that decisions within the relationships *can* be made out of love, rather than fear.

My wife, to illustrate, makes a great pot of spaghetti. She brews the sauce for hours with hard-boiled eggs in it, stirs it every 15 minutes, and best of all, lets me do the taste tests.

If, when my wife and I have a fight, or if I'm just unhappy with something about the relationship, and I threaten in any way to, "leave because I've had enough," she might from that point on make spaghetti for me because she's afraid of my leaving if she doesn't do something special for me. She might make spaghetti out of fear, rather than love. I want my wife to do special things for me because she loves me and loves to make life special for me, not because she is afraid of any consequences or punishments.

Anytime threats of this type are made, or, obviously, physical abuse is used, a relationship where nice things are performed for the wrong reason will result.

As a Christian, I need to build my relationships in such a way that decisions about interaction can be based on love, rather than fear of consequences or punishment.

Woes and warnings concerning evil carrying within it the seeds of its own destruction may sometimes be correct and necessary. But ideally, where possible, the Christian must make decisions, and create relationships where such decisions can be made, that are based on what is best for other individuals, rather than on a fear of consequences or punishment.

A Christian must do good, because it is good, not because he will suffer if he doesn't.

## REACT

Under what circumstances might threats or warnings in themselves be the loving thing to do? Under what circumstances are they unloving? Compare Matthew 23 with John 8:1-11 for possible clues.

**"The Christian must make choices based on how the results of those choices will affect people."**

# The Celebration of Faith

"I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Habakkuk 3:18, NIV).



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# Flight 266

by Edwin Zackrison

"Keep it going up, Arnie, you're a thousand feet—pull it up."

Those were the last words.

Seconds later UAL Flight 266 sank into the stormy waters of the Pacific Ocean off Santa Monica Bay at 6:27 p.m. on Saturday night, January 18, 1969. It had been airborne for three minutes.

Thirty-eight people died.

The passenger list included: two full United Airlines crews; the Georgels, a young couple with their infant daughter, Melody; six-year-old Lonnie McConnell, traveling under stewardess supervision; Dr. Lowell B. Swan, President of Iliff School of Theology in Denver; and Walter R. Schlemmer, first officer, based in Los Angeles.

I will never forget that Sabbath. I supervised several carloads of Pathfinders to Exposition Park. We went to a Stan Midgley film at the White Memorial Church in the evening. Then, on the freeway somewhere between L.A. and Camarillo, I turned on the news. It took a few minutes to register that my friend Wally had been on that plane.

Wally Schlemmer had been a pilot in the Canadian Air Force before joining UAL in 1964. He had moved to Redondo Beach where he and his wife Carol met Elder Bruce Dame who studied with them and subsequently baptized Carol. Shortly after that they and their three beautiful young children moved to Camarillo,

where they became active in our newly formed congregation.

In time Wally was baptized and became a deacon. Carol became church clerk. They were a pastor's dream—active and willing to work in virtually any area of the church's needs. Church was a priority to them. And the people loved them.

I talked to Wally for the last time at church. I was about to take his 10-year-old Michelle, and 30 other kids, to the city. I assured him I would have her back safely but it would be late. He said he had to work that night but would be back early Sunday, and, "Take good care of Michelle." I did.

To this day I can see him waving to us as we headed south.

The black box revealed that Wally had kept his composure admirably as he attempted to bring that huge, doomed bird under control. Electrical power failure caused the accident, not pilot error. Wally's calm, encouraging words to the captain were the last on the tape: "Keep it going up, Arnie, you're a thousand feet—pull it up."

The church was full on the night of the memorial service. The question on the lips of the mourners was another version of Habakkuk's question: Why do good people experience such tragedies? In an evil age death does not respect rank, social importance, wealth, or spirituality. Now it was time for faith. Would a time for praise ever come again?

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Habakkuk 3:1-19

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# Habakkuk's Prayer

## LOGOS

**Theme:** The assurance that God has acted in the past on behalf of His people and still goes forth to bring salvation makes life a celebration of praise to God.

### 1. The Request

*"Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:1, 2, NIV).*

Habakkuk's dilemma has been expressed, and woes on the wicked have been pronounced. But the problem has not been solved. How does one live by faith? How does one survive in time of trouble? The answer is found in this final chapter. The major source of strength in times of confusion and doubt about God's dealings is remembering His dealings in the past.

In our study of Habakkuk we have seen the prophet in anguish about the situation around him. He cries to God for help but can't really comprehend God's reply, or at least can't find much comfort in it. But he remains patient. He stands his watch and remembers how God has led in history and asks that God act now in the present.

In praying for God to take action, patience is a key. We cannot confine God to a human timetable, especially our personal schedule. Yet attempts to understand God's workings must still be made. He must not be passed off as being so far beyond and above us that interaction with Him is pointless. But because He is God, there is much that we can't understand. And when situations like this are encountered, security is found in being sure of what God has done in the past and believing He will continue to do the same in the present and future.

The prophet's prayer is labeled *shigionoth* (v. 1). The exact meaning of this term is uncertain, but *shigionoth* "are thought to be impassioned songs of rapid emotional changes of rhythm."<sup>1</sup> Such a musical structure would fit well the distinct changes in mood in the three sections of Habakkuk's prayer: the plea for God to act (vv. 1, 2), the dramatic depiction of His acts in the past (vv. 3-15), and the prophet's firm, confident expression of faith (vv. 16-19).

*For the Israelites, the mighty deeds of God in the past were primarily seen in the Exodus and conquest of the promised land. Do we have similar events that we can look back to in our history?*

### 2. Remembering (read Hab. 3:3-15)

*"You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot" (3:13, NIV).*

This section is a vivid, metaphorical celebration of the saving acts in history that Habakkuk calls on God to renew. The imagery is not specific enough to refer to only one event in the past, but allusions to particular historical occurrences can be detected:

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1) The giving of the law at Sinai (v. 3). Mt. Paran is another name for Sinai where a "theophany"—a dramatic manifestation of God—took place (see Deut. 33:2). Teman is in Edom, to the east of Israel, the direction from which God was traditionally pictured as coming to bring deliverance (see Judges 5:4).

2) The plagues on Egypt (v. 5; cf. Ex. 7-12).

3) Perhaps Gideon's victory or Israel's victories in the desert on the way to Canaan (v. 7; cf. Judges 7; Num. 31:1-12)

4) The sun standing still (v. 11; cf. Josh. 10:11-14)

5) Probably the Exodus (vv. 13, 14)

6) Perhaps the Red Sea (v. 15; cf. Ex. 15:1-19; Psalm 77:19, 20)

*The imagery in this section is drawn from ancient methods of warfare and Eastern culture. How would you express God's saving power and majesty using modern imagery?*

### **3. The Renewal of Faith (read Hab. 3:16-19)**

*"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food . . . yet I will rejoice in the Lord" (3:17, 18, NIV).*

Habakkuk's fear had not gone, "my legs trembled" (v. 16, NIV), but his doubt had. He remembered the past which gave him strength for the present and the assurance for the future, regardless of what may happen. The basis for hope and for peace of mind and soul is not found in the course of events transpiring in the present. This is too limited a scope to give us complete understanding. But through patience that is willing to ride out the storm of the present by remembering God's leading, one can say with confidence, "The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights" and "I will be joyful in God my Savior" (vv. 19, 18, NIV).

*Habakkuk "trembled" as he thought about the time God would finally come in judgment (v. 16). Why? What are the implications of vv. 16-19 for our perspective on the "time of trouble"?*

*Was Habakkuk's faith "blind," given the fact that no circumstances could alter it?*

E.R.M.

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# Remember the Tender Mercies

selected by Edwin Zackrison

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Philippians 4:4

"Many, walking along the path of life, dwell upon their mistakes and failures and disappointments, and their hearts are filled with grief and discouragement. While I was in Europe, a sister who had been doing this, and who was in deep distress, wrote to me, asking for some word of encouragement. The night after I had read her letter I dreamed that I was in a garden, and one who seemed to be the owner of the garden was conducting me through its paths. I was gathering the flowers and enjoying their fragrance, when this sister, who had been walking by my side, called my attention to some unsightly briars that were impeding her way. There she was mourning and grieving. She was not walking in the pathway, following the guide, but was walking among the briars and thorns. 'Oh,' she mourned, 'is it not a pity that this beautiful garden is spoiled with thorns?' Then the guide said, 'Let the thorns alone, for they will only wound you. Gather the roses, the lilies, and the pinks.'

"Thank God for the bright pictures which He has presented to us. Let us group together the blessed assurances of His love, that we may look upon them continually: The Son of God leaving His Father's throne, clothing His divinity with humanity, that He might rescue man from the power of Satan; His triumph in our behalf, opening heaven to men, revealing to human vision the presence chamber where the Deity unveils His glory; the fallen race uplifted from the pit of ruin into which sin had plunged it and brought again into connection with the infinite God, and having endured the divine test through faith in our Redeemer, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and exalted to His throne—these are the pictures which God would have us contemplate. . . .

"Every  
step in life  
may bring us  
closer to  
Jesus."

"Christians may have the joy of communion with Christ; they may have the light of His love, the perpetual comfort of His presence. Every step in life may bring us closer to Jesus, may give us a deeper experience of His love, and may bring us one step nearer to the blessed home of peace. Then let us not cast away our confidence, but have firm assurance, firmer than ever before. 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,' and He will help us to the end. 1 Samuel 7:12. Let us look to the monumental pillars, reminders of what the Lord has done to comfort us and to save us from the hand of the destroyer. Let us keep fresh in our memory all the tender mercies that God has shown us,—the tears He has wiped away, the pains He has soothed, the anxieties removed, the tears dispelled, the wants supplied, the blessings bestowed,—thus strengthening ourselves for all that is before us through the remainder of our pilgrimage."

## REACT

Should the Christian truly rejoice in *all* circumstances? Is it ever helpful to "keep fresh in our memory" negative experiences in our personal or corporate histories?

Excerpted from *Steps to  
Christ*, pp. 116-118.

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# An Antidote for Doubt

by Edwin Zackrison

There are times when life does not seem right. There are times when things have not all come together yet. Many threads are hanging in the wind. Often, in those times, we doubt. Is that bad? Is that wrong? I submit that there are times when doubt is the natural thing to do. But I also suggest that doubting brings an uneasiness and guilt which only praise can dispel.

Some confuse doubt with unbelief. But doubt is not necessarily unbelief. The word "doubt" comes to us from the Latin *dubito*, which indicates a struggle between "two minds." It means "to hesitate," to be double-minded. The doubting person is one who is *torn between* belief and unbelief. One's very act of doubting may indicate that he is thinking seriously.

The person who believes has a settledness about him. One who disbelieves also has a form of certainty. But the person who doubts is divided—it is impossible to follow two minds with equal fervor; thus the result is ambivalence and confusion.

But we should not conclude that the doubter is automatically an unbeliever. He is neither an unbeliever nor a believer. Unbelief is the willful refusal to believe God. The unbeliever is insensitive to God in his life and his doubts have hardened into unbelief. Belief is an attitude that exhibits itself in obedience to God. But doubt is a half-way station between belief and unbelief.

Doubt may lead to unbelief. And in the event that it does so, it is a road to destruction. But doubt need not lead to unbelief. Many young men and women have testified that their first steps toward the truth were *doubts* about their old faith or their old way of life. Many Seventh-day Adventist Christians will testify that their doubts about Methodism or agnosticism, drugs or hippie-ism, naturalism or humanism, drove them on to search out truth. C. S. Lewis testified that atheism did not hold answers for his inquiring mind even though for a while he considered himself an atheist. His doubting of atheism was the turn in the road that gave directions to Christianity.

The apostles wrote: "Do not trust any and every spirit. Test them to see if they are from God" (see 1 John 4:1); "Prove all things—hold fast that which is good" (see 1 Thess. 5:21). Thus there is a sense in which the Bible commends the doubter—the honest doubter—for only through honest doubt is one prepared to make it through the entree of confusion that this world serves us.

A most common cause of ambivalence about our faith is our failure to express gratitude. The celebration of faith is an antidote for the debilitating battle of the two minds that doubt introduces. Obviously God's wish for us is that we be believers—of one mind. But a truth that will encourage us in those moments of two minds is the fact that God is far more patient with us as doubters than most people are. And in His mercy He will give us time and space to sort out reality as we become serious about Him. Thus God leads us ever toward the celebration of faith which brings us full satisfaction and genuine happiness.

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Habakkuk 3:3

**"Many have testified that their first steps toward truth were doubts."**

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# Predicament, Promise, and Power

by Edwin Zackrison

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**2 Corinthians**  
**1:20**

The book of Habakkuk has cosmic implications. And those who take God and life seriously often find themselves asking the same kinds of questions the prophet was asking. But whenever man presumes to understand the ways of God he is in for some surprises, and to mature, he must cultivate a capacity for suspending judgment. God's ways are infinitely superior to man's as are God's intelligence and patience. Hence, judgments on God's movements inevitably prove naive. So, if divine action seems slow, God counsels, "Wait for it, it will surely come, it will not delay" (Hab. 2:3).

The personal implications of Habakkuk's cosmic message are found in clarification of the roles in the divine-human relationship.

**1. Our role is to provide the predicament.** Habakkuk surely exemplified that role. With his kind of questions he joined a cloud of biblical witnesses, such as: Moses ("What do I do with these stiff-necked, rebellious people?"); Isaiah ("Woe is me for I am undone"); the publican ("Be merciful to me, a sinner"); and Paul ("I do what I don't want to do, and I don't do what I want to do").

Great men and women of God find in predicament—self-will, unfaith, failure, depression, hopelessness, helplessness—the first steps in a serious quest for understanding God. In every case their questions imply a higher level of justice or mercy than they are presently finding, and God honors their recognition of predicament with promise.

**2. God's role is to provide the promise.** When Habakkuk pled, God promised. It is a divine solution to a common human problem. The antidote for discouragement is hope. And in the promises of God one finds this antidote. "It will surely come, it will not delay" (Hab. 2:3, RSV). We can be assured of receiving those things God promises.

Man often becomes conceited at this point and refuses the promise of God in favor of working out his own problem. But when man solves his own problem there is always that tinge (or avalanche) of pride that accompanies it. Habakkuk grew in faith when he realized that though he could provide the predicament quite adequately he had virtually no hope of solution without God's promises.

**3. God's role is to provide the power.** "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4, RSV). More than any other in Scripture this one sentence was the banner under which the great Reformers marched in renewed understanding of the power of the gospel. But Luther found that his problem in personal sin was not just the need for a *knowledge* of what was wrong but a *desire* to do what was right. Here he discovered that Christ provides both a desire and power to exercise the will Godward.

Cosmic evil is a universal problem, but personal evil is our problem, and the solutions God provides to cosmic evil are played out in our lives. His promise and power solves our predicament.

## REACT

What are the implications of today's key text, 2 Cor. 1:20, for understanding God's response to our predicament?

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# The Job

by Badger Clark, selected by Edwin Zackrison

But, God, it won't come right! It won't come right!

I've worked it over till my brain is numb.

The first flash came so bright,

Then more ideas after it—flash! flash!—I thought it some

New constellation men would wonder at.

Perhaps it's just a firework—flash! fizz! spat!

Then darker darkness and scorched pasteboard and sour smoke.

But God, the thought was great,

The scheme, the dream—why, till the first charm broke

The thing just built itself while I, elate,

Laughed and admired it. Then it stuck,

Half done, the lesser half, worse luck!

You see, it's dead as yet, a frame, a body—and the heart,

The soul, the fiery vital part

To give it life, is what I cannot get. I've tried—

You know it—tried to catch live fire

And pawed cold ashes. Every spark has died.

It won't come right! I'd drop the thing entire,

Only—I can't! I love my job.

You, who ride the thunder,

Do you know what it is to dream and drudge and throb?

I wonder.

Did it come to you with a rush, your dream, your plan?

If so, I know how you began.

Yes, with rapt face and sparkling eyes,

Swinging the hot globe out between the skies,

Marking the new seas with their white beach lines,

Sketching in sun and moon, the lightning and the rains,

Sowing the hills with pines,

Wreathing a rim of purple round the plains.

I know you laughed then, while you caught and wrought

The big, swift rapturous outline of your thought.

And then—

MEN.

I see it now.

O God, forgive my pettish row!

I see your job. While ages crawl

Your lips take laboring lines, your eyes a sadder light,

For man, the fire and flower and center of it all—

Man won't come right!

After your patient centuries

Fresh starts, recastings, tired Gethsemanes

And tense Golgothas, he, your central theme,

Is just a jangling echo of your dream.

Grand as the rest may be, he ruins it.

Why don't you quit?

Crumple it all, and dream again! But no;

Flaw after flaw you work it out, revise, refine—

Bondage, brutality, and war and woe

The sot, the fool, the tyrant and the mob—

Dear God, how you must love your job!

Help me, as I love mine.

## OPINION

Key text:

Habakkuk 3:8-13

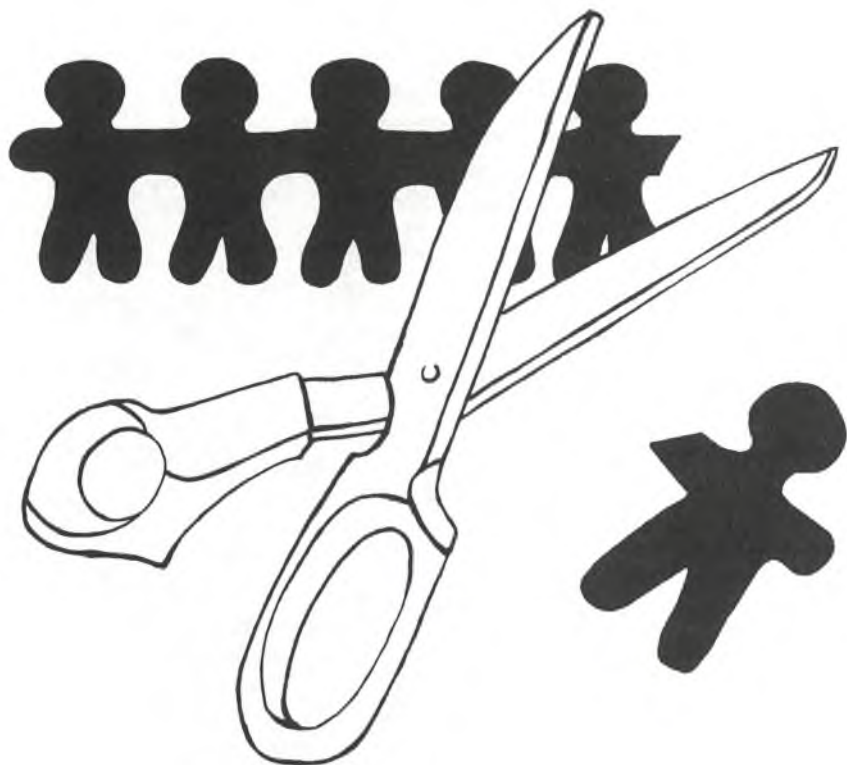
Reprinted from  
Cynthia Pearl Maus (ed),  
*The Old Testament  
and the Fine Arts*  
(New York: Harper  
and Row, 1954),  
pp. 770, 771.

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# Remedy for Failing Faith

"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:19, 22, RSV).



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# A Crisis of Spiritual Identity

It was Easter Sunday. Wanting to attend a service but unfamiliar with the churches in a city that was new to me, I randomly picked one from the newspaper ads.

I expected liturgy from the one I chose. I did not expect the most powerful bombardment of religious symbols my senses have ever received. Priests brilliantly arrayed filled the air with incense from large golden censers they swung during repeated processions. The worshiper's vision was centered on an imposing icon of the crucified Savior. A full orchestra and chorus performed Haydn's "Lord Nelson" Mass.

The rest of the details are hazy, but I clearly remember being overwhelmed. I was not tempted to join that church (Episcopalian). But I might have been . . . *if* my circumstances had been different. If I had been part of an ostracized, persecuted minority whose leaders were in and out of jail. If my family's property had been confiscated because of our faith. If unalleviated suffering and God's apparent failure to fulfill His promises had been weighing me down. If I had been going through a spiritual identity crisis and my spiritual vitality had been at a dangerously low level. If, in sum, I had been in the circumstances of the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews, I might have been very attracted by a religion that offered much more impressive ceremony, wealth and social acceptability than my religion.

## The Recipients of Hebrews

Though we don't know for certain, evidence suggests that the first recipients of Hebrews were a community of Jewish Christians. They had suffered persecution and, questioning the value of their faith, were tempted to turn back to Judaism. The location of the recipients is highly uncertain, but there are hints that it was Rome (see 13:24).<sup>1</sup>

The date of Hebrews cannot be conclusively determined either. However, a clue may be found in the reference to persecution in 10:32-34. Since no loss of life is mentioned, the persecution described here matches the persecution initiated by the emperor Claudius in 49 A.D. better than the persecutions under Nero (begun in 64), or under Domitian (80's and 90's), both of which did involve martyrdoms. Since 10:32-34 refers to events in the past, Hebrews may be dated after that persecution by Claudius but prior to the Neronian persecution, perhaps in the early 60's. Also, many scholars argue that if the author had written after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D., he would surely have referred to that event in his comparison of Judaism and Christianity, and thus a date before 70 is thought likely.

## The Author of Hebrews

The authorship of Hebrews is a mystery. The title found in the KJV, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews"

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Hebrews 2:1-4;  
3:7-19;  
5:11-6:12;  
10:19-25, 35-39

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was added centuries after Hebrews was written. The earliest support for Paul as the author comes from Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200 A.D.). However, Clement also recognized the vast differences between the Greek of Hebrews and that of Paul's other letters, and hypothesized that Luke translated Paul's Aramaic into Greek. A few years later, Origen, the leading scholar of his time, wrote that the authorship of Hebrews was uncertain.

Pauline authorship certainly is not impossible. A third-century collection of Pauline letters (P46) includes Hebrews, the ideas in the letter are in many ways similar to those expressed elsewhere by Paul, and no other Christian leader prior to 70 A.D. was known to be capable of producing such lofty and profound arguments.

But for the majority of scholars, the literary style of Hebrews, sharply distinct from Paul's letters, is an insurmountable difficulty to Pauline authorship, even taking into account the possibility that Paul might have used a different secretary for Hebrews.

If not Paul, who? Various candidates have been put forth, including Apollos, Barnabas, Priscilla, even the Virgin Mary (a female authorship might explain the anonymity of the letter!).<sup>2</sup> However, the case for none of these is compelling enough to refute Origen's conclusion that, "who wrote the *Letter to the Hebrews* only God

knows for certain."<sup>3</sup> It is probably best, as William Johnsson suggests, to use the designation Ellen White sometimes used, and simply refer to the author of Hebrews as "the apostle."<sup>4</sup>

### **The Purpose of Hebrews**

Much more crucial than the author's identity is his purpose: to help his readers pull out of the doldrums of a spiritual identity crisis. Persecution and spiritual weariness were causing them to question the value of their Christianity. Might not they be better off back in Judaism, with its vital, centuries-long heritage as God's chosen people and its impressive rituals? Employing intricate, profound arguments, the apostle's answer in essence is, No—Christianity is better. True, Israel was God's people and her religion came through revelation from Him. But that revelation was only a foreshadowing of God's ultimate, definitive revelation in Jesus Christ. In Christ, Christianity offers a better revelation (1:14), a better name (1:5-2:18), a better leader (3:1-4:13), a better priest (4:14-6:20), a better priesthood (7:1-28), a better ministry (8:1-13), a better sacrifice (9:1-10:18), a better country (10:19-39), a better hope (11:1-12:2), and a better city (12:3-13:25).

For those experiencing a spiritual identity crisis, Hebrews is a magnificent reaffirmation of the value of the Christian faith. In eloquent terms it sets forth the

multi-faceted work of Christ as the basis for living by faith.

Thus far we have referred to Hebrews as a letter, but in fact it does not have the typical features of a New Testament letter such as the greeting, identification of sender and recipient, and thanksgiving. Hebrews is better described as a written sermon. Like a good sermon it combines theology (*proclamation* based on the word of God), with *exhortation* (practical application of theology to life). Note the alternation of proclamation and exhortation in the following outline.

**Proclamation:** Jesus as Son of God (1:1-1:14)

**Exhortation:** Warning against neglect (2:1-4)

**Proclamation:** Jesus made man to save men (2:5-3:6)

**Exhortation:** Warning against unbelief (3:7-4:13)

**Proclamation:** Jesus the High Priest, first statement of the theme (4:14-5:10)

**Exhortation:** Christian

maturity (5:11-6:20)

**Proclamation:** Jesus as High Priest, development of the theme (7:1-10:18)

**Exhortation:** A call to persevere (10:19-39)

**Proclamation:** Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of faith (11:1-12:3)

**Exhortation:** Following Jesus' example of endurance and general exhortations (12:4-13:17)

**Closing benediction and greetings:** (11:18-25)

Wherever there is doubt, wherever God's concern for people seems hidden, wherever there is stagnation of Christian experience, wherever there is wavering commitment, wherever there is lack of assurance, Hebrews speaks a relevant, transforming word. As an overview of our ten-week study of this sermon, we will look in more detail this week at the spiritual profile of Hebrews' first readers and at the core of the apostle's response to their situation.

D. F. M.

1. The most natural understanding of the words, "Those from Italy send you their greeting" is that individuals from Italy who were associated with the author in some distant location were sending regards to their brothers and sisters still in Rome. Also, the earliest references to Hebrews we have in church history come from Clement of Rome, writing around 95 A.D.
2. Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1983), pp. xxi, xxii.
3. William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 7, 8.
4. William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), p. 29.

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# Profile and Prescription

**LOGOS**    **Theme:** Hebrew is a written sermon designed to revive the flagging faith of its readers by showing the supremacy of Jesus Christ and the assurance of salvation that comes through Him.

## 1. Neglect of the Gospel Message (read Heb. 2:1-4)

*"How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (2:3, RSV)*

By studying the exhortations in Hebrews, we can establish a spiritual profile of the believers to whom it was written. By identifying their problems and how the apostle addressed those problems, we will be better able to discern the relevance of Hebrews for our lives today.

It's human nature to take for granted the good things you have, and the first exhortation in Hebrews implies that the readers were beginning to take the gospel for granted. Through neglecting (v. 4) the gospel message, rather than rejecting it outright, the Hebrews were in danger of drifting away (v. 1) from the faith. The term "drift" in v. 1 is "a nautical metaphor for flowing by, slipping away, being washed away, drifting away. . . . The word can apply also to a ring that slips off the finger and is lost (hence the KJV 'slip')." In either case, the idea is gradual departure that one experiences without even realizing it while it is happening.

## 2. Hardening of the Heart (read Heb. 3:7-19)

*"Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (3:13, RSV).*

The apostle compares the temptation his readers face to "turn away" (v. 12) from Christianity to the rebellion of the Israelites in the wilderness. At the core of the problem of turning away (literally "apostasy") is simple unbelief—failure to take God at His word and to act on that word. Such an unbelieving heart is vulnerable to the deceitfulness (*apate*) of sin (v. 13). The heart ensnared by sin's *apate* (which can also be translated "pleasure," "lure," "delusion," or "fraud") becomes "hardened" (v. 13). The center of attitudes, emotions and will, which should be open to the Holy Spirit, has a barrier formed around it that resists the divine influence. The result, as demonstrated by the Israelites, goes beyond the neglect of 2:1-4 to outright rebellion against God (3:16-19).

*In what specific ways should we go about encouraging one another daily (v. 13)? Is it possible for one to avoid unbelief without receiving such encouragement?*

## 3. Lack of Growth (read Heb. 5:11-6:12)

*"Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil" (5:14, RSV).*

A third problem to which the readers of Hebrews were inclined was spiritual laziness (6:12), which resulted in lack of spiritual

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growth (5:11-14). Apparently they tended to be complacent, feeling that simple repetition of the "milk"—the basic introductory teachings they had received—was sufficient. They failed to move on to "solid food" by being intellectually rigorous about their faith—seeking to understand it more deeply, to see more fully its significance for daily living, to work through challenges to it.

The danger of not moving forward in the Christian faith, the apostle warns in 6:4-8, is falling away from it completely and irrevocably. This severe warning causes perplexity because it seems to say that one who apostasizes can never return to the faith. A satisfying "explanation" for this passage simply may not be possible. Certainly the clear teaching of other scriptures that God freely accepts the repentant sinner, including the sinner among His people, should not be forgotten (see Psalm 51; John 6:37; 2 Cor. 2:5-11). Perhaps the apostle, anxious to make his point forcefully, simply did not bother to discuss the possibility of exception to or modifications of his statement. "The severity of his statement is to be explained by the situation and context of the readers. If they are to remain faithful to their confession in the face of persecution, they must understand the nature of apostasy. This is not the time for words concerning God's grace and the possibility of restoration. In any event, because it is both difficult and uncertain, a way back ought not to be counted upon."<sup>2</sup>

The apostle's purpose is not to limit God's grace but to show that faith needs to be dynamic and progressive, not stagnant!

*How would you distinguish between the "milk" and "solid food" of Christian doctrine (see 6:1)? Is there a sense in which we should leave the "milk" behind?*

#### **4. Failure to Fellowship (read Heb. 10:23-25)**

*"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (10:25, NIV).*

Cut off from the warmth of community, faith cannot survive any more than it can survive outside of a connection with Christ. Neglecting regular fellowship, as some of the apostle's readers apparently were doing, can only hasten spiritual decline.

#### **5. Diminishing Confidence (read Heb. 10:35-39)**

*"Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised" (10:35, 36, RSV).*

The failure of Christ to return as soon as they had hoped added to the spiritual weariness of the Hebrews. With their hope for the future wavering, they were tempted to "shrink back" (v. 38) from perseverance in the Christian life. Quoting Habakkuk, who as we have seen had doubts himself about the fulfillment of God's purposes, the

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apostle reaffirms the solid basis of Christian hope and the appropriate response to that hope—faithfulness that endures even through hard times.

*Is hope for a future reward a viable basis for enduring faithfulness?*

**6. Full Assurance (read Heb. 10:19-22)**

*"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith . . ." (10:19, 22, RSV).*

William Johnsson summarizes the spiritual profile of the recipients of Hebrews: "Their problem is one of *tired blood*. They have grown weary waiting for the Lord's return, sluggish in their Christian identity, questioning the value of their religion, more so as hard times for Christians appear to loom on the horizon."<sup>3</sup>

The remedy prescribed by the apostle for their spiritual identity crisis and its consequent malaise is found in 10:19-22. Here the theology of Hebrews is summarized—full access to God through Jesus Christ as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. And the exhortation is to draw near "in full assurance" or "in absolute confidence" (see the New American Bible). "Here we have a sermon for weary Christians, a message to stir up Christian growth and zeal. Instead of sluggishness, spiritual inertia, shrinking back in view of the long delay in the return of the Lord, they are to be fully assured. Fully assured of what Christ *has done*, of *where* and *what* He is, of what He *will do*. And fully assured of their own cleansing from sin."<sup>4</sup>

*Can you identify with the spiritual profile of the recipients of Hebrews?*

*How relevant is the spiritual profile and the theological "remedy" given by the apostle to the church today?*

D. F. M.

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1. William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), pp. 17, 18.

2. Donald Hagner, *Hebrews* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), p. 72. See also Johnsson, pp. 143-148 for a more thorough discussion of Heb. 6:4-8.

3. Johnsson, p. 20.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

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# The Church's Great Need

"A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it. Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing. A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer.

"There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out His Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation. If Satan had his way, there would never be another awakening, great or small, to the end of time. But we are not ignorant of his devices. It is possible to resist his power. When the way is prepared for the Spirit of God, the blessing will come. Satan can no more hinder a shower of blessing from descending upon God's people than he can close the windows of heaven that rain cannot come upon the earth. Wicked men and devils cannot hinder the work of God, or shut out His presence from the assemblies of His people, if they will, with subdued, contrite hearts, confess and put away their sins, and in faith claim His promises. Every temptation, every opposing influence, whether open or secret, may be successfully resisted, 'not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord of hosts' (Zech. 4:6)."<sup>1</sup>

"In many hearts there seems to be scarcely a breath of spiritual life. This makes me very sad. I fear that aggressive warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil has not been maintained. Shall we cheer on, by a half-dead Christianity, the selfish, covetous spirit of the world, sharing its ungodliness and smiling on its falsehood?—Nay! By the grace of God let us be steadfast to the principles of truth, holding firm to the end the beginning of our confidence. . . .

"A revival and a reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit. Revival and reformation are to do their appointed work, and in doing this work they must blend."<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

How would you complete the following sentences?

1. The revival we need will come about by . . .
2. The most needed reforms that should result are . . .

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Hebrews 3:12-15

**"To seek revival should be our first work."**

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1. *The Review and Herald*, March 22, 1887 (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 121, 124).  
2. *The Review and Herald*, Feb. 25, 1902 (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 127, 128).

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# Danger of Rejection

by R. Dean Davis

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Hebrews 12:25

The message of Hebrews, sent to revive spiritually sluggish believers, is cast within the framework of two covenants. The two covenants are not different on God's part because the divine method for salvation is always the same. However, the two covenants are diametrically opposed to each other in respect to man's response.

The contrast between these two covenants begins with the opening words of Hebrews. First, God had spoken to the fathers by the prophets (primarily Moses at Sinai), and second, He has now spoken by the Son (1:1, 2). Moses was a faithful servant in the ancient tabernacle of the first covenant. In contrast, Jesus is faithful over God's house as the royal Son (3:5, 6). God's house, says the writer of Hebrews, is comprised of Christian believers (3:6).

Because the believers are God's house, the author's plea is that they not harden their hearts as Israel did under the Mosaic covenant (3:7). When the people of Israel rebelled in the wilderness, they provoked the Lord to wrath so that He swore that they would not enter into His "rest" (3:10, 11). Because Israel did not respond to God's appeal in their day ("today"), they "fell in the wilderness" and never entered into the offered rest. Under the new covenant of the Son the same offer of rest remained for the readers of Hebrews to accept "today" (4:7). They must not harden their hearts in unbelief, but accept the provisions of the new and better covenant in which Jesus, the Son, is both high priest and king in a better tabernacle (9:11) based on better promises and sacrifices (8:9, 9:23).

Inherent in the biblical covenant is the conditional, blessing/curse factor. Those who are faithful to God, according to the stipulation of the covenant, receive blessings, while those who are unfaithful receive curses and ultimate rejection. Thus, there must come a time for the dispensing of rewards, either positive or negative. In the Mosaic covenant, the people's lack of belief brought on them the curse of the forty years in the wilderness and finally rejection—they were not allowed to enter God's "rest."

The readers of Hebrews are also in danger of rejection. They are neglecting the gospel invitation to place their confidence in their high priest and king, Jesus Christ. They will not escape the "just retribution" if they neglect such a great salvation. Since they have known the gospel and are now neglecting it, they face a "fearful prospect of judgment" (10:26-31). To fall into the hands of the living God is a fearful thing (10:31). As Israel came to judgment at Mt. Sinai (12:18-21) so the readers of Hebrews come to Mt. Zion (12:22-24). Their experience can be either that of rejoicing in salvation, or of rejection and destruction (12:25-29).

The real issue in both the covenant and the entire book of Hebrews is belief. That issue is just as relevant for us today. The danger of rejection is real, yet the glorious promises of salvation remain for those who will believe.

**"To fall into the hands of the living God is a fearful thing."**

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R. Dean Davis is the chairman of the religion department at Atlantic Union College.

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# Strategy for Living

by M. E. Kidder

The only consistent thing about us humans is our inconsistency. It seems that our lives are filled with ups and downs, which can be especially hazardous where God's plan to rescue us from sin is concerned. The Christian believers to whom Hebrews was addressed couldn't seem to remain steadfast in their relationship with Christ. They were on a trajectory that would pull them out of the orbit of God's saving grace, yet they seemed oblivious to their plight. The downward spiral was accelerating: they were losing interest in meeting with fellow Christians, and even the hope of the appearing of Christ was losing its luster. The retardation of spiritual growth was leading to hardened minds that were becoming increasingly less responsive to the moving of the Holy Spirit, setting the stage for the ultimate folly—the rejection of Christ.

This scenario that we find in the background of Hebrews has been so effective in the past that Satan is not about to abandon it as a method of destruction in our day. Could it be that some of us are unknowingly being drawn into the vortex which leads to eternal oblivion?

What kinds of strategy can we develop that will repel the enemy's subtle attack? Consider the following:

**1. Recognize where the real battle is.** It is not a battle against our sins or against the devil. Jesus has already fought and won those battles for us. The battle is against our natural tendency to trust in ourselves and try to guide our own lives. The battle is to take time with Jesus each day to develop a relationship with Him as a friend. To really know Him is to trust Him, to trust Him is to give up trusting ourselves, to "rest" from our own efforts to be good (4:10, 11). The obedience comes from the new heart which has God's law written upon it (8:10-12).

**2. Persevere in your efforts to know Christ.** Preparation for eternity requires more than a casual interest. We do not drift into heaven. Guesswork will not be sufficient. To make no choice is to default to the devil. Spiritual weakness and susceptibility to deception are the result of a neglected relationship. By not being serious about a commitment to communicate with God through devotional study and prayer we set ourselves up for the "downward spiral" in which the Christian believers described in Hebrews found themselves. Drawing near to God each day takes personal effort but we can have the confidence that our efforts will pay rich dividends (4:16). As we gain spiritual power we can minister to each other and encourage each other with hope in the ultimate reality—the coming of our sovereign Lord (10:35-39).

## REACT

What are the key spiritual indicators that signal a lack of a vital relationship with Christ? If, like the author of Hebrews, you see these indicators in people you care about, what should you do?

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Hebrews**  
**4:10, 11**

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# “This Is a Day of Good News”

by C. E. Bradford

## OPINION

Key text:  
2 Kings 7:9

*Like the letter to the Hebrews, the following essay by our division president reminds us—in our own particular context—of the value of our faith, and of the action to which that faith calls us.*

The doomsayers are abroad in the land, weaving their grim scenarios and spraying the globe with frightening predictions on how and when it will all end. They do have a point, however. The times do seem, as the poet says, “out of joint.” Powerful centrifugal forces peel off everything that isn’t glued and nailed down. Sociologists, educators, politicians, and of course, preachers outdo each other in describing the final gasps of a dying world.

A great many would agree with former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, who said, “As a historian you would now have to predict that our kind of society would very probably not last much longer” or with Norman Brown’s bleak assessment, “Today even the survival of humanity is a utopian hope.” Speaking of the possibility that some monumental error in judgment might touch off a worldwide holocaust, King-Hele says, “The logical conclusion is that the weapons are likely to be let loose, probably before the end of the twentieth century.”

“Our great need is to see ourselves as the advance agents of the kingdom.”

The men who know the most seem to be the most gloomy. And the specter of that deadly radioactive mushroom cloud always hangs over our planet like the sword of Damocles. Then you could add to the data of doom the distinct danger of extinction by overpopulation, the pollution of the ecosystem, and mass suffocation through destruction of the oxygen-producing plant life. We could go on. The point is that bad news, horrible news, seems the order of the day.

But I make bold to say in the midst of it all and in spite of it all: This is a day of good news! (see 2 Kings 7:9).

Upon the authority of the Word of God, Seventh-day Adventists can say to this gloom-enshrouded world, “We have good news for you.” God has not left the final generation without a message of hope and salvation.

What is our Good News? It is the gospel of Jesus Christ adapted to the space age. John the revelator saw earth darkened by sin, out of orbit, and on collision course with certain destruction. He saw a celestial messenger broadcasting a powerful global communication that penetrates all barriers—geographical, social, racial, and national. “He had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people” (Revelation 14:6, NIV).

Of course we know that the angels of Revelation 14:6-12 (this is the basic text of God’s last message to the family of mankind) symbolize a people who proclaim God’s saving grace and a knowledge of His will at a specific time in earth’s history. To them the precious Word of life is a treasure, a treasure that must be shared with the human family in the final age.

The great truths committed to Seventh-day Adventists are tailor-

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made for today's world. Anxiety about the future, fear of death, meaningless existence, and the riddle of origins (Where did I come from?), identity (What is the nature of man?), and destiny (Where will I spend eternity?) are all taken up and addressed in God's present-truth message. "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Revelation 14:7, NIV). Our first business is to experience the dynamics of this saving knowledge and then to pass it on.

Our great need is the recovery of a sense of mission, to see ourselves as the advance agents of the kingdom of God. We need a mission to keep us alive. Emil Brunner was right when he said, "As the fire exists by burning, so the church exists by mission." Without a sense of mission, a clear-cut description, Seventh-day Adventists are bound to suffer an identity crisis, a kind of spiritual amnesia. This we cannot afford. Too much is at stake. Jesus warned us that the greatest danger to the people who wait and watch for His return is lethargy and complacency. "The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep" (Matthew 25:5, NIV).

This is why the church constantly needs renewal and revival. The situation is paradoxical. The great signs of the end foretold by Jesus and the prophets speak in trumpet tones that are amplified by current events: "He is coming soon." At the same time a strange thing happens, the very news that should excite the believer and stimulate to vigorous action is neutralized by a variety of counterworking influences. Materialism, the spirit of the age, the absence of persecution, adjustment to the mores and customs of society, tend to cool zeal and fervor. The believer's witness becomes weak and insipid. The salt loses its flavor. The church settles down, counting on a long stretch of tomorrows. Herein lies our great danger.

During my college days most of the students stayed on campus year round—weekends, holidays, even Thanksgiving and Christmas. Even now, across all those years, I can still hear the voices of a men's chorus ringing out on a still Christmas morning: "Go, tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and everywhere; Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!" The lyrics also point to the great consummation: "Go, tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and everywhere . . . That Jesus soon will come."

This is our mission. The Good News is our message. And the love that Christ has shown us in making us recipients of life eternal is the compelling motive to go and tell.

There is no night so dark, there is no road so rough and thorny, there are no walls of skepticism so thick and stout that can turn us away from our heaven-ordained mission.

## REACT

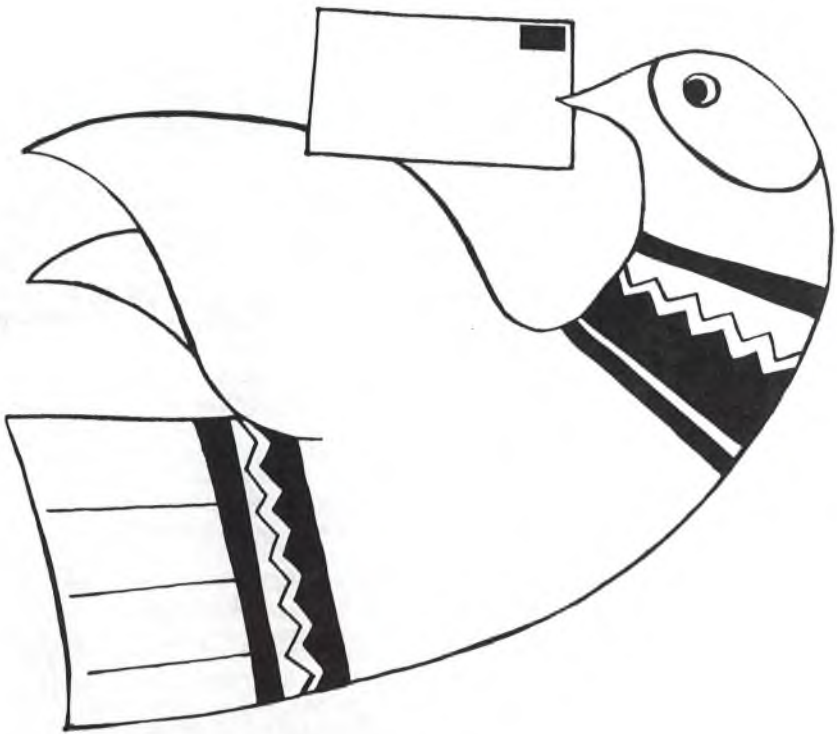
How would you express a "statement of mission" for the Adventist Church today?

**"Without a sense of mission, Seventh-day Adventists are bound to suffer an identity crisis."**

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# The Basis for Faith

"When in former times God spoke to our forefathers, he spoke in fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets. But in this the final age he has spoken to us in the Son whom he has made heir to the whole universe" (Hebrews 1:1, 2, NEB).





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# Is Anyone Listening?

## UNCERTAINTY

We wish we were sure  
About you, God.  
We want to believe—  
But it's kinda hard.

Mostly hard to pray, Lord.  
Kinda gives you the  
Creeps to pray  
And not be sure  
Anyone's hearing.

This prayer is one of several by inner city youngsters published in the book *Treat Me Cool, Lord* by Chaplain Carl F. Burke. It's a prayer that rings true in its candor and simplicity.

Sometimes prayer can indeed give us "the creeps," because when we talk to God, no one talks back (to most of us). We speak; God is silent. And that silence may lead us to wonder not only if our prayers are doing any good, but whether in fact there is anyone there to hear them, and whether there are any answers to the perplexities and traumas that harrow our existence. To be told that God has written His answer to us in the Bible isn't always satisfying either.

But perhaps we should not too quickly equate God's inaudibility with silence. Perhaps He *does* speak to us, not just in cold print, but personally and directly. Perhaps He speaks in a way that is nonverbal, nonprovable and ultimately nonexplainable. A way that penetrates deeper than our

rational or sensory powers can comprehend. And perhaps, if we are attentive to our hearts, which He created in His image, we will "hear" His "still, small voice."

The catch is that because we are sinful, we need help in hearing God's voice with clarity. So God uses special people to help us grasp the Word that He speaks to each one of us as individuals. The Bible is full of such special people. There are prophets with keen insight on God's will and the ability to communicate it powerfully. There are priests who through the ritual drama of their sacred services illustrate the fundamental realities of the relationship between God and people. There are kings whose wisdom, justice and peacefulness give us glimpses of what God's reign is like.

Most of all, there is the One of whom God said, "This is my son. . . . Listen to him!" (Matt. 17:5, NIV). He is the ultimate prophet because He is the definitive revelation of God; the ultimate priest because He brings about purification for sins; the ultimate king because He now reigns at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:1-3). God's Word to us centers in this magnificent Person, who is Himself the answer to all our prayers.

If you listen with your heart to the words and deeds of Jesus the Son, you will hear God speaking directly to you.

D. F. M.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Hebrews 1:1-3

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# God's Definitive Word

**LOGOS**     **Theme:** Christian faith is centered on a God who has spoken to us in diverse ways, but whose supreme, definitive word to us is Jesus Christ.

## 1. God's Manner of Speaking

*"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb. 1:1, 2, RSV).*

The apostle opens Hebrews with a sublime, majestic statement of the thesis he will develop throughout his "sermon." Verse 1 reminds us that God cares enough to communicate. He does not stay detached from us in His ineffable splendor, but He speaks, He discloses Himself to us in an effort to win our affection. In the Old Testament era, He disclosed Himself in various ways—through the pillar of fire, the burning bush, dreams, symbols, the Urim and Thummim on the high priest's breastplate, angels, natural events, and the "still, small voice." Yet all of these disclosures were "fragmentary" (NEB) and incomplete. In Jesus Christ however, God *has spoken*, once-for-all. Jesus Christ is God's climactic, definitive disclosure. He is the touchstone for all other revelation, whether prior to or after His time on earth.

The revelation of God in Jesus was made "in these last days" (v. 1)—it is eschatological (final) in nature. The "last days," in a sense, began with the saving work of Jesus Christ. Donald Hagner explains: "There is no way our writer can have recognized the reality of Jesus Christ—who he is and what he has done—and not have confessed this to be the last time. The sense in which it is 'last' is not chronological but theological. The cross, the death, and the exaltation of Jesus point automatically to the beginning of the end. Theologically we have reached the turning point in the plan that God has had all through the ages, so by definition we are in the last days. Eschatology is of one theological fabric: when God has spoken through his Son eschatology has begun and we are necessarily in the last days theologically."<sup>1</sup>

We should not glide too quickly past the apostle's familiar designation of Jesus as the "Son." We tend to associate the term with the human, biological relationship between father and son. But if we do this in reading Hebrews, we will largely miss the author's point. In v. 1 and throughout Hebrews, "Son" is a messianic title referring to the specific role and function of Jesus in the plan of salvation. The title is drawn from Psalm 2:7, where God says to the messianic king at his coronation, "You are my son, today I have begotten you [the present tense obviously indicates that sonship is being used metaphorically]." In applying the title "Son" to Jesus the apostle is saying that Jesus of Nazareth is in fact that reigning Messiah of Psalm 2.

The primary significance of using the word "son" as a messianic title is that a son is also an heir. Jesus, as the Son, is "appointed heir of all things" (v. 2), or as Psalm 2:8 promises, will be given the na-

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tions as His heritage and the ends of the earth as His possession.

*This passage suggests that the "last days" began 2,000 years ago with the work of Christ. What significance do you find in this concept for yourself and for the church?*

## 2. At the Right Hand of Majesty

*"He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . . (Heb. 1:3, 4, RSV).*

The apostle uses two word-pictures to describe Jesus in v. 3. First, he says Jesus was the *apaugasma* of God's glory. *Apaugasma* can mean "reflection" as in the RSV. But it can also mean "shining forth," "radiance" (Phillips) or "effulgence" (NEB). As Barclay puts it, just as the ray is the light of the sun, so "Jesus is the shining of God's glory among men."<sup>2</sup>

Second, Jesus is the *character* or "stamp" of God's very being. In Greek, *character* "has the idea of a stamp, an impression made in wax, a coin which bears the image of a king or president."<sup>3</sup> Just as a stamp in wax shows us exactly what the seal that made it is like, so Jesus shows us exactly what God is like.<sup>4</sup>

William Johnsson points out that the work of the Son as outlined in Heb. 1:1-3 can be divided into three phases: preincarnate, incarnate, and postincarnate.<sup>5</sup> His preincarnate work was the creation of the universe (v. 2) and, as v. 3 adds, "upholding the universe by his word of power." It is the Son's dynamic "word-energy" that sustains and empowers the life of all creation.

The Son's incarnate work is summed up by the words, "when he had made purification for sins" (v. 3). Note that the purification of sins is something which has *already* been accomplished—completely and finally—by Jesus Christ.

Christ's work of purging sins was shown to be fully valid and sufficient by His postincarnate exaltation to "the right hand of the majesty on high" (v. 3). The apostle here is alluding to another messianic Psalm, the 110th, in describing the Son's current status of royal authority over the universe. Because He is in this supreme position, the Son is able to meet the ongoing needs of His people.

As we will discover, the author of Hebrews repeatedly refers to Psalm 110:1, 4. The reason for this is that this Psalm supports two main arguments of the epistle: "the incomparable superiority of Christ (as revealed in his exaltation to the right hand of God [v. 1]) and the extraordinary high priesthood of Christ (as paralleled and prefigured by Melchizedek [v. 4])."<sup>6</sup>

*Is there significance to the fact that Jesus is reigning now, when clearly the world does not accept His Lordship (see also 1 Cor. 15:24-27).*

1. Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, p. 2.
2. William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 14; Hagner, p. 3.
3. William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, p. 44.
4. Barclay, p. 14.
5. Johnsson, pp. 46, 47.
6. Hagner, p. 5.

D. F. M.

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# The Word Made Audible

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
John 3:16

"From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was 'the image of God,' the image of His greatness and majesty, 'the outshining of His Glory.' It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God's love,—to be 'God with us.' Therefore it was prophesied of Him, 'His name shall be called Immanuel.'

"By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God,—God's thought made audible. . . .

"In the beginning, God was revealed in all the works of creation. It was Christ that spread the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth. It was His hand that hung the worlds in space, and fashioned the flowers of the field. 'His strength setteth fast the mountains.' 'The sea is His, and He made it.' Ps. 65:6; 95:5. It was He that filled the earth with beauty, and the air with song. And upon all things in earth, and air, and sky, He wrote the message of the Father's love.

"Now sin has marred God's perfect work, yet that handwriting remains. Even now all created things declare the glory of His excellence. There is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself. No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. . . .

**"Turning from  
all lesser  
representations,  
we behold  
God in Jesus."**

"The angels of glory find their joy in giving,—giving love and tireless watchcare to souls that are fallen and unholy. Heavenly beings woo the hearts of men; they bring to this dark world light from the courts above; by gentle and patient ministry they move upon the human spirit, to bring the lost into a fellowship with Christ which is even closer than they themselves can know.

"But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. 'I do nothing of Myself,' said Christ; 'the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father.' 'I seek not Mine own glory,' but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life."

## REACT

What are some practical ways God's self-giving character as revealed in Jesus can be more fully reflected in our individual lifestyles? In our relationships with others? In the functioning of the church?

Excerpted from  
*The Desire of Ages*,  
pp. 19-21.

# What the Son Reveals

by Langdon Gilkey

It has always been assumed that Christian understanding provided illumination on human nature, on God, and on the character and goal of history and of human destiny. It has also been assumed that this knowledge, while possibly fed by many other sources, nevertheless is given its final certainty and definitive shape in Jesus Christ as the decisive revelation for Christians of the nature of God, of human being, and of the world. It is, therefore, the major responsibility of any Christology to express and make intelligible what illumination on these ultimate questions Christian faith finds in the event of Jesus Christ. In briefly dealing with this responsibility, I should note that . . . *both* the life and teachings of the historical Jesus *and* the wider theological implications of his death and resurrection ("the Christ of faith") contribute—often in baffling and surprising mixtures—to a Christian understanding of God, of human being, and of our historical and ultimate destiny.

## Man in a New Light

Who we really are, what are the requirements and possibilities of being really human, and what we should or could be are questioned and debated, answered and unanswered throughout history. It is not as if anyone knew definitively or could take answers for granted. Yet an answer of some sort is, on the one hand, inescapable—both as individuals and as communities we each live *out* some answer. On the other hand, that answer we live out is in large part determined by the accidents of cultural and religious inheritance—most of us, for example, merely reenact the contemporary American answer. In Jesus, for Christians, an answer, a model, a paradigm of authentic humanity has appeared: the possibilities of human existence are here defined and enacted, and thus the requirements of being fully human for the first time are made plain. Here is a life lived under the same conditions of finitude we experience; of time and space; of need and of weakness; of identity and yet of relation with others; of an uncertain and precarious vocation or task; of suffering, danger, and death. Yet it was lived in devotion to God; in courage, serenity and inner integrity; in utter self-giving and sacrifice to others (as Barth says, "He was a man for others"); and in transcendent devotion of self to a cause, the cause of God's kingdom. The really human has appeared, characterized—and this was not known before—by faith, love, and hope, enacting, therefore, the two commandments that summarize the law. The older categories of the "perfection of his human nature" and his "sinlessness" mean, in other words, that Jesus presented to us not only the fulfillment of human possibilities, but the definitive definition of those possibilities—and its requirements. Thus he replaced, in fulfilling it, the sacred law as manifesting to us what the uncomfortable, and yet inescapable, requirements of our own fulfillment are.

As has also been made clear, his life, teachings, and especially his death uncovered, as a light uncovers both the deep darkness of a

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
2 Corinthians  
4:6

**"In Jesus, the requirements of being fully human for the first time are made plain."**

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basement and the cracks in walls and floor—not to mention the crawling things lurking there—the depth, universality, and structure of the human predicament, revealing its presence, even among the mighty, the intelligent, and the spiritual, exposing its character as a love of self rather than of God and of neighbor, a love of self that loses both self, other and world, and underlining the need of all of us—whoever we are—for divine mercy and divine grace if we are to be whole again. The character of Jesus' historical existence revealed both the real possibilities and the radical estrangement of human existence; as Irenaeus said, "He presented *man* to man in a new light."

### God in a New Light

... It is a revelation of the nature of *God*, even more than of the possibilities of human being, that is essential for trust and for hope, either for hope for our own fulfillment or for the fulfillment of the human story.

**"His life, teachings, and especially his death uncovered the depth, universality, and structure of the human predicament."**

What is it, then, that is revealed of God in and through this event, for nature, history, and human experience give us ambiguous clues to these questions. What does Christology say about *God*? Again the coming or happening of the event itself, and Jesus' teachings and life, his death and resurrection, unite together to answer this question. Central to this new understanding of God is, first, the divine "going forth," "coming," "reaching out" to rescue the lost. This is, of course, a theme vividly portrayed in Jesus' teaching through his parables about God. It is also a motif borne especially by the symbol of the incarnation, "God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten Son" (John 3:16), and expressed in and through the category of God's initiation of and participation in the event of Jesus the Christ.

This central motif of the divine outreach, of the divine coming in love, is, second, deepened by two more elements which together define this new conception of the divine love: the participation in the suffering of his creatures and the forgiveness of their sins. Both of these appear, of course, initially and most vividly in the life and words of Jesus. They find their main locus, however, in the event of the cross, where not only is human sin uncovered and human fidelity and courage manifested, but where—as a revelation of God—the participation of God in our suffering and his/her mercy to all, even to sinners, are revealed. The symbol of the Atonement has, in various ways, expressed these two themes of the divine suffering for us and the divine forgiveness of us. Both are essential if the depth of the divine agape, the love of God for the unworthy and the identification of God with the suffering and the lost, are to be expressed. It is here, in the manifestation both of the divine judgment and the divine mercy, and of the participation of God in the suffering resulting from sin—and not through the representation of human possibilities—that the problematic of sin, both as the demonic and as the self-destructive, is countered and resolved.

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Third, in Jesus' proclamation of the coming Kingdom in new union with his death and resurrection, the final *victory* of God over sin, fate, and death is revealed and thereby the ultimate basis for faith, hope, and love for God given. Implied in the unconditional *power* of God expressed in the symbols of creation and providence, a power united with the love of God taught by prophets, priests, and Jesus alike, this confidence in the final efficacy of the divine saving will, both for individuals and for history, is vindicated—and symbolized—by the victory over fate and death in the event of Jesus' resurrection. The goodness of God—known in many ways—is for Christians not merely a struggling and possibly ineffective goodness. God's love is a victorious love—a point taken for granted by all of us but, when we consider it in relation to the apparent character of reality, by no means as obvious as we like to think. "Of course," we say, "God is love, God forgives, God rescues the lost, God is victorious—of course." But where does that "of course" come from—an "of course" assumed throughout the modern mythologies from evolutionism and process through to Marxism and humanism. Ordinary life experience? *Time* magazine? the six o'clock news? "reason"? a well equipped laboratory? This is the question I have tried to answer in explicating the revelation of *God* in the total event of Jesus Christ. As Irenaeus, again, said: "Also he presented *God* to man in a new light."

**"The goodness of God is not merely a struggling and possibly ineffective goodness."**

### **The Future in a New Light**

Finally, the revelation in Jesus who is the Christ uncovered in a new way the problem, the resolution, and the ultimate goal of historical process. The fallenness of the world, the depth of the problem of sin, the outrageous dislocation of institutions, and the waywardness of their leaders—all of this was revealed in Jesus' teachings, life, and death in a depth and clarity unknown before. But most important, in his proclamation of the Kingdom and of the reality of God's future, the mystery of the "whither," of the purpose, goal, and direction of history's processes, was unveiled.

### **REACT**

1. What specific characteristics of authentic humanness do you see in Jesus? In what practical ways can we display these characteristics in our own lives?

2. In a world of hate and suffering, what evidence is there that God's love is *victorious* love?

Excerpted from  
*Message and Existence*  
by Langdon Gilkey,  
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# The Word Made Effective

by Deborah Hardin

## HOW TO

Key text:  
John 1:1

Have you ever tried communicating with someone who doesn't speak your language? Your voice gets louder, and your gestures take on a new importance. You do better pointing than speaking. As long as you're bargaining for something basic and concrete, you can usually make out okay. But have you ever tried telling a joke or explaining something abstract? It's much more difficult. You start to remember the importance of language and words.

How well would you know God if you couldn't read? How much would you know about God if you couldn't read? Without words and language it would be impossible to get the full picture of God. Before sin God could talk to man face to face. After sin, when this was no longer possible, God started using the prophets to give His message to the world. Their words were abstract, though. Giving the message in this way wasn't enough. So the Word of God became flesh, something the people could see and touch. "The Word was God" (John 1:1, RSV).

To understand God we must understand Christ, the Word. And to understand Christ we must study the Bible, the Word of God, through daily, careful reading. The question is what kind of reading do you want to do? Here are some varied possibilities:

1. When you're reading the Bible, you might **select a passage that reflects your current mood**. If you're depressed, perhaps you would choose one of the psalms David wrote when fleeing from Saul. Or maybe you would look up Psalm 51 when you're feeling guilty and repentant. You could choose a biblical character who seems to be feeling what you are feeling. A lot of comfort can be gained from this method.

2. Instead of reading something that reflects your mood, you could **read something that will direct your mood**. If you're down, you might choose a joyful psalm like Psalm 150. If nothing seems to be working for you, you might read a success story like Daniel's, and get some pointers on how to improve your life. If you use this method, you will probably find yourself getting inspired and ready to go again.

3. Besides reading for your emotions, you also need to **read to learn**. If you never read to learn your growth will be stunted. A planned schedule insures that this type of reading is also included.

There are many ways to read the Bible. You, the intelligent reader, must make the choice. Words have power. Through words God created the world. Now God's Word sustains the world (see Heb. 1:3). The world was changed by Christ becoming the Word made flesh. And by daily study and absorption of God's Word, we are changed.

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# The Fullest Picture

by David E. Greenlaw

**OPINION**  
Key text:  
John 14:8, 9

I really enjoy nature. While growing up in Maine I often wandered up and down the coast and inland through the forests. In this way I learned at a young age to appreciate the God of creation. The beauty and order of nature told me much about the God of nature.

The study of God's Word gave me a fuller picture of what He is like. From Old Testament events and characters one sees that God is involved in the history of mankind. The life of Moses is a good example. The story of Israel going forth from Egypt to the promised land is replete with information about what God is like.

Certain New Testament characters showed me what the power of God could do to change people. One of the greatest examples of this is seen in the life of the apostle Paul. A man who once hated the Christians and tried to destroy them becomes a champion of the Christian faith. The power God has to change humanity speaks forcefully to us about the creator God.

The history of the Christian era has also spoken volumes to me. Men and women of faith who have determined to live their lives in harmony with God's teachings speak powerfully of the God they serve.

George Muller, of Bristol, England, was such a man. Having wasted his young life in riotous living, he determined at his conversion to live for God. In Bristol he developed an orphanage financed totally by faith. Thousands of children passed through his orphanage but Muller never solicited funds to run his establishment. He believed that God had called him to that ministry and God would maintain it. The stories are thrilling about how God fulfilled his promises to this man of faith. Muller's life is a tremendous example of what God has done in history.

However, all of the above only tell me certain aspects about what God is like. I learn from nature that God is a marvelous Creator. I learn from the Bible the attributes of God's character. I learn also from the Word that God is able to change people's lives. History gives me a fuller picture of God by revealing God's activities in the lives of humanity. It is, however, only when I see and understand Jesus Christ that I can have a full revelation of what God is like.

Do you really want to know what God is like? Then you must study the life and teachings of Jesus. When Philip asked, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied," Jesus answered, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:8, 9, RSV).

## REACT

What is the relationship of the revelation in Jesus Christ to other modes of revelation, such as the Old Testament law, Paul's ethical instruction and the writings of Ellen White?

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# Faith in a Brother

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage” (Hebrews 2:14, 15, RSV).



# A King Among His People

by Jill Doster

In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Mark Twain tells the story of Hank, a nineteenth-century New England mechanic who is transported, via a bump on the head, to the England of King Arthur. Using a knowledge of history and that famous "Yankee know how," he quickly adopts the title "Sir Boss," and becomes the king's most important advisor.

In an effort to better understand his subjects, ignorant, illiterate peasants, Arthur decides to travel across the country incognito, recognizing that he will never be able to reach his people, or even get an accurate view of their lives if he appears in the garb of a king. Hank describes the transformation of Arthur from king to peasant:

"[A]bout bedtime I took the king to my private quarters to cut his hair and help him get the hang of the lowly raiment he was to wear. . . . So I inverted a bowl over his head and cut away all the locks that hung below it. I also trimmed his whiskers and moustache until they were only about a half inch long; and tried to do it inartistically, and succeeded. It was villainous disfigurement. When he got his lubberly sandals on, and his long robe of coarse brown linen cloth, which hung straight from his neck to his anklebones, he was no longer the comeliest man in his kingdom, but one of the unhandsomest and most commonplace and unattractive."<sup>1</sup>

Arthur's disguise is not always successful, and he finds it difficult to alter his cultural speech patterns and regal bearings, and Hank worries again and again that the disguise will be discovered. But when Arthur and Hank enter the hut of a peasant family decimated by smallpox, we realize that Arthur will always be king because of something that goes beyond the trappings of royalty:

"There was a slight noise from the direction of the dim corner where the ladder was. It was the king, descending. I could see that he was bearing something in one arm. . . . [U]pon his breast lay a slender girl of fifteen. She was but half conscious; she was dying of smallpox. Here was heroism at its last and loftiest possibility; . . . here was challenging death in the open field unarmed, . . . no reward set upon the contest, and no admiring world in silks and cloth of gold to gaze and applaud; . . . and yet the king's bearing was as serenely brave as it had always been. . . . He was great, now; sublimely great. The rude statues of his ancestors in his palace should have an addition—I would see to that; and it would not be a mailed king killing a giant or a dragon, like the rest, it would be a king in commoner's garb bearing death in his arms that a peasant mother might look her last upon her child and be comforted."<sup>2</sup>

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Hebrews  
1:4-2:18

1. Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), p. 160.  
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 173.

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# The Son in Solidarity

**LOGOS** Theme: The Son, eternally greater than any angel, became a brother to the human family in order that He might conquer the devil and death, and qualify to become our High Priest.

## 1. The Son—Higher Than the Angels (read Heb. 1:4-14)

*"The Son was made greater than the angels, just as the name that God gave him is greater than theirs" (1:4, GNB).*

In order to succeed in driving home his point about the superiority of Jesus Christ, the author of Hebrews had to deal with what was a hot theological theme in his day—angelology (the study of angels). Angels appear at key points throughout the Old Testament, but during the intertestamental period their significance in Jewish theology vastly increased. Jewish thinking came to place more and more stress on the *transcendence* of God, and the vast gulf that separates God from man. Angels came to be seen as intermediaries that bridged the gulf.

For example, while the Old Testament clearly states that God gave the law directly to Moses (see Ex. 31:18), first-century Jews believed that direct communication between God and man was unthinkable. Based on Deut. 33:2 in the Greek translation (Septuagint or LXX) which suggests angels were with God at Sinai, they concluded that angels functioned as intermediaries, receiving the law from God and then passing it on to Moses (see Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19).

The recipients of Hebrews were no doubt influenced by this angelology. And while the angelology was to a degree based on Scripture, it was a potential threat to a proper understanding of Jesus for a couple of reasons: 1) it involved a hierarchy of beings in addition to Jesus through whom men and women have to go in order to approach God; 2) it could lead believers to regard Jesus as one of the chief angels, rather than the unique Son of God. This view might have been a tempting way for Jewish Christians in danger of lapsing back toward Judaism to resolve the problem of the deity of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The apostle draws four arguments from Old Testament messianic passages to show the crucial distinction between the divine Son of God and angels:

1) Jesus bears an exclusive divine title—"Son." No angel was ever called "Son" (v. 5), but the Messiah is so addressed in Psalm 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14.

2) God commands that angels worship the Son (v. 6). The quotation here is from the Septuagint of Deut. 32:43. It should be noted that the term "first-born" in v. 6 does not mean Christ was created or is somehow the offspring of God, but rather refers to the supremacy of his rank (cf. Psalm 89:27). He is at the apex of all that exists.

3) There is a contrast between the nature of the angels and the Son. The angels are "winds" and "flames of fire" (v. 7) according to the Septuagint of Psalm 104:4. The Son, on the other hand, is directly addressed as "God" (vv. 8, 9) whose throne lasts forever, the

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eternal, changeless creator God (vv. 10-12). Here the quotations are from Psalms 45:6, 7 and 102:25, 27, respectively.

4) The Son and the angels have contrasting roles (vv. 13, 14). Unlike any angel, the Son reigns at God's right hand as shown by Psalm 110:1. The angels have a lesser though important role. They are God's agents in serving his people.

*Most modern Christians never question the superiority of Jesus over the angels. What then is the significance of this passage for us? Who or what might we tend to give the exalted status in our thinking that should belong only to Jesus?*

## 2. A Great Salvation (read Heb. 2:1-4)

*"Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (2:1, RSV).*

In this first of several sections where he applies his theology to the lives of his readers, the apostle uses an *a fortiori* argument: If that which was revealed through angels is accepted to be true, he reasons, then the gospel message should be more convincing, since there are even stronger reasons for accepting its truth.

These superior evidences are: 1) the gospel's *origin*—it was proclaimed by Jesus Himself, God incarnate; 2) its *transmission*—it was passed on directly to the recipients of Hebrews by those who had seen and heard the Lord; and 3) its *effectiveness*—signs, miracles and power attest to the gospel's authenticity.

The readers are urged not to "neglect" (*pararrein*) such compelling evidence but rather "pay closer attention" (*proschein*) to it. Both the Greek words here have a nautical sense, so Barclay suggests that a vivid translation of the apostle's point could be: "Therefore, we must the more eagerly anchor our lives [*proschein*] to the things that we have been taught lest the ship of life drift past the harbour and be wrecked [*pararrein*]."2

## 3. The Path to Glory (read Heb. 2:5-9)

*"We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (2:9, RSV).*

Having made a forceful argument for the Son's superiority over the angels, the apostle must now deal with the fact that during his time on earth Jesus, as a real human being, was in fact "lower" than the angels. He shows that the divine, exalted Son also had to become a brother to the human race through the incarnation in order to win our salvation.

Psalm 8, which originally was a poem about God's design for the role of man in the scheme of creation, is applied to Jesus, who is the embodiment of authentic humanity. Only by becoming for a little while lower than the angels and suffering in our stead at the cross

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could Jesus enable us to share in His exalted position and thus experience the "glory and honor" which according to Psalm 8 has always been the divine intention for humanity.

Although empirically we do not yet see Jesus ruling as Lord over all things, His saving acts in history (v. 9) assure us that the "world to come" (v. 5), in which He reigns supreme, is already a reality (v. 8) which has broken into our present evil world and will one day be fully manifest.

*According to Heb. 2:5-9, are the following statements true? A) Suffering and death is always the necessary prelude to glory and honor. B) The death of Christ was an outgrowth of God's grace, rather than being a satisfaction of His justice (cf. Rom. 3:23-26).*

#### **4. Solidarity With Us (read Heb. 2:10-18)**

*"Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people" (2:17, RSV).*

As the pioneer of our salvation (v. 10), Jesus blazed open the path we must enter to find eternal life. In order to do this He had to come into complete solidarity with us. This solidarity was also necessary for Jesus to become our High Priest. A priest is one who represents his people before God, and therefore he must be one with the people he represents.

Jesus' solidarity with us involves more than the fact of His humanity, it also involves suffering—to the point of death on a cross. Through this suffering Jesus became "perfected" (v. 10) in the sense that he became fully qualified as our High Priest (an idea that will be expanded on in 5:7-10 and 7:28). This is true for two reasons:

1) His suffering was vicarious. The penalty of sin that was hanging over us fell on Him. And since He died *for us* we are liberated from the fear of death (v. 14). Though the devil still wields the weapons of fear and death, through Jesus the power of both have been broken, and their ultimate elimination is certain.

2) By experiencing the full range of human suffering, Jesus is now in a position to give us just the help we need in our own struggles (v. 18). There is a supreme comfort in knowing that whatever we may face, Jesus has been there, He knows what it's like, and He can help (see also 4:14-16).

*Why did Christ have to become a real human being in order to save us? Couldn't God in His love and power simply have made a direct offer of salvation, without the incarnation?*

D. F. M.

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1. Donald Hagner, *Hebrews*, p. 10.

2. William Barclay, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 21.

# The Yawning Chasm Closed

by David Scheider

The book of Hebrews vividly shows the supreme position and authority of Jesus Christ. Christ is higher than the angels, the Sabbath, the priesthood, Melchizedek, the temple, and even the sacrifices on the altar. As the acclaim heightens, one senses the yawning chasm between Christ and ourselves. The words of Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am lost" may express the feeling one has when perceiving Christ in His exaltation.

Rather than dwelling on human inadequacies and sinfulness in comparison to Christ's divinity and holiness, Hebrews 2:14-18 reminds us that Christ, the Exalted One, plummeted to the depths to purchase eternal life for us. Ellen White, in connection with these verses, also reminds us that Christ has closed the "yawning chasm" by becoming one of us so that we may be one with Him.

"Under the mighty impulse of His love, He took our place in the universe, and invited the Ruler of all things to treat Him as a representative of the human family. He identified Himself with our interests, bared His breast for the stroke of death, took man's guilt and its penalty, and offered in man's behalf a complete sacrifice to God. By virtue of this atonement, He has power to offer to man perfect righteousness and full salvation, whosoever shall believe on Him as a personal Saviour shall not perish, but have everlasting life."<sup>1</sup>

"It is our privilege to contemplate Jesus by faith, and see Him standing between humanity and the eternal throne. He is our Advocate, presenting our prayers and offerings as spiritual sacrifices to God. Jesus is the great sinless propitiation, and through His merit, God and men may hold converse together.

"Christ has carried His humanity into eternity. He stands before God as the representative of our race. When we are clothed with the wedding garment of His righteousness, we become one with Him, and He says to us, 'They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.' His saints will behold Him in His glory, with no dimming veil between."<sup>2</sup>

If Christ, the Exalted One, has performed such an act on our behalf—i.e. becoming human, living a sinless life, and dying as the perfect sacrifice for sin—then those who believe in Christ need not fear the second death. He already died that death for us.

## REACT

1. How would you compare the attitudes and behaviors of those in bondage to the fear of death with those liberated from that fear?

2. In view of the saving work of Christ, is it wrong for the Christian to fear death?

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Hebrews  
2:17, 18

**"Under the mighty impulse of His love, He took our place in the universe."**

1. *Review and Herald*, April 18, 1893 (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 924, 925).

2. *Youth Instructor*, October 28, 1897 (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 925).

David Scheider is an intern minister at the Kettering SDA church.

# The Interpretive Key

by Donald Hagner

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
2 Corinthians  
1:20

Careful students of Hebrews may find the author's use of the Old Testament perplexing for at least two reasons, both of which come to the surface in this week's passage: 1) he appears to quote it inaccurately; and 2) he appears to use it "out of context." In today's reading, Donald Hagner suggests an explanation which may be helpful to keep in mind throughout our study of Hebrews.

The book of Hebrews is . . . very dependent upon the OT (about thirty actual citations and over seventy allusions have been counted). In his quotations the author regularly follows the Greek (LXX) rather than the Hebrew (or Masoretic) text that has come down to us. It is primarily this that accounts for differences between the citations as found in Hebrews and in our English OT.

In his interpretation of the OT our author uses what may be called a *Christocentric* hermeneutic. That is, Christ is seen to be the key to the real meaning of the OT as it can now be understood in this era of fulfillment. From this point of view, all of the OT points directly or indirectly to Christ, who is by definition the *telos* (goal) of God's saving purposes.

Obviously this kind of interpretation involves going beyond the meaning of the text in a literal sense—that is, beyond what the original writers of those texts meant by them. Yet because of the unity of God's saving purposes and the basic relationship of the past to the present as promise to fulfillment, the OT texts may be said to have a deeper or fuller sense (what theologians call *sensus plenior*), beyond what the Hebrew authors could be aware of because of their early position in the history of salvation. Only from the standpoint of fulfillment can the ultimate significance of the OT be seen. The dawning of eschatology in Christ and the experience of fulfillment through his death and resurrection provide the writers of the NT, including the anonymous author of Hebrews, with a dramatically new point of orientation from which the OT can be read with new understanding.

This new perspective on the OT does not amount to the sanctioning of an arbitrary, frivolous, or allegorical interpretation of the OT. Although this kind of abuse of the OT did occur in the second-century church, as in forms of Judaism contemporary with the NT, the NT by comparison is relatively restrained and sober in its interpretation of the OT. . . .

Before Christ, no key was available to arrive at the ultimate intention and unity of Scripture. But now in Christ, God has disclosed the true goal of the OT promises (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20).

## REACT

Which is more important and valid in our interpretation of the Old Testament today: the Christocentric approach, or deriving the original meaning as determined by study of the historical and literary context?

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lishers, San Francisco.

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# Benefiting From Our Brother

by Marguerite Johnson

Appreciation of the fact that Jesus is a brother to the human family is essential to successful Christian living in today's changing world. Only when we grasp the fact that He coped with trials, suffering, injustice, temptation and death can we commit ourselves to the Christian lifestyle with absolute confidence that He is able to help us with whatever we may face.

Here are some suggestions for taking full advantage of the empathy and aid Christ our Brother offers:

**1. Visualize the human Christ.** Imagine scenes in which you encounter Jesus person to person. Place yourself in the scenes related in the gospels and imagine Jesus speaking His life-giving words directly to *you*, and touching *you* with His healing hand.

Proper visualization requires study of the inspired narratives of Jesus' life on earth as a starting point. But by creatively visualizing you can go beyond mere reading to personalizing the significance of Jesus.

**2. Consciously affirm the supremacy of Christ.** Angels and prophets no longer rival Christ for supremacy in our thinking. Intellectually, we take for granted Christ's deity and lordship. Are we not in actual fact, though, constantly prone to place our true priorities outside of Christ?

If *People* magazine, "Entertainment Tonight", and all the other media attention to celebrities grabs more of your interest and time than does studying and thinking about Christ, then you probably need to evaluate who has the highest status in your heart. Believing in Jesus as the one who reigns supreme over the universe (Heb. 1:4-9) has no value without conscious and continual choices to accept His reign over your life.

**3. Keep the lines of communication open.** Don't confine your communication with Christ to morning/evening/mealtimes prayers. Be continually sensitive to our Brother's presence with you, and continually inclined to turn to Him for help and guidance for each challenge.

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Hebrews 2:4-9

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# Mysterious, but Efficient

by Robert G. Wilson

## OPINION

**Key text:**  
Luke 1:35;  
John 1:1-3,  
14, 18

The passage from Hebrews under consideration in this lesson focuses our attention on the very heart of God's redemptive plan. God took the initiative in rescuing mankind from the results of sin. Basic to His solution was "incarnation." This word, a derivative from the Latin "in flesh," symbolizes the most profound and infinite thought ever to invade the human mind. From the inception of the Christian proclamation, unbelievers and believers alike have grappled with the complexity and credibility of this event. The God/Man—how can such contrasting entities be integrated into one? How can mutually exclusive characteristics be blended into a single "Person," or is it "person"? Theologians have proposed novel and conflicting alternatives to the dilemma (most have been labeled "heresy"). Struggles over the great creeds of the church reflect the centrality of the issue.

Orthodox Christianity has traditionally maintained that the child born in the Bethlehem stable was fully God and fully man (John 1:1-5, 14, 18). The Bible, however, remains mute as to *how* the qualities and prerogatives of the infinite God can be blended and encased in the finite perimeters of humanity. My guess is that the divine mind behind the Bible was aware of the limitations of the human mind's ability to comprehend the vastness of "incarnation" and thus chose to not attempt an explanation.

**"The Creator became the creature, lived with heat, cold, pain, frustration, rejection, needs, desires, drives."**

The writer of Hebrews avoids the "how" of incarnation but focuses on the "why," and on the consequences to the human family. The author vigorously asserts the reality and the benefits of this fathomless mystery to us. God became fully human in the person of His Son. The Creator became the creature, lived with heat, cold, pain, frustration, rejection, needs, desires, drives—every facet of the human condition. The importance of Christ's full humanity is underscored by F. F. Bruce: ". . . If His solidarity with them [humanity] is real, He also must be a true human being, a genuine partaker of flesh and blood."<sup>1</sup> He became one with us to understand us, to empathize with us, to minister for us, and to provide us with a model for authentic human life made in the image of God. "He suffered with them and for them, and through His sufferings was made perfect—qualified in every way to be their high priest. He is merciful, because through His own sufferings and trials He can sympathize with theirs; He is faithful, because He endured to the end without faltering."<sup>2</sup>

Modern psychology and psychiatric therapy has shown how important it is to identify with the one you seek to help. Alcoholics Anonymous has used this dynamic reality to bring help and healing to thousands of alcohol-soaked lives. It is so easy and tempting for one in need to dismiss your counsel or help with a simple, "But you

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don't understand." And it's true—without first hand experience or knowledge we don't fully understand. As a father there is a significant dimension of the birth experience I will never understand like a mother who has been through the anxieties, pains and ultimate satisfactions of giving birth. We need to be very careful of our simplistic use of "I know just how you feel."

But our passage this week (also 4:15) powerfully declares that our Advocate, our Example, our Counselor and our Savior knows exactly what it is like to walk the pathway of the human situation. His experience qualifies Him to say, "I understand." In Him we have been shown human potential. We have been understood. We have been redeemed by none other than God Himself. "He endured keen trials and temptations Himself, not only the trials incidental to our human lot, but those subtle temptations which attended His Messianic calling. . . . What a source of strength it was to them [Christians] to be assured that in the presence of God they had as their champion and intercessor one who had known similar and even sorer temptations, and had withstood them victoriously!"<sup>3</sup>

All this drives the writer to a potent conclusion: in light of what Christ has done, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" (2:3). The purpose of the incarnation is that we might not receive the natural consequences of alienation from God, but rather possess the benefits of renewed potentials for divine-like life everlasting. In Christ is the ultimate understanding because in Him, as God, is the ultimate identification with us. His identification transcends that of Mark Twain's King Arthur (see Introduction). Arthur visits the peasants, but Christ *unites* with His people in their affliction, even to death.

**"He endured not only the trials incidental to our human lot, but those subtle temptations which attended His Messianic calling."**

## REACT

Did Christ know what it's like to be sinful? If not, is He really able to identify with us fully? Do sinners need the help of other sinners, in addition to the help of Christ, in order to come to salvation or successfully live as Christians?

1. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 1964), p. 48.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

# A Call to Faith

“Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” (Hebrews 3:15, RSV).



# From Linus, Elder of the Hebrews

by Tom Robbins

*As we read the letters of the New Testament, we only experience one side of the dialog. If the Hebrews wrote back, perhaps their response would look like the letter that appears below. How would you answer their concerns?*

From Linus, servant of Christ and elder of the Hebrews, to our esteemed friend and teacher.

Your letter has been read before our group on two occasions and has been the subject of discussion in several smaller meetings. Many of our number have a variety of questions, which I forward to you in this epistle. We are a divided group. I am in agreement with your letter, but some of our brethren have questions and still others wish to develop your themes in extreme ways. I have tried to summarize their concerns, which run like this:

It was the way of our fathers, that if a murder was committed, the whole community would share the guilt until the murder was avenged. We cannot forget this guilt until the murder of Christ is avenged.

Why did Jesus not come in the time of Moses to deliver our people? Surely He would have spared us the pain of the wilderness.

Your letter speaks of entering the Sabbath rest as if it is

similar to our fathers entering the promised land. Why do you link these together like this?

Why do you say that a Sabbath rest is so important? While it was important for Moses, it is not really necessary in our time, is it?

You say that Christ is our High Priest, but He is not among us. Don't we still need priests here on earth to guide and direct us?

The first apostles, from whom our fathers learned of Christ, are now dead. How can we continue in the light of Christ without their guidance? Perhaps we should pray to them?

Moses and the Israelites had the definite goal of reaching the promised land and still they faltered. The Christian ideas of reward, such as a Sabbath rest, are less definite. How can we even hope for our people to be more faithful than the Israelites of Moses' time?

These are the questions that some have raised, dear brother. Perhaps you can calm their minds on your next visit. We were very pleased to learn from your letter that Timothy has been released and that he may be with you when you see us. Greetings to those among you who know us and all God's people. God's grace be with you!

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**Hebrews**  
**3:1-4:13**

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# Strive to Rest!

## LOGOS

**Theme:** In light of Jesus' superiority to Moses, Christians have even greater reason to believe the promise of God than the Israelites, whose example provides a warning against unbelief.

### 1. Greater Than Moses (read Heb. 3:1-6)

*"Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful over God's house as a son" (Heb. 3:5, 6, RSV).*

The author of Hebrews finds theological significance both in the similarity between Jesus and Moses and in the differences. The similarity is that both are faithful in carrying out their appointed roles. Jesus is both a merciful and *faithful* high priest, according to 2:17. His trait of mercifulness is elaborated later in 4:14-5:10. In 3:1-6, Jesus' faithfulness is discussed and amplified by the use of another title—apostle (v. 2). An apostle is someone like an ambassador who is sent out with a commission and given authority to carry it out. This is the only time the Bible calls Jesus an apostle.

Jesus was completely faithful in His appointed task as God's apostle—the one sent to represent God to humanity, to face life as we face it, and to die an atoning death. Only through the process of faithfulness to the end as apostle could He become our faithful high priest—the one who can be counted on to represent us before God, because He is truly one of us, and who can mediate to us the help we need because of His first-hand knowledge of our situation.

Having shown in chapter 1 that Jesus is superior to the angels, the author is also concerned to show that Jesus is superior to Moses. Again, the modern reader is tempted to yawn a "so what" at this argument, but in the setting of first-century Judaism it was an astounding assertion to make. Nobody was regarded as being as close to God as Moses, the one to whom God spoke "mouth to mouth" (Num. 12:8). In fact, a statement by the second-century rabbi Jose ben Chalafta suggests that some even regarded Moses as higher than the angels: "God calls Moses faithful in all his house, and thereby he ranked him higher than the ministering angels themselves."<sup>1</sup>

Hebrews, however, shows Jesus to be infinitely greater than Moses. The Israelite leader was a part of God's house (God's people), but Jesus is the builder of the house (v. 3). Moses was a servant in the house (v. 5), but Jesus as Son reigns over the house (v. 6). Moses testified about the Christ later to come (v. 5), but Jesus is the fulfillment of all things.

*What can we, who "share in the heavenly call," learn from considering Jesus as apostle (see 3:1)?*

### 2. Lessons From Israel's Unfaithfulness (read Heb. 3:7-19)

*"For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end" (3:14, RSV).*

Good beginnings are never enough, argues the apostle in this pas-

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sage. To experience the fulfillment God has promised at the end, we must cling to our initial confidence in Him through the middle of our experience.

Quoting Psalm 95:7-11, the apostle typologically applies the experience of the Israelites on their way to Canaan to his readers. The Israelites had a good beginning. The mighty arm of Yahweh had delivered them from Egypt. But as they faced hardship, they got bogged down in the middle of their journey (see Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 14:20-35; 20:1-13). They lost their confidence, their hearts became hardened and they continually went astray—not geographically, but in the heart, in the realm of attitude and will.

Jesus, greater than Moses (vv. 1-6), provides through the cross a vastly greater deliverance than the Exodus. Thus the warnings given the Israelites are of even greater urgency when applied to those who have accepted the redemption Christ offers. We must not let our hearts harden but rather hold on to the trust we first placed in Christ. Our relationship with Him must be kept current every day, while it is called, "today" (v. 13), for tomorrow never comes. As our hearts are continually open to Christ and our commitment to Him is thereby maintained through the middle of the Christian journey, we will enter the rest He offers at the end (v. 19).

*Does this passage suggest that the failure of the Advent movement to reach the heavenly rest is due to simple lack of belief?*

*How would you define "belief" and "unbelief" in the context of Hebrews 3?*

### **3. A Call to Sabbath-rest (read Heb. 4:1-10)**

*"So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his" (4:9, 10, RSV).*

The crucial thing that the rebellious Israelites failed to experience but which is now available to Christians is the "rest" of God. In this somewhat complicated passage, the apostle uses the word "rest" in three distinct, though related ways: 1) The literal rest in the land of Canaan (v. 3; cf. Deut. 12:9); 2) God's own rest (v. 4); and 3) the ultimate rest intended for God's people which in one sense may be experienced now (v. 3), but will only be fully experienced when Christ returns. "It is clear that our author sees a typological relationship between rest in the land of Canaan and the rest that God intends for Christians. The blessings of one foreshadow those of the other, just as the present rest Christians can enjoy is an anticipation of the final, eschatological rest."<sup>2</sup>

The apostle's reasoning might be rephrased this way:

1. Though the rebellious Israelites failed to enter God's rest, that rest remains continually available, for it is based on the fact that God Himself rested from His work on the seventh day of creation.

2. We are offered a share in that rest, but the experience of the

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Israelites warns us that we don't receive it automatically. Disbelief disqualified them.

3. Eventually the Israelites did enter the promised land under Joshua. But this was not the ultimate rest God offers. Centuries later the psalmist used the present tense in inviting people to God's rest, which shows that the rest had not yet been realized.

4. God's ultimate rest is the full salvation that comes through Christ, both in its present and future dimensions. It is a "Sabbath-rest" for we enter into it by resting from our own works, just as God rested on the seventh day.

It is probably not quite accurate to see in v. 10 a call to cease attempts at works-righteousness (though that is certainly a truth of the gospel). Rather, "the author has in mind the ideal qualities of the Sabbath-rest, namely peace, well-being, and security—that is, a frame of mind that by virtue of its confidence and trust in God possesses these qualities in contradiction to the surrounding circumstances."<sup>3</sup> The physical rest and peace of the weekly Sabbath day is a sign both of a deeper spiritual peace that should pervade all of life and the ultimate peace of the new earth God will bring into being.

*What does it mean for us today to enter the "rest" of God? To what extent, if any, can this be experienced in the present?*

#### **4. The Penetrating Word (read Heb. 4:11-13)**

*"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (4:12, RSV).*

The Word of God is the greatest reality therapy. It drives home the truth about ourselves with unparalleled power. But if we are open to this penetrating power, we will find that it not only exposes us but also transforms us. And it is only through a trusting response in our hearts to God's powerful Word that we "enter His rest" and partake of the benefits of His glorious promises to us in Christ (vv. 1, 2, 11).

*Verse 11 seems paradoxical: We are to strive to rest. Looking carefully at the overall context, how would you sort out the paradox?*

D. F. M.

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1. William Barclay, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 29.

2. Donald Hagner, *Hebrews*, p. 54.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 52.



# Admission to Rest

selected and introduced  
by Merrill J. Shidler

And so the question presses us. How are we admitted to this "rest"? Where do we purchase our ticket? When will the main event begin? "Come to me, all of you who toil and are burdened, and I will let you rest" (Matt. 11:28, Goodspeed).

"In these words Christ is speaking to every human being. Whether they know it or not, all are weary and heavy-laden. All are weighed down with burdens that only Christ can remove. The heaviest burden that we bear is the burden of sin. If we were left to bear this burden it would crush us. But the Sinless One has taken our place. 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' Isa. 53:6. He has borne the burden of our guilt. He will take the load from our shoulders. He will give us rest. The burden of care and sorrow also He will bear. He invites us to cast all our care upon Him; for He carries us upon His heart.

"... He tells us just how His rest is to be found.

"Take my yoke upon you' Jesus says. The yoke is an instrument of service. . . . We are to take upon us His yoke, that we may be co-workers with Him.

"The yoke that binds to service is the law of God. . . . Therefore God confines us to His will, which is high, and noble, and elevating. He desires that we shall patiently and wisely take up the duties of service. The yoke of service Christ Himself has borne in humanity. . . . Love for God, zeal for His glory, and love for fallen humanity, brought Jesus to earth to suffer and to die. This was the controlling power of His life. This principle He bids us adopt. . . .

"Learn of Me,' says Jesus; 'for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest.' We are to enter the school of Christ, to learn from Him meekness and lowliness. Redemption is that process by which the soul is trained for heaven. This training means a knowledge of Christ. It means emancipation from ideas, habits, and practices that have been gained in the school of the prince of darkness. The soul must be delivered from all that is opposed to loyalty to God. . . .

"As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. We respond to His invitation, Come, learn of Me, and in thus coming we begin life eternal. Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ. The longer we are in the heaven of bliss, the more and still more of glory will be opened to us; and the more we know of God, the more intense will be our happiness. As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence. All that human nature can bear, we may receive here. But what is this compared with the hereafter? There 'are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" Rev. 7:15-17.<sup>1</sup>

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Matthew  
11:28-30

"The more we  
know of God,  
the more intense  
will be our  
happiness."

1. *The Desire of Ages*,  
pp. 328-332.

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# The Sabbath In Hebrews 4

by Samuele Bacchiocchi

## EVIDENCE and HOW TO

*Literal or figurative Sabbathkeeping?* What inference can be legitimately drawn from this passage [Heb. 4:1-10] regarding the actual observance and understanding of the Sabbath among the recipients of Hebrews? The position of the majority of commentators is that this passage provides no indication that these Christian "Hebrews" actually observed the Sabbath or that the author intended to give a Christian interpretation to such an observance. What are the reasons advanced for such a position? Basically three. First, it is argued that since the author discusses not the actual observance of the Sabbath but the permanence and the fulfillment of its rest through the Christ-event, no inference can be drawn regarding its literal observance. Second, it is pointed out that since "the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God" (4:9) is a future realization, the exhortation to enter God's rest (4:10, 11) has no implication for the present observance of the day. Thirdly, it is assumed that since the author in a number of places indicates that with the coming of Christ, certain old covenant institutions were made "obsolete" (8:13; 7:11-9:28), the Sabbath also was presumably viewed as belonging to the past.

**"The Sabbath is understood as the anticipation of the future rest and peace to be realized by the Messiah."**

In our view these reasons come short on several counts. The first argument fails to recognize that the recipients of the Epistle (whether Gentiles or Jewish-Christians) were so attracted to Jewish liturgy (of which the Sabbath was fundamental) that it was unnecessary for the author to discuss or encourage its actual observance. What those Christians actually needed, tempted as they were to turn back to Judaism, was to understand the meaning of its observance in the light of Christ's coming. . . . Moreover, the fact that the author is not engaged in a *polemical* defense of the validity of Sabbath observance but rather in an *exhortation* to experience its blessings which are still outstanding for the people of God (4:9), makes his testimony all the more valuable, since it takes its observance for granted. Additional indications will soon be offered.

*Present or future?* With regard to the second argument, it can hardly be said that in Hebrews the Sabbath rest is viewed primarily as a future benefit, unrelated to the present observance of the day. Some scholars have identified in Hebrews the model of the church as a company of wanderers, journeying to a future heavenly resting place. Without denying the presence of the pilgrimage motif in Hebrews, it must be pointed out that the "sabbath rest" that "remains for the people of God" (4:9) is presented primarily not as a future but as a present experience into which those "who have believed *are entering*" (4:3). The latter verb is in the present tense, and in Greek is placed first in the sentence to stress the present reality of this "rest" experience. . . .

*Obsolete or remaining?* This leads us to the third argument which maintains that the Sabbath is an OT shadow or type of that final rest which Christ has made available to His people and consequently its function terminated with His coming. . . .

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The "Sabbath rest" is explicitly and emphatically presented not as being "obsolete" like the temple and its services, but as a divine benefit that still "remains" (4:9). The verb "remains—*apoleipetai*," literally means "to leave behind" and is used here in the present passive tense. If literally translated verse 9 reads: "So then a Sabbath rest is left behind for the people of God." The contrast between the Sabbath and the sanctuary services is obvious. While the latter are "obsolete," the former is "left behind," and therefore still relevant. A similar contrast is found in the Gospel of Matthew. There the rending of the Temple's curtain in conjunction with Christ's death (Matt. 27:51) indicates the termination of the Temple's services. On the other hand, Christ's warning about the possibility that the future flight out of the city might occur on a Sabbath (Matt. 24:20) takes for granted the permanence of its observance.

The exhortation given in verse 11 to "strive to enter that rest" provides an additional indication of the permanence of the Sabbath. The fact that one must make efforts "to enter that rest" implies that the "rest" experience of the Sabbath is not exhausted in the present but has a future realization also. This Christian view of the Sabbath rest as representing not only a *present* but also a *future* "rest" experience reflects to a large extent what . . . [is] found in the OT and in later Jewish literature. There . . . the Sabbath [is] understood not only as a *present* experience of personal rest and liberation from social injustices, but also as the anticipation of the *future* rest and peace to be realized by the Messiah. Thus in his own way the author of Hebrews reaffirms the OT understanding of the Sabbath in a fresh Christian setting, namely, a day to experience the present rest of salvation while looking forward to the future and final rest in the heavenly Canaan. . . .

**"Through the Sabbath God reassures us that He is in control."**

In an age when the forces of chaos and disorder increasingly appear to prevail, when injustice, greed, violence, corruption, crime, suffering and death seem to dominate, God through the Sabbath reassures His people that these destructive forces will not triumph, because "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (4:9). Through the Sabbath God reassures us that He is in control of this world, working out His ultimate purpose. God tells us that He conquered chaos at creation, that He has liberated His people from the bonds of sin and death through the saving mission of His Son, and that He "is working until now" (John 5:17) in order to establish a New World where "from sabbath to sabbath all flesh shall come to worship before God" (Isa. 66:23). In that final Sabbath, as eloquently expressed by Augustine, "we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise."

## REACT

What are some ways in which we can make our Sabbath-keeping reflect the spiritual experience of Sabbath-rest described in Hebrews 4?

Excerpted from Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, pp. 164-170. Copyright © 1980 by Samuele Bacchiocchi, 230 Lisa Lane, Berrien Springs, MI 49103. Used by permission.

# Solution for the Troubled Psyche

by Robert G. Wilson

## OPINION

Key text:  
Exodus 20:8-11

Our generation seems to be wearing out from the inside. Around a medical center one is reminded how much of human suffering comes from things that trouble the psyche. Many estimate that psychosomatic illnesses account for the origin of 80-90% of the maladies we suffer from, and some studies have suggested that as high as 90% of ailments patients visit doctors for are not even medically treatable.<sup>1</sup> As someone has said, "Our problems might not be so much what we are eating, but what's eating us." Guilt seems to top the list of what keeps the psychologists and psychiatrists in work. Depression is popular, too. Then comes poor self-image, insecurity, frustration and a myriad of similar afflictions. People are literally dying as a result of the wear and tear the human system sustains from those things which eat away at us inside. Human anxiety and fear—over finances, children, jobs, spouses, loves, friends, futures, retirement, loosing hair, wrinkles, etc.—is pandemic. Anyone who could come up with a cure for it would be on a sure road to fame, glory, and wealth.

"Our problems might not be so much what we are eating, as much as what's eating us."

Mankind needs rest. We need solutions to the restlessness caused by our multiple anxieties. We need a peace that transcends fear and insecurity. Hebrews 4 focuses our attention on the divine solution. It involves moving from fear to faith, from the insecurity of our own ingenuity to the security of unity with the Creator. If "He's got the whole world in His hand," then the spirit of man surely can find security only through trust in God's providential care (Matt. 6:25-33). The only assurance we can possibly know is that which comes from being in the will and providence of God. It is the by-product of that faith position that our author refers to as "rest."

The term "rest" as used in chapter 4 is loaded. It represents the fullness of the benefits God has promised and provided at significant cost to Himself. The term philosophically embraces the breadth of the peace, joy, rest, happiness and fulfillment which results from a person's entering into union with God (see Matt. 11:28, 29).

The weekly Sabbath was given by God as a symbol of that all-encompassing experience spoken of here as "rest." It is not that "rest," but it can be for us a type of that transcendent experience which awaits God's people. It is poor exegesis to try to use this passage as a proof text for modern Saturday as the Sabbath. The author presupposes knowledge of the weekly Sabbath on the part of his readers, and then points them to the transcendent and broad concept the Sabbath was to remind its adherents of—the concept elucidated by Ellen White in this week's Testimony article.

In a sense that "rest" is available now for God's people. "As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. . . . And in thus coming we begin eternal life."<sup>2</sup> But there is also an ultimate experience of that rest, referred to in the last two verses of chapter 11. This is the ultimate "rest" of restoration to God and perfect personhood. Then no longer will God's people be plagued by fear, anxiety, frustration, neurosis, psychosis, insecurity, low self-worth,

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timidity, or anything that generates restlessness and wears us out. This is what the weekly Sabbath was meant to remind us of. It was to be a symbol of that ultimate rest our passage refers to. As F. F. Bruce says, "What then is this Sabbath rest which awaits them? It is evidently an experience which they do not enjoy in their present mortal life, although it belongs to them as a heritage, and by faith they may live in the good of it here and now. . . . This blissful rest in unbroken fellowship with God is the goal to which His people are urged to press forward; this is the final perfection which has been prepared for them by the sacrifice of their heavenly high priest."<sup>3</sup>

God's plan will be successful, His goal realized, and all that troubles, distracts and wears us out will be eliminated. Those who accept God's invitation will enter into the fullness of His promised "rest" (shabbat) and "peace" (shalom). You and I can begin today to enter that experience through Christ and the Sabbath can be for us a special expression of that reality.

### REACT

Does the presence of anxiety, depression, guilt, insecurity, low self-esteem, and so on, in a Christian's life indicate that he has failed to enter God's "rest"?

**"The term embraces the breadth of the peace, joy, rest, happiness and fulfillment."**

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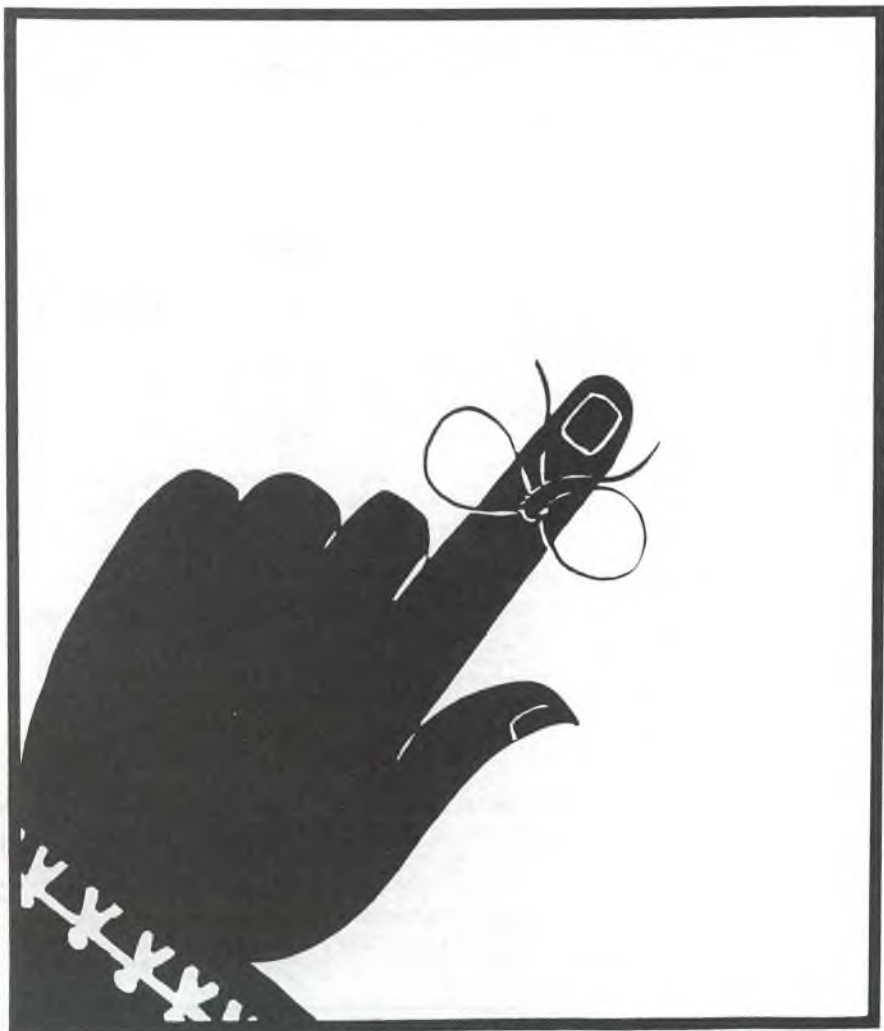
1. Bruce Larson, *There Is A Lot More To Being Healthy Than Not Being Sick* (Waco Texas: Word Books, 1981), pp. 10, 14.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 331.

3. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 78.

# Faith in a Better Priest

"For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15, RSV).



# God Sends a Go-Between

by Ted Wick

God loves to express Himself to the people of His creation. He walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden daily. There was a time and a place where they would expect to meet. It is anticipation of pleasant times together that makes a relationship sweet.

Can you imagine God's surprised disappointment when one day neither Adam nor Eve were at the meeting place? I guess it is impossible for God to be surprised, but the wording of Scripture suggests that He was expecting them there. Then He went calling for them throughout the garden. Don Francisco, composer of "He's Alive," wrote a song about this scene in the garden of Eden. As he sings the words of God calling for Adam, you sense God's anguish and pain.

Just before the evening in  
the cool of the day  
They hear the voice of  
God as He is walking,  
And can't abide His presence  
so they try to hide  
away.

Still they hear the sounds  
as He is calling

ADAM, ADAM. Where  
are you?

ADAM, ADAM. Where  
are you?

Since those days God has needed a "Go-between" to keep in touch with the sons of Adam. He has spoken through prophets many times and in many ways, finally He spoke through His Son. Jesus is the ultimate "Go-between."

A person who is the connector for two other persons must live in both worlds, communicate with both individuals and understand their needs and purposes. He then must be able to communicate those longings in their truest light.

Since we are dealing with Omniscience—the Father who already knows our hearts—most of the "Go-between" activity is initiated by Him. We are invited to come to the Father by coming to the One who stands between (Hebrews 4:16).

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Hebrews  
4:14-5:10;  
7:1-28

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# High Priest of a New Order

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Because Jesus Christ is our High Priest, we have continual access to mercy, caring and timely help from heaven.

### 1. A Merciful High Priest (read Heb. 4:14-16)

*"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16, RSV).*

The concept of Jesus Christ as High Priest, not even explicitly mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament, is given major attention in Hebrews. This week and the following two, we will study the author's careful development of this theme, which is in fact the central theological idea he wishes to articulate. This week we will look at the *person* of Jesus as High Priest (4:14-5:10, 7:1-28). Next week we will focus on the *ministry* of Jesus as High Priest (8:1-9:5). And finally, the following week, we will consider the *sacrifice* of Jesus on which His high priestly ministry is based (9:6-10:18).

In 4:14-16, the apostle introduces the two attributes necessary for Jesus to qualify as High Priest—the one who brings human beings to God: 1) His divine Sonship (v. 14); and 2) His genuine humanity (v. 15). Throughout chapters 5 and 7, the apostle will marshal the most forceful theological arguments he can to establish the fact that Jesus does indeed possess these qualifications.

Jesus' exalted status as Son of God is convincing evidence of power to save. But sinners sensitive to their stark unworthiness should rightly be terrified of approaching such a divine figure. Only assurance that Jesus also shares in the human condition, that He's been through what we're going through, can convince us of His mercy and sympathy for our weakness, and enable us to "draw near" to His throne with full confidence.

### 2. Qualified to Save (read Heb. 5:1-10)

*"Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (5:8, 9, NIV).*

Seven characteristics are given in the profile of the ideal Aaronic high priest in vv. 1-4: human origin, divine appointment, representative service, cultic service, atoning service, sympathetic service, and sin-weakened service. At this point in his argument, the apostle establishes two crucial similarities between Jesus and the Old Testament high priest:

1) *Divine appointment.* God chose the high priestly family for Israel, and in the same way it was God's declaration, recorded in Psalm 110:4, that designated Jesus as the ultimate High Priest.

2) *Sympathetic service.* Because Jesus' humanity was genuine, because the suffering and temptation He experienced was the most intense that can afflict a human being, He knows just how to deal with those who share human frailty. Only by going through the process of learning obedience "in the school of suffering" (NEB), a pro-

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cess that involved progressive submission to the divine will and which reached its greatest poignance in Gethsemane (v. 7), could He become “perfected” as a merciful high priest. “He *was* (as He *is*) the Son. But as a man He *became*—*became* a sufferer, *became* a suppliant, *became* a dependent, *became* a learner. So, by what He went through—*because* He went through—He was ‘perfected.’ His human experiences—intense, real, genuine—made Him complete for the heavenly work of high priest that the divine plan had ordained.”<sup>1</sup>

We must also note two crucial ways in which Jesus is superior to the Aaronic high priests. First He was not merely “chosen from among men” (v. 1). He was already the divine Son before his “appointment” as high priest (see vv. 5, 6).

Second, Jesus is a sinless rather than sin-weakened high priest. Thus in contrast to the Aaronic priests, he never had to offer sacrifices to atone for His own sin (4:15; 5:3; 7:27, 28).

*According to Heb. 5:7, Jesus’ prayers in Gethsemane were heard, yet he was not in fact “saved from death.” Does this suggest anything about the nature of answered prayer, or about the sort of relationship with God which Jesus modeled for us?*

### **3. In the Order of Melchizedek (read Heb. 7:1-28)**

*“He holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (7:24, 25, RSV).*

Having alluded to Jesus being a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek in 5:6, 10, the apostle in chapter 7 now elucidates the significance of that fact. The enigma of just who or what Melchizedek was invites speculation. But the author of Hebrews is not interested in filling us in about Melchizedek. He only wants to use the figure of Melchizedek as *type*, an illustration, to clarify further the significance of Jesus. He is not really at all concerned with the person of Melchizedek as such but rather with the brief Old Testament record (Gen. 14:17-20; Psalm 110:4) about Melchizedek, *both what it says and what it does not say*.

Melchizedek is a fitting type of Christ because he was both a priest and a king. A segment of first-century Judaism looked for two Messiahs—one priestly, the other royal.<sup>2</sup> Using Psalm 110:1-4 as his key, the author of Hebrews captures the crucial insight that the Messiah is both a royal Son (110:1) and the priest of the new, Melchizedek-like order (110:4). Melchizedek’s royal titles (7:2) also are appropriate, for Jesus is the preeminent king of righteousness and peace.

By showing that Melchizedek is a much better type for Christ than the Aaronic (Levitical) priesthood, the apostle bolsters his basic thesis that Jesus Christ far surpasses the old order of Judaism as the one worthy of steadfast trust and commitment. We can summarize the apostle’s argument as follows:

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*Verses 1-3.* These verses establish three salient points about Melchizedek: 1) the greatness of his office (vv. 1, 2); 2) his lack of genealogy (v. 3), and 3) the continuing character of his office (v. 3). In saying that Melchizedek is "without father or mother" and "has neither beginning of days nor end of life," the apostle is not lifting up Melchizedek as some sort of supernatural being. Rather, in a manner customary for his day, the apostle is arguing from the *silence* of the Old Testament record regarding any ancestry or death for Melchizedek. He is saying that as far as the *biblical record* is concerned, there is no beginning or end for Melchizedek, thus he is a fitting illustration for Christ.

*Verses 4-10.* Melchizedek is greater than Abraham because he received tithe from the patriarch, not vice versa. And, more important to the argument of Hebrews, since Levi (the progenitor of Israel's priestly tribe) was "in the loins" of his ancestor Abraham, Levi in effect paid tithe to Melchizedek through Abraham. Again the reasoning seems strange to modern readers, but the point is simply that the Melchizedekian order is vastly superior to the Levitical order.

*Verses 11-14.* According to Psalm 110:4, God foreordained the rise of a new priesthood. The necessity of this new order underscores the inadequacy of the old, Levitical order.

*Verses 15-19.* In the Levitical order a man became a priest by being born into the right family. In the Melchizedekian order, priesthood comes about through divine decree (Psalm 110:4) and personal qualification—"The power of an indestructible life" (v. 16). That power affords us a "better hope" (v. 19) in approaching God.

*Verses 20-22.* A divine oath affirms Jesus as the "surety of a better covenant." No such oaths were pronounced regarding the Levitical priests.

*Verses 23-28.* Though it may not be easy to find contemporary relevance in the arcane reasoning in chapter 7 to this point, these verses bring us to the ever relevant crux of the matter. "Whereas the old priesthood necessarily entailed a succession of priests, Christ's office is permanent because of His eternal life. Continuity of person ensures perpetual availability of salvation and strengthens Christian confidence."<sup>3</sup> Through his "once-for-all" sacrifice (v. 27), Christ is forever the perfect priest (v. 28).

The apostle has deftly demonstrated from Scripture that Melchizedek is superior to Abraham, Levi and Aaron (who stand for the entire Old Covenant) and that the Melchizedek typology applies to Jesus as Messiah. There can be no doubt that Jesus is the fullness that the Jewish system but reflects and thus it is on Him that life should be centered.

*If Hebrews and its developed concept of Jesus as High Priest were not in the Bible, how would your faith be different? What practical difference would it make?*

D. F. M.

1. William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, p. 66.

2. Donald Hagner, *Hebrews*, p. 86.

3. Johnsson, p. 89.

# A Friend at Court

selected by Ted Wick

"What is Christ doing in heaven? He is interceding for us. . . . As the prayers of the sincere and contrite ones ascend to heaven Christ says to the Father, I will take their sins. Let them stand before You innocent."<sup>1</sup>

"Christ is watching. He knows all about our burdens, our dangers, and our difficulties; and He fills His mouth with arguments in our behalf. He fits His intercessions to the needs of each soul, as He did in the case of Peter. . . . Our Advocate fills His mouth with arguments to teach His tried, tempted ones to brace against Satan's temptations. He interprets every movement of the enemy. He orders events."<sup>2</sup>

"Christ glorified not Himself in being made High Priest, God gave Him His appointment to the priesthood. He was to be an example to all the human family. He qualified Himself to be, not only the representative of the race, but their Advocate, so that every soul if he will may say, I have a Friend at court. He is a High Priest that can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities."<sup>3</sup>

"Do not let your thoughts dwell upon yourselves. Think of Jesus. He is in His holy place, not in a state of solitude and grandeur, but surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand of heavenly beings who wait to do their Master's bidding. And He bids them go and work for the weakest saint who puts his trust in God. High and low, rich and poor, have the same help provided."<sup>4</sup>

"The Son of God . . . has fulfilled His pledge, and has passed into the heavens, to take upon Himself the government of the heavenly host. He fulfilled one phase of His priesthood by dying on the cross for the fallen race. He is now fulfilling another phase by pleading before the Father the case of the repenting, believing sinner."<sup>5</sup>

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Hebrews 4:14-16

**"He fits His intercessions to the needs of each soul."**

## REACT

According to Heb. 4:15, Christ was enabled to be our Friend and Intercessor in heaven because He was tempted in every respect as we are. How do you interpret that statement? What about the following possibilities:

a) Jesus was tempted in every way like we are except by those temptations caused by previous sins, because He was sinless.

b) Jesus' temptations were even more intense than ours, since we have never resisted the devil to the point of experiencing his fiercest possible attack.

c) Jesus was tempted in the same broad principles that we are, but not in every specific way.

1. Manuscript 28, 1901.  
2. Letter 90, 1906.  
3. Manuscript 101, 1897.  
4. Letter 134, 1899.  
5. Manuscript 42, 1901.

Ted Wick is the chaplain at Pacific Union College.

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# A Larger View of Priesthood

by Ted Wick

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Genesis  
14:18-20

Where did Adam pay his tithe? Who was minister to Enoch? Had the idea of priesthood been introduced in those earliest times?

The role and function of a priest is to lead a community of believers in the worship of God. The "community" was just one family in the beginning, so Adam, Cain and Abel offered their own sacrifices, a priestly function in Old Testament times.

In the days of the patriarchs it was the custom for the oldest son to receive a double portion of the inheritance. This was to help him with the responsibility of serving as the family "priest" for the next generation.

To establish the idea of priesthood early in the history of His people, God employed Melchizedek as one that Abraham could respect and to whom he paid his tithes. After Abraham defeated Kedorlaomer and his allies, who had taken Lot and his fellow citizens of Sodom captive and stolen their household possessions, Abraham returned to Valley of the Kings with the captives and all their goods. The tithe of the spoils of this conflict were given to Melchizedek.

"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram. . . . Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything" (Gen. 14:18, 19, NIV).

We also read of another priest in Exodus 18:1, 12. "Jethro, priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moses, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people. . . .

"Jethro . . . offered a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God" (RSV).

The Old Testament Scripture is so dominated by the history of the Israelites and their sanctuary system that we miss a larger picture of the priesthood. The author of Hebrews appeals to this larger view when he quotes this testimony about Jesus, "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7:17). He continues his arguments in Hebrews 8:6. "The ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises" (NIV). The outworking of this new covenant is described in v. 10: "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (NIV).

The kingdom of the heart is the new order. Lives changed into the divine similitude is the outcome. The old order taught in rite and symbol. The new order also teaches with a much greater sacrifice. It has power to change people from inside out.

## REACT

1. What was God trying to teach by establishing the priesthood?
2. Do passages such as Psalm 51:10 and Isa. 51:7 suggest that the old covenant involved the heart as well as the new? If so, what changed with the new covenant?

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Ted Wick is the campus chaplain at Pacific Union College.

"Lives changed into the divine similitude is the outcome."

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# Faith for Water-walking

by Pat Wick

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Matthew**  
**14:22-33**

When I think of the "disobedience" that Hebrews speaks of, I remember my favorite definition of sin: "Sin is disbelieving God" (see Rom. 14:23). Could we then say that disbelief is disobedience and that sin is synonymous with lack of faith? The author of Hebrews urges us to "hold firmly to the faith" (4:14) in view of Jesus' great high priesthood. Yet how difficult it seems even for those who have "heard the gospel preached to them (4:2)" to be faithful: full-of-faith. It seems that we tend to get so caught up in our fretful dogmatics that there is little room for exercising faithfulness, for "walking on water."

How do we exercise our faithfulness? Let us insist on stepping out into untried areas, challenging rigidity and opening ourselves to the Inner Voice—the High Priest who not only ministers in the heavenly temple but also, through the Holy Spirit, resides within the temple of our beings. As we train our ears to listen, recognizing God's speaking, we gain clarity in our decision-making ability. We become keenly aware of our personal values of right and wrong so that we can start walking, risking, adventuring for the Lord.

Reflect with me for a moment on the story of Jesus walking on the water (Matt. 14:22-33). There are some lessons about faithfulness that we can learn from this encounter.

## 1. Getting a Sense of Direction

Jesus had just participated in some pretty amazing events and felt drained by the crowds that He had been ministering to. He needed some time alone. Scripture says that He went up into the hills by Himself to pray (Matt. 14:23). Before we attempt water-walking, we should take time alone to think, pray and become very clear on our direction.

## 2. Taking Direct Action

Jesus realized that there was a need for action. The disciples were in serious trouble and He proceeded to get to them in the most expedient fashion. Can you imagine the advice He might have gotten from the church leaders? I'm sure they would have counseled Him not to attract too much attention. "Don't walk on the water," they probably would have cautioned, "take a ferry or borrow a canoe. In fact, wouldn't it be easier to build a bridge?"

"People are going to criticize you for being so direct," they would go on. "Don't shock the brethren, move slowly, it's only for your best good."

We, however, like Jesus, must accept the storm, and not waver in our sense of direction.

## 3. Reassuring the Fearful ("The disciples screamed in terror.")

When you are brave enough to attempt walking on water, you can rest assured that the people around you may be frightened to death. Often, the very people you have come to help will be scared. They

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won't understand your motives, they may misjudge who you are and be fearful of the outcome of your audacity. Jesus again sets our example in giving reassurance: "It's alright, don't be afraid, it is I."

#### **4. Helping Others Step Out ("C'mon in the water's fine!")**

It's logical that the next step in our water-walking would be to invite others to join us. The very core concept of Christian fellowship is a "gathering" of people together for ministry. Others may even ask to step onto the water—Peter did! He stepped out gingerly over the waves and, after he reached Jesus, the sea calmed, and they proceeded together into the boat.

Perhaps the boat here can represent the church as we have known it. Let's not abandon ship!

I believe that Christians should be outrageous people, daring people, challenging people to be around. It is only when we content ourselves to merely be *in* the boat with all our dogmas high and dry that we stagnate. It is only as we peer from our safe little shelter into the gathering storm, held inactive by our fears, that we are faithless. And it is only when we dare to climb over the walls that we have erected around us, grasping Jesus' hand by faith, that we can truly walk on the water.

Start stepping. . . .

#### **REACT**

1. How does the concept in Hebrews of Jesus as High Priest relate to the possibility of our "walking on water"?

2. Think of varied ways to complete the following sentence: "In an attempt to be faithful to Christ, I/we should take the audacious step of . . ."

# Go-Between Or Friend?

by Pat Wick

It was the first big social event of the school year, with much chatter heard about who was going to ask whom and who would like to go with whom. My daughter, a high school freshman, came home with news that her friend had said that one of the guys in the grade ahead was for sure going to ask her to go to the party. Now the question was, "Would you be willing to go *if* by some chance he *really* gets up the nerve to ask?"

She pondered a minute and then sent back the message through the mediator that she would be interested. Back through the grapevine came word that she could expect an invitation shortly. Nothing happened. Again, the go-between searched for bits of information. The parties passed in recognition in the hallway but nary a word was mentioned. Frustration mounted. Once more the matchmaker approached with word that the young man was really much more shy and embarrassing than anyone had anticipated and he really didn't have a suit for such dress-up occasions. The invitation may not occur.

"Why all this go-between stuff?" I asked in exasperation, "Wouldn't it be easier if he just asked and you answered?"

"Oh, no," the response came back, "it's so much simpler this way. No one has to lose face or be embarrassed. It's cool, Mom, quit fretting."

A go-between? Seems to me they complicate matters immensely.

In my midlife years, it seems I am much more confrontive than I was at 15. This business of sending messages via other people is less than satisfactory. I really do want to see the expression on people's faces, watch for the twinkle in their eyes and let them see the earnestness in mine so that we can communicate openly—face to face.

I reread the passages in Hebrews which talk about our High Priest go-between. What I hear is confirmation of an understanding friend more than an intercessor. When someone plays the part of go-between it is for some reason. Perhaps the party to be approached is fearsome or angry or the one approaching is shy, awkward or immature. Surely we do not view God as unapproachable. I believe that He was there (prior to Christ's advent) for Abraham and He is there for me now! And what of Jesus? What part does He play? I think He is the friend who says, "Ask—I did, remember? Seek, you'll find. I too was a seeker. Knock, through faith the door will be opened. I am on your side, like your brother, modeling for you, the way, the truth, the life."

## REACT

If we have a loving and understanding God, what need is there for Christ's intercession? Why are we to pray in the name of Jesus? Check Rom. 1:18; 3:9-19; John 14:6; 16:23, 24; and 2 Cor. 1:20 for possible clues.

## OPINION

Key text:  
Hebrews 4:14-16

"What I hear is confirmation of an understanding friend more than an intercessor."

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# Faith in a Better Covenant

“The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will conclude a new covenant with the house of Israel . . . I will set my laws in their understanding and write them on their hearts” (Hebrews 8:8, 10, NEB).





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# No More Soap Sheep

by Corla Crase Johnson

I carved them out of Ivory soap. I'd always wanted to soap-carve, and now, finally, I was getting the chance. My sixth-grader's fingers fashioned crude little sheep, while some of my friends made odd-looking furnishings, some of clay, some of balsa. Our construction of a model sanctuary was great fun, despite the mess Johnny in the back row caused when he got careless with the gold paint for the balsa wood altar. We were proud of our "detailed scale model." (I thought it was beautiful. How true to scale it was, someone older than my eleven years would have to judge.) I'm sure the teacher pointed out its cosmic significance, but I was much more concerned with how to make soap look like fleece and balsa wood like gold.

When I was perhaps fifteen, the sanctuary was brought up again in Bible class. Again we discussed its significance, but that quickly paled next to What the Teacher Wants to Know (sanctuary inventory: laver—1, altar of burnt sacrifice—1, shewbread—how many pieces? where? how often changed?)

And then there was the period of argument—born of sincere searching, but argument nevertheless. "I am supposed to believe that the Saviour of the world is actually limited to one small *room* in heaven? How do you handle that?" I challenged my Bible teacher. I don't remember the answer, only the feeling of being dissatisfied with it.

"When I was a child, I spake as a child . . ." I hope that I have "put away childish things." I'm certainly not carving Ivory sacrificial lambs. I no longer remember the sanctuary inventory (complete with what *all* the curtains were made of and in which order they hung). I still ask questions, and am still not totally satisfied with answers I find, but I take comfort in the fact that there is a new covenant, and there is a High Priest whose "ministry . . . is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises" (Heb. 8:6, RSV). Through careful study of Hebrews, better answers about the significance of the sanctuary begin to emerge.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Hebrews  
8:1-9:5

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# A More Excellent Ministry

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Christ our High Priest serves in the true sanctuary—the heavenly—and is the mediator of a new, superior covenant.

### 1. The Better Sanctuary (read Heb. 8:1-5; 9:1-5)

*"We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord" (8:1, 2, RSV).*

Having thoroughly established Jesus' personal credentials as the ultimate High Priest, the author of Hebrews now shifts the focus to the *ministry*, or high priestly service, that Jesus is carrying out in heaven.

Some scholars see the influence of Greek dualism in the apostle's comparison between the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries. In the thinking of Plato, every earthly object is the manifestation of a corresponding archetypal "idea" or "form" that can be known only through the intellect. The concept of the earthly sanctuary being a "shadow" (v. 5) of the heavenly appears similar.

However, while it is possible that the apostle was influenced by Platonic philosophy, careful examination shows that the thrust of his thinking here is actually quite different. The earthly tabernacle was a copy and shadow of the heavenly (v. 5), but the ultimate reality to which the earthly "copy" pointed was not an "idea" which can be perceived only by the intellect, as in Greek philosophy. Rather, the ultimate reality to which the earthly pointed is a concrete sequence of occurrences in history: the death, resurrection and intercession of Jesus Christ.

"What took place in that ritual of the historical tabernacle only through pictures and symbols actually takes place in the sacrificial work of Christ. The work of our High Priest, therefore, concerns not pictures or symbols, but ultimate reality—the reality of God himself. What preoccupies our author is not a vertical dualism, but a historical progression from promise to fulfillment."<sup>1</sup>

The earthly sanctuary is thus a copy of the heavenly in the sense that its sacrifices for atonement pointed forward to the real atonement which took place at Calvary and is now mediated to us by our High Priest in heaven, Jesus. It is not a copy in the sense that the heavenly sanctuary literally corresponds to the earthly in every respect.

"Anything finite can at best dimly resemble that which is infinite. Moses was shown not the heavenly sanctuary itself, but a representation of it. The earthly sanctuary was patterned after that in heaven to the extent that it was vivid representation of the various aspects of Christ's ministry in behalf of fallen man (PP 357)."<sup>2</sup>

*Does this passage teach that the heavenly sanctuary is a literal building which resembles the Israelite earthly sanctuary? Explain.*

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## 2. The Better Covenant (read Heb. 8:6-13)

*"Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises" (8:6, RSV).*

Modern usage of the terms "mediator" and "covenant" obscures to a degree their biblical meaning. We think of a mediator as a "middleman"—one who stands between two parties and brings them together. This concept describes Jesus' work partially—He does bring God and human beings together. But He is more than a middleman or go-between. He Himself is the means or agency by which the new covenant becomes a reality. He does not merely arrange the new covenant, He makes it happen through His own person and work. As mediator He is Himself the "surety" or guarantee of the new covenant (see 7:22).

We think of a covenant as an agreement negotiated between two parties. But "in the biblical sense of a covenant, the whole approach comes from God. Man cannot bargain with God; he cannot argue about the terms of the covenant; he can only accept or reject the offer God makes."<sup>3</sup>

As the apostle points out, the fact that Jesus mediates a new and better covenant based on new and better promises (v. 6) indicates the old covenant was inadequate—not because it was a system of righteousness by works but because:

1) It was by its nature preparatory and symbolic. Its rituals and regulations were never designed to, in themselves, bring salvation. Rather they were to lead the people of Israel to a spiritual relationship with God of trust and obedience, and help prepare them for comprehension of the salvation to be effected through Christ. "The 'old' covenant was, in fact, a temporary arrangement designed to enable those bound by its provisions to enter the privileges and responsibilities of the new or 'everlasting,' covenant."<sup>4</sup>

2) The people themselves failed (v. 8) to enter the spiritual relationship with God into which the old covenant was designed to lead them, thus the necessity of a new covenant.

The new covenant, envisioned by the prophet Jeremiah (vv. 8-12), and brought to reality in the saving ministry of Jesus, is a "new situation" in which there is a "new kind of living, a new spiritual possibility, and a new experience of a definitive forgiveness of sin. The law is internalized and a new intimacy of relationships between God and his people becomes possible. Knowledge of the Lord becomes the possession of all and the cleansing of sin becomes a reality at the deepest level."<sup>5</sup>

*What clues can be found in the following passages as to what activities Christ's "more excellent ministry" in heaven involves? Heb. 7:25; John 16:7; Rev. 1:12-20; Dan. 7:9-14.*

1. Donald Hagner, *Hebrews*, p. 92.  
2. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 636.  
3. William Barclay, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 91.  
4. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, article, "Covenant."  
5. Hagner, p. 104.

D. F. M.

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# Engraved Hearts

selected by Corla Crase Johnson

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Hebrews 8:10

"The typical shadows of the Jewish tabernacle no longer possess any virtue. A daily and yearly typical atonement is no longer to be made, but the atoning sacrifice through a mediator is essential because of the constant commission of sin. Jesus is officiating in the presence of God, offering up His shed blood, as it had been a lamb slain. Jesus presents the oblation offered for every offense and every shortcoming of the sinner."<sup>1</sup>

**"The law is revealed to us, in all its beauty and excellence, in the life of Christ."**

"In His law, God has given us the pattern. Our character building is to be after 'the pattern showed to thee in the mount.' The law is the great standard of righteousness. It represents the character of God, and is the test of our loyalty to His government. And it is revealed to us, in all its beauty and excellence, in the life of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

"He who has God's law written in the heart will obey God rather than men, and will sooner disobey all men than deviate in the least from the commandment of God. God's people, taught by the inspiration of truth, and led by a good conscience to live by every word of God, will take His law, written in their hearts, as the only authority which they can acknowledge or consent to obey. The wisdom and authority of the divine law are supreme."<sup>3</sup>

"The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself. Then the law of God is written in the mind and heart, and we can say with Christ, 'I delight to do Thy will, O my God.' Ps. 40:8."<sup>4</sup>

## REACT

1. Since we have the new covenant, is it ever necessary to remind ourselves of the old one, and study it in detail? Why or why not?

2. How does the "law written in the heart" differ from the law written in stone?

1. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 344.

2. *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 62.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 361.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 176.

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# Release From Externalities

by F. F. Bruce

We know of at least one community of Israelites which, in the second century, B.C., endeavored to realize the promise of the new covenant. The members of the Qumran community are described as "entering the new covenant in the land of Damascus"—the "land of Damascus" being probably their wilderness retreat on the shores of the Dead Sea. They were to constitute "a holy house for Israel, a most holy assembly for Aaron . . . the foundation of a holy spirit according to eternal truth, to make atonement for the guilt of rebellion and for sinful disloyalty, and to obtain favor for the land apart from the flesh of burnt-offerings and the fat of sacrifice." But our author [of Hebrews] would not have recognized in this community the fulfillment of Jeremiah's oracle. The men of Qumran might regard their obedience and endurance as an acceptable substitute for the sacrificial ritual while the temple and its services were polluted by an unworthy priesthood; but they looked forward to a new age which would revive the highest ideals of the old age; they looked forward to a renovated temple which would still be a temple made with hands, to a pure sacrificial worship which would still involve the slaughter of bulls and goats, to a worthy priesthood which would still be confined to the sons of Aaron. To our author, the new covenant involves the abolition of the old sacrificial order because of a perfect and unrepeatable sacrifice, and a high-priestly ministry discharged in the heavenly, no longer in an earthly, sanctuary on the basis of that sacrifice by a priest of a different line from Aaron's. True worship, "in spirit and in truth," is thus released from dependence on the externalities of religion.

When Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, gave His disciples the cup and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, shed for many" (Mark 14:24, NEB), the paschal context of the incident would surely have made them link His words with "the blood of the covenant" which God established with His people Israel in the days of Moses on the basis of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 24:8). Nor can we doubt that His intention was to announce that now at length that earlier covenant was to be replaced by the "new covenant" foretold by Jeremiah midway between Moses' day and His own. Whether in fact, the sacrifice of Jesus has had the effect which Jeremiah said the new covenant would have, let those tell who have proved its saving power. Or let one tell for all: "What the law could never do, because our lower nature robbed it of all potency, God has done: by sending his own Son in a form like that of our own sinful nature, and as a sacrifice for sin, he has passed judgment against sin within that very nature, so that the commandment of the law may find fulfillment in us, whose conduct, no longer under the control of our lower nature, is directed by the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3f., NEB).

## REACT

Can you think of religious viewpoints today similar to that of the Qumran community? Why was their approach inadequate?

F. F. Bruce was until 1978 Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester in England.

## EVIDENCE

**Key text:**  
Jeremiah  
31:31-34

**"What the law  
could never do,  
God has done."**

Excerpted from *The Epistle to the Hebrews* by F. F. Bruce, pp. 176-178, copyright © 1964 by F. F. Bruce. Used by permission of Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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# Living by the Law Written Within

by Winona Winkler Wendth

## HOW TO

"I will set my laws in their understanding and write them on their hearts; . . . I will be merciful . . . I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:10-12, NEB).

When the new covenant was made with us, we were shown its uniqueness by contrast with the old: the requirements made of us were no longer "material," specific, and concrete. Even the law, once written in stone, easily deciphered—"Don't do this; do that"—is now written on our hearts and in our understandings, where its implications become deeper and more complex.

Living on the principle of an internalized law can be tricky business, however. It's more difficult than living by a checklist. We all feel more secure when we know exactly what the rules are. From the time we are young children, we learn them—and learn how to manipulate them, sometimes, to our advantage—knowing that we will be acceptable and, even, successful, if we follow them closely enough. But following those regulations—"Always do this; never do that"—is merely an attempt at imitating what we were told or believed to be adult behavior. The rules we follow are no more able to produce true understanding and loving attitudes than the regulation-bound sanctuary of the old covenant could fully reveal the true nature of God. Punishment, constant reminders of past mistakes, and warnings about probable new ones are immature and ineffectual compared to mercy and willing forgetfulness of wrongs, just as the old covenant and the tabernacle were inadequate methods for getting at the true nature of heavenly relationships.

As we seek to live out the principles of God's eternal law in our own mature and complex human relationships, we are reminded of how difficult yet rewarding living without hard and fast rules is, of how nearly impossible it is to structure our lives entirely in imitation of what we think our parents or forefathers are or were like. Because of God's Ultimate Sacrifice, we may have a direct, personal knowledge of the Lord and His will. Through our relationship with Him we can discover what is good and true without having to constantly test ourselves by a humanly-established set of external or potentially obsolete rules.

Through new faith we can abandon a childish dependence on literal models and not-to-the-point regulations in the knowledge that God's laws are not set in stone but in understanding; they are written not in legal tradition, but in our hearts.

## REACT

1. Are the ethical demands of the new covenant greater or lesser than the old?
2. What does having God's law written on our hearts mean for how we relate to the rules of the institutions we are a part of—school, church, family, etc.?

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"We can abandon a childish dependence on literal models and not-to-the-point regulations."

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# The Lure of Tradition

by Isaac Johnson

The writer of Hebrews had a sticky problem on his hands. "His" people, probably Jewish followers of Jesus living in Rome, were attempting to improve Christianity. They were adding to Christianity the rituals and rules of their tradition. And why not? The way of Jesus was the way of truth, of course, but it did have a certain lack of *specificity*. There was nothing one could *do* to be sure of one's standing with God. The observance of the ritual laws restored that specificity; it gave one something to do, and it gave God some concrete evidence. It provided a sure foundation.

Now who could argue with that? Even if renewed observance of ceremonial law was unnecessary, what harm could it do? The Jewish Christians who followed the old rules probably did not insist that all others follow them. Those Christians were simply doing something that gave them assurance and peace of mind, and in the persecution that had to be faced, assurance and peace of mind were crucial.

The writer of Hebrews was determined, however, not to let them rest in their new peace of mind. (That is an interesting point; the very existence of Hebrews indicates that getting assurance from rules is a serious mistake.) How then, could he address these well-meaning church members? A sticky problem.

His solution, which was both cunning and kind, was to "out-Herod Herod," as Hamlet would say. He wrote the ultimate proof-text tract bristling with quotations and references, to show that the proof-text approach to spirituality was invalid. He used traditional authority to show that the authority of tradition was dead. He did not say that it was incorrect, mind you, but that it had limited uses, and that getting assurance from it was a big mistake. Assurance could come only from walking in freedom with the living God. "A high priest you want?" said the author. "Think of Jesus as the 'high priest' to end all high priests."

We Seventh-day Adventists say, "What a wonderful message!" But do we then look to traditional dogmas and regulations, in addition to Christ, for the hope we need to make it through the coming persecution? Are we really relying on Jesus for our assurance? Or do we need the night light of tradition to sleep by?

Hebrews, it appears, may indeed be addressed to us.

## REACT

1. In what specific ways are we as Adventists lured by tradition? Are these all bad?

2. Do you agree with the author's reconstruction of the historical background of Hebrews (compare Lesson 4, Introduction) and the suggested comparison with modern Adventism?

## OPINION

Key text:  
Hebrews 8:6, 7

"Getting assurance from rules is a serious mistake."

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# Faith in a Better Sacrifice

"He has appeared once and for all at the climax of history to abolish sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26, NEB).





# No More Lambs

by Ken Thomson

*Jerusalem, April 0032*

"Mother, why aren't we going to the temple this year to celebrate Passover and to offer a lamb?"

"Reuben, we don't need to. There is no need to offer a lamb now, because the Lamb of God has come, and has offered Himself. That one offering is sufficient, and will count forever. For everyone. No more lambs."

"Jesus has saved the lambs, as well as people, hasn't He?"

"Yes, Reuben."

*Wittenberg, 1517*

"Father, why aren't we doing our penances and buying indulgences any more?"

"Walther, we don't need to. Doctor Luther has shown us that people everywhere can find salvation only by faith in Christ's sacrifice for their sins. There is no value in penance and indulgences. We can't earn salvation by them."

"This will make men less dependent on the church."

"More dependent on Christ, Walther."

*Collegetown, 1986*

"Professor, do Hebrews 9 and 10 say anything to us today?"

"Yes, David, and it's an oft-repeated theme. Every generation needs to hear it, because so-called requirements of salvation become institutionalized, standardized and ritualized with the result that they take on a sacramental quality—the impression is given that performing them is man's contribution to his salvation.

But what we do in no way generates credit, because Christ made 'one sacrifice for sins forever,' as it says in Hebrews 10:10."

"But I want to feel that I am doing something."

"That's sort of like my little daughter, who sometimes tries to help my wife with the cooking. She gets a little spoon, and has her little stir of the mixture. But her efforts make no contribution to what my wife accomplishes, so my wife doesn't mind if she doesn't do anything to 'help' with the cooking."

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Hebrews  
9:6-10:18

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Ken Thomson teaches physics at Pacific Union College.

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# Guilt Relief

**LOGOS**    **Theme:** Christ's death on the cross was an all-sufficient sacrifice, God's once-for-all solution to the problem of sin. Through that sacrifice we have unhindered access to God.

## 1. The Need for Sacrifice (read Heb. 9:15-22)

*"Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (9:22, RSV).*

In our study for this week, the author of Hebrews moves to the climax of his theological argument. An essential component is added to complete the discussion which has already demonstrated the significance of Christ's person and ministry: His *sacrifice* as the means of purification from sin.

A sense of inner defilement and the need for cleansing is an experience common to humanity in nearly every culture and period of history. And the technique most often used to resolve the problem has been sacrificial blood.

In examining how the apostle speaks to this deep existential issue of the defilement of guilt, we note that in 9:22 he affirms a basic axiom: blood is necessary for purification and forgiveness. The shedding of blood was necessary to ratify both the old covenant (vv. 18-21) and the new (vv. 15-17). Just as it is necessary for the one who makes a will to die in order for the beneficiaries to receive their inheritance, so Christ had to die in order to make the new covenant effective. This analogy cannot be pressed too far however, for the Christ who is "the testator, upon whose death the will takes effect, is also the executor of the will—that is, 'the mediator of the new covenant.' The uniqueness of Christ and his work is such that while it is expressed in categories of both covenant and will, it transcends the ordinary stipulations of both of them."<sup>1</sup>

*Why is shedding of blood necessary for forgiveness? Consider the following possibilities.*

a) *Only a sacrificial death could convince man of the reality of God's forgiveness.*

b) *Only sacrificial death could sufficiently impress human minds with the true horror of sin.*

c) *God's justice requires that a penalty be paid for sin.*

## 2. Inadequacy of the Old Testament Sacrifices (read Heb. 9:6-10; 10:1-4)

These passages point up at least three inadequacies of the old covenant sacrifices:

1) *Hindered access (9:6-8).* In the Israelite sanctuary there were a series of barriers between the individual and God. The common person was barred from the holy place, where only priests could enter. And the priests, except for the high priest, were barred from the sanctuary's innermost shrine, where the glory of God hovered over

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the ark and mercy seat. And even the high priest could only enter this Most Holy Place once per year, following carefully prescribed rituals. Thus it was impossible to find full access through the sanctuary rituals in themselves.

2) *Ineffectiveness* (9:9, 10). The old covenant rituals dealt with external regulations and were powerless to work internal transformation. They could not "perfect the conscience of the worshipers." William Johnsson points out that in Hebrews the word "'conscience' does not carry the sense of moral referee that we understand by it. Rather, 'conscience' here is part of that description of the predicament of man in his sinfulness. It is closer to consciousness than to our conscience. A poignant term, it graphically portrays man's 'numinous uneasiness.'"<sup>2</sup> The Old Testament ceremony could not bring adequate relief from the nagging consciousness of guilt.

3) *Impermanence* (10:1-4) The very repetitiveness of the Old Testament sacrifices is clear proof that they offer no final solution to the problem of sin.

*Why do you think God put so many barriers between Himself and the common people in the sanctuary system? Why were there so many detailed rituals required then?*

### **3. Christ's Death—a Better Sacrifice (read 9:11-14; 23-28; 10:5-18)**

*"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of good things that have come . . . he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goat and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (9:11, 12, RSV).*

To readers feeling the lure of the old rituals of Judaism, the apostle uplifts the "final, absolute, definitive, complete and perfect" sacrifice of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> His sacrifice is better than all the Levitical sacrifices combined because:

1) *It enables unhindered access.* Jesus now appears in the very presence of God on our behalf (9:24). In Him, we have full acceptance into God's presence. No veil shuts us out.

2) *It is effective.* Christ's sacrifice secures for us an eternal redemption (9:12). It does what animal sacrifices could never do; it provides real guilt relief by purifying the consciousness of the "dead works" of sin. And this freedom from guilt frees us to "serve the living God" (9:15).

Through Christ's sacrifice we are "perfected for all time" (10:14). Here as elsewhere in Hebrews "perfect" is "not to be understood as moral perfection, but as the complete realization of God's saving purpose."<sup>4</sup> Christ's sacrifice is fully effective in bringing salvation, it is complete and perfect. So if we are in him, we are "perfect."

3) *It is once-for-all.* Over and over the apostle stresses the glorious truth that Christ's one sacrifice is good for all time (7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10).

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The Day of Atonement sacrifices were the pinnacle of the Old Testament system, yet even they had to be repeated annually. But Calvary fulfills for all time what the repeated Day of Atonement sacrifices were meant to signify (9:12, 25, 26).

Christ's sacrifice is final because with it comes "the end of the age" (v. 26). The fact that nothing can be added to His already completed saving work, indicates that the end-time has already been inaugurated, with its consummation to come when Christ appears "a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (9:28, RSV).

The finality of Christ's sacrifice is further shown in 10:11, 12. Unlike the priest who "stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices," when Christ "had offered for all time a single sacrifice, he *sat down* at the right hand of God," signifying a completed work.

This truth leads to a caution regarding our understanding of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. We should not think of Christ performing some new saving work with His blood in the sanctuary. Rather, He is applying and mediating the benefits of a saving work already completed once for all time.

William Johnsson gives an eloquent summation of the significance of the better sacrifice of Christ: "One offering has removed the need for any further offering, one Sacrifice has obsoleted all sacrifices, one Blood has succeeded where all blood before fell short."<sup>5</sup>

*What, to you, are the greatest implications of the "once-for-all" character of Christ's sacrifice?*

*Read Psalm 110:1 and note carefully how it is used in Heb. 10:12, 13. What does this usage suggest about how the author of Hebrews understood Christ to fulfill the eschatological promises of the Old Testament?*

D. F. M.

1. Donald Hagner, *Hebrews*, p. 125.
  2. William Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, p. 108.
  3. Hagner, p. 115.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
  5. Johnsson, p. 113.
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# Christ's Heavenly Ministry Foundational

compiled by  
Keith Anderson

"The correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith."<sup>1</sup>

"The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise, it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time, or to occupy the position which God designs."<sup>2</sup>

"It is those who by faith follow Jesus in the great work of the atonement, who receive the benefits of His mediation in their behalf; while those who reject the light which brings to view this work of ministration, are not benefited thereby."<sup>3</sup>

"We should not rest until we become intelligent in regard to the subject of the sanctuary, which is brought out in the visions of Daniel and John. . . . It explains our disappointment in 1844, showing us that the sanctuary to be cleansed was not the earth, as we had supposed, but that Christ then entered into the most holy apartment of the heavenly sanctuary, and is there performing the closing work of His priestly office, in fulfillment of the words of the angel, . . . 'unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.' . . ."

"The great waymarks we have passed are immovable. Although the hosts of hell may try to tear them from their foundation, and triumph in the thought that they have succeeded, yet they do not succeed. . . . God's people are now to have their eyes fixed on the heavenly sanctuary, where the final ministration of our great High Priest in the work of judgment is going forward."<sup>4</sup>

In a Sabbath sermon at the much-discussed and often controversial 1888 Minneapolis General Conference, Ellen White declared: "Now Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary. And what is He doing? Making atonement for us, cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. Then we must enter by faith into the sanctuary with Him; we must commence the work in the sanctuary of our souls. . . . We must 'cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God' (2 Cor. 7:1)."<sup>5</sup>

"Christ as high priest within the veil so immortalized Calvary that though He liveth unto God, He dies continually to sin, and thus if any man sin, he has an advocate with the Father."<sup>6</sup>

"As the great pillars of faith have been presented, the Holy Spirit has borne witness to them, and especially is this so regarding the truths of the sanctuary question."<sup>7</sup>

## REACT

What particulars of the "ministration in the heavenly sanctuary" are truly foundational to faith? Why?

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Psalm 73:17;  
77:13

**"We should not rest until we become intelligent in regard to the sanctuary."**

1. *Evangelism*, p. 221.
2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 488.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 430.
4. *Review and Herald*, November 27, 1883.
5. Quoted in A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory*, p. 267.
6. *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 343.
7. *The Upward Look*, p. 199.

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# What Is the Holy Spirit Signifying?

## EVIDENCE

**Key text:**  
**Hebrews 9:6-8**

Hebrews 9:6-8, which discusses the significance of the two apartments of the sanctuary, is not an easy passage to understand. There is considerable disagreement as to its interpretation. The questions center on v. 8: What is it that the Holy Spirit is "signifying" or "indicating"? What exactly is meant by the "sanctuary" here? What is the "outer" or "first" tent? What are the implications of how these questions are answered for how we understand Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary?

Read the passage in several translations, and then consider the following possible interpretations.

*Interpretation No. 1.* A. P. Salom of Andrews University writes, "The way into the sanctuary' [v. 8] refers to the way into the heavenly sanctuary of which the inner room of the earthly is symbolic. The means of access to the heavenly sanctuary was historically not available as long as the outer compartment had standing or retained its status. This outer compartment (of the earthly sanctuary) represents the customary limit of access to God in the experience of Israel. . . .

"In the context of the epistle, this passage is to show the readers that even when they as individuals lived under the Levitic system they didn't enjoy the privileges that were theirs under the gospel. The first apartment symbolized the old system as a whole—the continual services and characteristic offerings were made in connection with that apartment. The second apartment symbolized the new cultus, by direct access to God and through the high priestly ministry of Jesus. It is a symbol of the heavenly sanctuary. As long as the first apartment (symbolizing the earthly sanctuary) retains its status as 'sanctuary', the way into the heavenly sanctuary is not open. The first apartment (= earthly sanctuary) ceased to have status at the rending of the veil. From this time, direct access to God became available through the high priestly ministry of Christ in the very presence of God."<sup>1</sup>

This view of how Hebrews interprets the significance of the sanctuary's two apartments might be diagrammed this way:

<b>Earthly first apartment</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>Earthly sanctuary system in its entirety</b>
<b>Earthly second apartment</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary in its entirety</b>

The difficulty this view presents for the traditional Adventist sanctuary doctrine is that it envisions the high priestly ministry of Christ symbolized by the earthly Most Holy Place as covering the entire Christian era, rather than beginning only in 1844. Does, however, this interpretation rule out the possibility of Christ entering a new phase of His high priestly ministry when the pre-advent judgment begins?

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*Interpretation No. 2.* As expressed in a recent report of the conclusions of the General Conference Daniel and Revelation Committee, this view denies that Hebrews teaches that the two apartments of the sanctuary are symbolic of the Mosaic and Christian eras, respectively. The committee's report argues that the overall context, which begins with chapter 8:1, "indicates that the author is comparing the entire sanctuary of the *first covenant* with the entire sanctuary of the *second* or new covenant (Chaps. 8:1, 2, 6-13; 9:1, 11, 24). Thus the reference to 'the first tabernacle' is to be understood as a reference to the Sinai tabernacle-sanctuary. The committee rejected the argument that the author is using the 'first tabernacle/tent' (=first apartment) as a symbol for the *whole* Mosaic tabernacle (a part for the whole), in as much as the sense of the argument in the full context suggests a simple comparison of the two sanctuaries: the earthly and the heavenly.

"... Thus, the sense of the passage is simply that as long as 'the earlier tent,' that is the earthly sanctuary had a viable function as a type (until Christ's first advent), our Lord's priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary was not operative."<sup>2</sup>

This second interpretation might be diagrammed as follows:

<b>Earthly first apartment</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>heavenly first apartment ministry</b>
<b>Earthly second apartment</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>heavenly second apartment ministry</b>

## REACT

Which view seems more plausible to you? Does it make any significant difference how this passage is understood?

1. A. P. Salom, "Exegesis of Selected Passages of Hebrews 8 and 9," (Manuscript), pp. 10-12.  
 2. "Issues in the Book of Hebrews," *Adventist Review*, Feb. 7, 1985, pp. 6, 7.

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# The New Covenant Jubilee

by Bill Mundy

## HOW TO New Covenant Laws in the Heart

Key text:  
Hebrews  
10:16, 17

One of the concepts discussed in the Bible passage for this week is the new covenant: "I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them in their minds" (Heb. 10:16, NIV). I suggest that Christ's teachings and life characterize those laws. Not only are we to love our neighbor as ourselves, but Jesus pronounced His blessing on those who love even their enemies and work to establish *shalom*—a condition of peace, justice, unity, and well-being among all.

Thus I believe that Christians, with new covenant laws written on our hearts, will individually and collectively seek to maintain an influence that encourages nonviolent solutions to problems in a world that too often relies on violent solutions. Specifically, I think new covenant precepts will prompt us to seek and lend our support to alternatives to the U.S./Soviet arms build-up.

## The Jubilee Way of Life

The Day of Atonement (type and antitype) is prominent in Hebrews 9. From this fact my mind wanders onto the fact that in Old Testament law the Day of Atonement initiated the Jubilee year (every fiftieth year) and by implication also the Sabbatical year (every seventh year).<sup>1</sup> On these occasions the community of Israel let the land rest, remitted debts, released slaves and returned property to the original owners (Lev. 25 and Deut. 15). These provisions hindered the rich from getting richer while the poor got poorer.<sup>2</sup>

Christ may have been suggesting the antitype of these "freedom" years when at Nazareth He announced that He was anointed "to preach good news to the poor . . . to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18, 19, NIV). This last phrase "is reminiscent of the year of jubilee," according to the *SDA Bible Commentary*.<sup>3</sup>

I think that just as Christ's death broke into the round of ceremonies and linearized the cyclic patterns of the old covenant to form a perfect new covenant sacrifice *forever*, so His pronouncement that "the year of the Lord's favor" has arrived means that the Sabbatical and Jubilee years now model a *continuous* way of life for us. In selling their possessions and giving to those in need (Acts 2:44, 45) and in sharing everything they had so that there was no needy person among them (Acts 4:32-34), I believe the early Christians provided an example of the new covenant Jubilee.

In our practice of the New Testament Jubilee, I feel that we should lend our influence to help secure the rights of all people to food, clothing, shelter, health care, and to dignity as individuals. Specifically, we may need to learn to say to ourselves "Enough is Enough"<sup>4</sup> so that others may have enough, to understand the paradox of "Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger"<sup>5</sup> and to discover effective way of providing "Bread for the World"<sup>6</sup> so that there may be equality (2 Cor. 8:13, 14).

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1. *SDA Bible Dictionary* article, "Sabbatical Year."

2. *Ibid.*, article, "Jubilee."  
3. *SDA Bible Commentary* on Luke 4:19.

4. *Enough is Enough* by John V. Taylor (Augsburg Publishing House, 1975).

5. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* by Ronald J. Sider (Inter-Varsity Press, 1984).

6. *Bread for the World* by Arthur Simon (Paulist Press and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Revised edition, 1984).



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# Demonstration, Not Reparation

by Milo Anderson

In the section of Hebrews we are now studying, the author discusses the weaknesses of the first covenant and the contrasting efficacy of the new covenant. He has also provided some further insights into the nature and purpose of the first covenant.

Consider the implications of Hebrews 9:9 and Hebrews 10:11. As translated in the NIV we find expressions like "an illustration for the present time," "can never take away sins," and "sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the consciences of the worshipers." When I meditate on the meaning of the above expressions and then recall all of the complex ceremonies and ordinances of the first covenant, I am reminded of something more like a demonstration than a reparation for sin. Perhaps it was God's attempt to make clear an abstract idea by having the people act out a real illustration.

In giving lessons on astronomy to elementary school children, I have used this method in trying to get across why we only ever see one side of the moon. The abstract explanation for this phenomenon is that, under the force of gravity, the moon makes one full rotation on its own axis for every revolution around the earth. To help the children grasp this fact I have one child walk around me while constantly facing me and then repeat the "orbit" while facing constantly in the other direction. The contrasting appearance of these two orbits illustrates the point.

Nuclear forces and stability can be illustrated by rolling a ball toward a hole with a raised area around it. The two-dimensional, visible behavior of the ball and gravity illustrates the more abstract, invisible, three-dimensional properties of the atomic nucleus.

The ceremonies of the first covenant illustrated or demonstrated the abstract idea of salvation by acting out the ideas of the spiritual theme. They did not take away sin nor clear the conscience and were never intended to do so. The provisions of the first covenant could only draw attention to God, to the problem of sin, and to man's need for salvation. The new covenant was and is needed to provide the only real cure for the sin problem.

The new covenant involves real salvation from sin, a process not really understood by us in our humanity. It involves the mysterious Jesus, the God-man. It involves a death and an incredible resurrection. It involves the law in the mind (Heb. 10:16). It involves a heavenly sanctuary. The first covenant by contrast involves a real, physical model, the law in stone, a real lamb, and real process acted out by real people—but all of it unreal; it was only an illustration.

Therefore, the first covenant did not provide real salvation, but involved physically real things. The new covenant provides real salvation by abstract (un-"real") things.

## REACT

If you had only the Old Testament sanctuary to go on what would you conclude about God and the plan of salvation? Does the sanctuary provide a complete picture on these ultimate issues?

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Milo Anderson is a professor of physics at Pacific Union College.

## OPINION

Key text:  
Hebrews 9:9, 15;  
10:11

# Encouraged by Faith

"Do not then throw away your confidence, for it carries a great reward. You need endurance, if you are to do God's will and win what he has promised" (Hebrews 10:35-36, NEB).



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# Singers, Darkrooms and the Second Coming

by Stephen Payne

I was a student at Auburn Academy in Washington state, and the Heritage Singers had just given a chapel concert. One of the guitar players and I started talking, and we decided that for various reasons the Lord would come again within the next two years.

Our conversation was 11 years ago.

Two weeks ago I stood in a darkroom with a photographer who was helping me on a magazine assignment. He asked me if I'd been watching the news recently.

"Not much. I've been really busy this week."

"Well, no, I mean, doesn't it seem to you like the Lord is going to be coming soon?"

"Well, yes."

"Are you ready?"

I wasn't sure what to say. Being ready for the second coming of Christ is a crucial element of our lives as Christians. Frequently, though, we don't

feel ready, and we're unsure when Christ is really going to come. But when we turn to Hebrews 10, we find that we can "have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place . . . with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (v. 20, 22)<sup>1</sup> and that "He who is coming will come and will not delay" (v. 37).

While assuredness of salvation and the second coming are fundamentals of faith, they are not very easy fundamentals to understand and live by. As I've suggested, I have managed to come up with inaccurate time lines and have been left startled and unsure when asked about my readiness.

But I can leave doubt behind when I read Hebrews 10. Assurance, for those who accept, is a rock solid offer. And the second coming, a point of confusion for many of us, will simply be "just a very little while" (v. 37) away.

Good news indeed.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**Hebrews**  
**10:19-39**

1. All Scripture quotations from the New International Version.

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When Stephen Payne wrote this article, he worked in the public relations office at Pacific Union College.

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# Reasons for Endurance

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Christ's high priestly ministry enables us to approach God with full assurance. This assurance does not lead to complacency or neglect but to enduring commitment in the Christian life as we eagerly await Christ's return.

### 1. Full Assurance (read Heb. 10:19-25)

The apostle's theological discussion of Jesus as High Priest and Sacrifice, beginning in 7:1, has been lengthy and complex. His purpose, however, has not been to give us a "head-trip," but to give us the solid foundation necessary for a vital Christian experience. In the passage for this week, he turns from what Christ *has done* for our salvation to what we *should do* in response, from the "what" of theology to the "so what" of practical Christian living.

The Greek word translated "confidence" in v. 19 "often implies boldness or courage to do something otherwise regarded as dangerous."<sup>1</sup> No pious Israelite, for fear of death, would have dared venture into the Most Holy Place,<sup>2</sup> but now "what had hitherto been the special awe-inspiring privilege of the high priest one day in the year—entry into the very presence of God—is . . . said to be the privilege of every member of the community of faith (cf. Eph. 2:18; 3:12)."<sup>3</sup>

Such remarkable confidence, or "complete freedom" (GNB) to enter God's presence can, of course, only be based on the fact that, as the author has so carefully established in 7:1-10:18, Jesus has opened the way for us "through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (v. 20). In this verse the apostle appears to be creatively conflating two thoughts—the tearing of Jesus' flesh at the cross and the tearing of the veil before the Most Holy Place at the time of Jesus' death (see Mark 15:38). Barclay offers this illumination: "Before the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle hung the veil to screen off the presence of God. For men to enter into that presence the veil would have to be torn apart. Jesus' flesh veiled his godhead. . . . It was when the flesh of Christ was rent upon the cross that men really saw God. All his life showed God; but it was on the Cross that God's love really was revealed. As the rending of the Tabernacle veil opened the way to the presence of God, so the rending of the flesh of Christ revealed the full greatness of his love and opened up the way to him."<sup>4</sup>

The saving reality of Christ's work calls for a three-fold response on our part: faith (v. 22), hope (v. 23), and love (vv. 24, 25).

*What is meant by the "house of God" in v. 21 (compare Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:4, 5; Eph. 2:19-22)? What significance does the fact that Christ is the "great priest" over this house have for the human organization of the house?*

### 2. An Awesome Warning (read Heb. 10:26-31)

*"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31, RSV).*

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The power with which the author of Hebrews assures us of salvation through Christ is matched by the severity with which he warns us of the peril of rejecting Christ.

But this passage should not lead us to despair that a sin of weakness or momentary rebellion excludes us from the benefits of Christ's sacrifice. The form of the Greek verb for "sin" in v. 26 indicates continuous action—persistent, unremitting sin.

Moreover, v. 29 indicates that the "sin" being referred to here is willful, defiant and utter rejection of Jesus Christ. If, as the apostle has argued, Jesus Christ is God's absolute, final, once-for-all solution to the problem of sin, then for the one who persistently, deliberately rejects Him there is clearly no longer a "sacrifice for sins"—no source of salvation.

*What role should "fear" play in our relationship with God? (Compare Heb. 10:31; 12:28, 29; Isa. 6:1-8; Rev. 14:7, 9-11; Isa. 41:13; Matt. 14:27; 17:5-7; 1 John 4:18).*

### 3. A Certain Outcome (read Heb. 10:32-39)

*"Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised" (10:35, 36, RSV).*

An external problem—persecution, and an internal problem—spiritual malaise, were threatening to draw the readers of Hebrews into the peril described in vv. 26-31. The apostle urges them to avert such a tragedy by recapturing the vision of earlier years. Then, they had endured in their "hard struggle," suffering public abuse and affliction and supporting those imprisoned for the faith. They had joyfully accepted severe economic hardship, knowing that their possessions were insignificant compared to Christ, the better and abiding possession (vv. 32-34). Now, in a time of spiritual crisis they needed to reestablish their confidence and renew their endurance (vv. 35, 36).

For the author of Hebrews, the Christian life was a pilgrimage that begins with conversion and baptism and ends in the city of God where all things are made new.<sup>5</sup> In between, in the middle of the pilgrimage, there is suffering, temptation and struggle. But the pilgrim should press on and not "shrink back" (v. 39) because the reward at the end is certain—"he who shall come *will come*" (v. 37).

Endurance for the pilgrimage requires *faith* or faithfulness—like that described in Habakkuk—which hangs on through the hassles and keeps trusting God's promise, even when it looks like evil is prevailing unchecked and the only outcome of faithfulness is suffering (v. 38).

In chapter 11 the quality of faith needed will be amplified by description and examples.

*In a time and country where Christianity is socially acceptable, do we still need the "endurance" described in Hebrews? What do we have to endure?*

1. Donald Hagner, *Hebrews*, p. 147.

2. The context—9:6-8, 11-14, 25, 26, 10:20—makes it clear that the author has the Most Holy Place in mind.

3. Hagner, p. 145.

4. William Barclay, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 119.

5. See William Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, pp. 155, 156.

D.F.M.

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# The Joy of Sharing Your Assurance

by Carol Tilstra

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Hebrews  
10:19-24

As I was growing up, I listened to and participated in many discussions on the joy of the Christian lifestyle. People were beginning to realize that God does not want people to be somber all of the time.

While it has become easier for many people to enjoy a life with Christ, many of these same people still worry over sharing their joy with others. I find myself and many of my friends fidgeting over the thought of witnessing.

It is in this context that I appreciate Ellen White's comments in the passage below.

"The religion of Christ means more than the forgiveness of sin; it means taking away our sins, and filling the vacuum with the graces of the Holy Spirit. It means divine illumination, rejoicing in God. It means a heart emptied of self, and blessed with the abiding presence of Christ. When Christ reigns in the soul, there is purity, freedom from sin. The glory, the fullness, the completeness of the gospel plan is fulfilled in the life. The acceptance of the Saviour brings a glow of perfect peace, perfect love, perfect assurance. The beauty and fragrance of the character of Christ revealed in the life testifies that God has indeed sent His Son into the world to be its Saviour.

"Christ does not bid His followers strive to shine. He says, *Let your light shine*. If you have received the grace of God, the light is in you. Remove the obstructions, and the Lord's glory will be revealed. The light will shine forth to penetrate and dispel the darkness. You cannot help shining within the range of your influence.

**"You cannot help shining within the range of your influence."**

"The revelation of His own glory in the form of humanity will bring heaven so near to men that the beauty adorning the inner temple will be seen in every soul in whom the Saviour dwells. Men will be captivated by the glory of an abiding Christ. And in currents of praise and thanksgiving from the many souls thus won to God, glory will flow back to the great Giver."<sup>1</sup>

*Let your light shine. God will shine through us, we need only be willing.*

## REACT

Is witnessing spontaneous and natural for the one who has "full assurance of faith"? Or does our responsibility to witness mean that we will sometimes have to "force" ourselves to do what we're not inclined to do?

1. Christ's  
Object Lessons,  
pp. 419, 420.

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Carol Tilstra was a senior at Pacific Union College and editor of the campus newspaper, *Campus Chronicle*, when this was written.

# Intelligent and Enduring

by Clinton L. Wahlen

People who express doubts about unquestioned "truths" are often commended as "thinking Christians." Hebrews was written to a group of "thinking" people who began to doubt that Jesus was the Savior He claimed to be and that He really would return in glory (vv. 29, 35, 36). Two thousand years later these doubts can seem even more reasonable. But faith holds on confidently to the promise, certain that God is faithful (v. 23), in spite of numerous occasions for doubt. The certainty of the author of Hebrews that Christ would return in a short time provides us with an example worth imitating: "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come and will not tarry" (v. 37). The actual wording in Greek "makes this encouragement even stronger . . . in order to indicate what positively will occur: the Lord will positively not tarry."<sup>1</sup>

The problem remains: Christ has not come yet. Why? Widely different answers have been given to this question. Some spiritualize the second coming, identifying it with Christ's coming to live in a person's heart or with a future era of world peace and prosperity. Others believe that God's timetable is different from ours—two thousand years is soon to Him; God's purposes know no haste and no delay so that when the cosmic clock winds down to the final pre-determined moment, Jesus will come.

However, these explanations do not seem adequate. Certainly Scripture depicts Christ's coming as more than just a spiritual event; it is the climax of human history when God finally eradicates evil and establishes the new earth. But if the time when this occurs is arbitrarily determined by God and independent of events on earth, why didn't Jesus come long ago? Such an explanation makes God appear responsible for perpetuating sin and suffering.

There is another possible explanation for why Jesus has not come yet. Israel could not enter the promised land because of unbelief (Heb. 3:19) and the first-century Christians were warned against repeating this failure (Heb. 4:11). Christ has opened up the way for us to enter heaven. His death brings deliverance from sin's power. He enables us to share His life of obedience. Instead of doubting that Christ will return soon because He hasn't yet, maybe we need to consider the possibility that these doubts are part of the reason *why* He has not returned. An intelligent faith overcomes doubts and endures to the end. When Christ's experience on earth becomes ours, His home in heaven will become ours too—Christ will indeed come soon and we will receive what has been promised.

## REACT

How can we proclaim the promise of Christ's soon return without, in the light of a 2,000 year history of failed predictions of His return, appearing to simply be crying "Wolf!"?

## EVIDENCE

**Key text:**  
**Hebrews**  
**10:35-37**

**"Maybe these doubts are part of the reason why he has not returned."**

1. Kenneth J. Thomas, "The OT Citations in Hebrews," *New Testament Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 303-325.

Clinton L. Wahlen, a 1984 PUC alumnus is associate pastor of the St. Helena SDA church in California.

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# Entering the New and Living Way

by Gina Devine Wahlen

## HOW TO Key text: Hebrews 10:22-26

It was scrawled in black soot on the side of a beautiful Gothic cathedral in Switzerland—"Gott ist tot," meaning "God is dead." The words seemed so inappropriate—they were something that one might expect to find on a subway wall filled with graffiti, but on the side of a church?

We, of course believe that God is alive, but that belief in itself has no value unless we ourselves are spiritually "alive" with Christ.

How may we be alive with Christ? In Hebrews 10:19, 20 we are told that we may "have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us. . . ."<sup>1</sup> This "new and living way," which we may enter through faith in Christ, opens up to us the very presence of God, in which we find all the resources we need to be spiritually "alive."

Hebrews 10:22-26 gives or implies several practical ways we can exercise our privilege of being in the "new and living way."

**1. Ask for forgiveness.** When we ask forgiveness from God we can "draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith," knowing that He will forgive and accept us.

**2. Accept God's gift of forgiveness.** This means being able to forgive ourselves as well.

**3. Be baptized.** We are to have "our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (v. 22).

**4. Don't lose hope.** Hold on tight to your faith. Remember what led you to Christ, and know that He loves you and wants to be actively involved in every aspect of your life.

**5. Encourage others.** Share with others the joys you have experienced in your Christian life. Sharing is really a double-blessing as it encourages others as well as giving us confidence.

**6. Accept the power God offers.** Jesus' death paid the penalty for sin. Now that the debt has been paid, God offers each of us the power to resist sin. In fact, v. 26 says that "if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." If a person rejects the truth of Christ's death for sin and the power Christ offers to overcome sin, there is no other sacrifice available and no other way to come to God.<sup>2</sup>

**7. Wait for Christ's return with a purpose.** Each day accept the challenge of living the Christian life. Keep up an active faith, believing, no, *knowing* that God is not dead because He is alive in you.

1. All scriptural references are from the New American Standard Bible.  
2. The Ryrie Study Bible, p. 1849, f.n.

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Gina Devine Wahlen is a 1984 graduate of Pacific Union College and now works there as a public relations assistant.



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# Assurance and Reward

by Stephen Payne

How much do we *really* want the Lord to return?  
Or, to put it more directly, *when* do we want the Lord to return?  
I know I occasionally like to place my own, half-serious conditions on Christ's return.

If I could just finish college . . .

If I could just get married . . .

If I could just go to Europe . . .

Such conditions pose no problem for my assurance of salvation. But they do pose a problem for how I handle the prospect of the true reward of salvation at Christ's second coming.

Part of the problem may be that this kind of thinking makes a sharp distinction between assurance now and the reward when Christ returns. In some ways that's appropriate. Certainly there is a chronological separation between believing now and receiving our reward later.

At the same time, though, I think there is a real value in perceiving assurance/reward as part of one and the same progression. In other words, as we pursue and perceive the assurance of salvation, we are really pursuing and perceiving our participation in the second coming. Assurance of salvation is, in fact, the essence of preparation for Christ's return. As Heb. 10:39 says, those "who believe [now] . . . are saved [at the second coming]."

Now, let's talk about getting married once more.

When we read Revelation 19, as well as several other New Testament references, we find the second coming and heaven being compared to a wedding. I think that's a particularly apt metaphor for the relationship of assurance of salvation to the second coming: the assurance of salvation and our on-earth relationship with Christ is essentially the courtship, the second coming and heaven are the wedding.

I don't want to force too much on that metaphor, of course, but I think the courtship/marriage comparison can tell us important things about how we wait for the second coming. I suppose we all know stories about friends who have eloped. But generally, most of our friends who have made a commitment to marry have gotten married when an agreed upon time comes. The waiting is not important, the relationship is.

Likewise, though the soonness (or slowness) of Christ's return is important to us, it is not foundational. For as we live with assurance of salvation, His return really becomes the inevitable glorious consummation of a relationship that we're already in.

## REACT

Are there things you would like to do before Christ returns? If so, why? Are your feelings wrong?

## OPINION

Key text:  
Hebrews  
10:37, 38

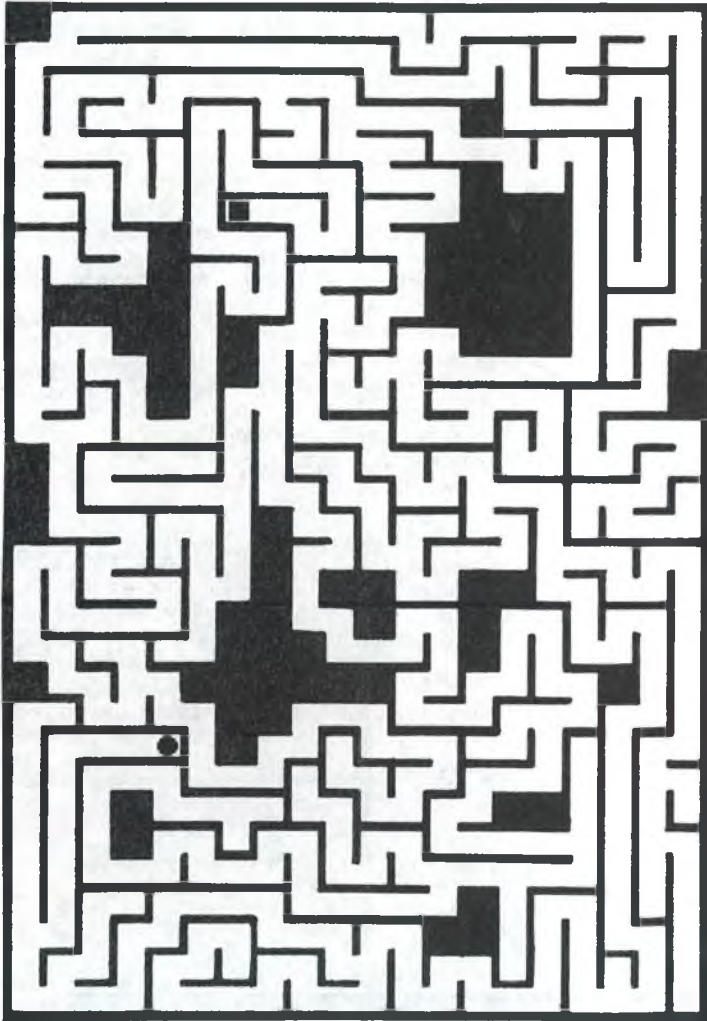
"Assurance of salvation is the essence of preparation for Christ's return."

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When Stephen Payne wrote this article, he worked in the public relations office at Pacific Union College.

# The Journey by Faith

"Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, he endured the cross, disregarding the shameful of it, and from now on has taken his place at the right of God's throne" (Hebrews 12:2, Jerusalem Bible).



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# Faith Journey on the Amazon

by Valerie Halliwell-Smith

It was in Brazil that my grandparents, Leo Blair and Jessie Halliwell, began a journey of faith as engineer/nurse missionaries in 1921. Since roads were non-existent in the heavy rain forest, Leo designed and built a self-contained launch, called the *Luzeiro* (light bearer) to ply the tributaries of the Amazon.

In final preparation for their first journey upstream, Leo, Jessie, and their son Jack knelt in prayer, petitioning heaven for guidance and safekeeping. Well-wishers saw them off, reminding them to beware of river pirates and untamed natives.

With these warnings fresh in their minds the next day, they were reluctant to listen to a request for help that came from two natives in a dugout canoe. But Leo was trusting and big-hearted, and he was further prompted by a "still, small voice" to host these two. However, his trust turned quickly to fear as the two natives insisted on tying up their canoe to the launch and boarding the *Luzeiro*.

"They seem pleasant enough," Leo reassured himself as they chatted politely on either side of him. But suddenly what had been feared happened. Both men lunged toward Leo, broke his hold on the large wheel, grabbed control of it, and maneuvered the launch abruptly to the left.

Before Leo could even regret his generosity, one of them shouted, "Don't you know about those huge rocks?"

Glancing over his shoulder into the murky brown waters, Leo quietly noted the large, jagged boulders just beneath the surface of the currents. Fear turned, as quickly as it had come, into gratitude.

The men returned the wheel to Leo, insisting it was time to cast off. My grandfather, somewhat shaken by the rapid change of events, hugged the oversized wheel in a state of shock. He knew those sharp boulders would have shredded the side of the launch, sinking it into the middle of the great Amazon.

"Jack," he called to his eight-year-old son, "please go help those men cast off." Without delay Jack headed to the back of the boat but just as quickly returned aft.

"Dad, those men are gone. I don't see them anywhere." Leo turned the wheel over to Jack and Jessie for a few moments, and investigated for himself. Not even a trace of an overturned canoe was evident. The riverbanks were too far away to reach in such a short span of time.

Returning to the wheel, Leo joined his small family in thanking God for sending heavenly messengers to spare them on their first journey on the mighty Amazon. Having undertaken that journey by faith in a God they could not see, they were strengthened to persevere by evidence that He indeed exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Hebrews  
11:1-12:2

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Valerie Halliwell-Smith coordinates academic advising at PUC and is the guidance counselor and career education teacher at PUC Prep School.

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# Faithful to the Faithful

## LOGOS

**Theme:** With God's people of all ages, we are to journey toward our heavenly destiny "by faith," keeping our attention centered on Jesus, the "pioneer" of our faith.

### 1. Faith Defined (read Heb. 11:1-3)

*"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (11:3, NIV).*

Faith, in Hebrews 11 is placed within the perspective of hope, "being sure of what we hope for" (v. 1, NIV). Without faith, hope is as substantial as a wishful dream, ever uncertain. "For the man of faith, however, hope is something sure and substantial precisely because it is founded on the objective reality of the immutable promises of God."<sup>1</sup>

Some take the definition in v. 1 to mean being certain of what is unsure, believing something to be true when the evidence for verification is lacking. The result is three extremes. On the one side are those who cherish a religious position contrary to the Bible because "I know it in my heart to be true." On the other, are those who hold to what can be termed a "religion of gaps." For them religion fills in the gaps left by what science cannot explain. But eventually these gaps in knowledge are filled and no room is left for God. The third are those who ignore science because it seems to contradict presumed truth. For an example one need only remember Galileo's ecclesiastical antagonists. The final result of all of these is a religion lost.

So how can these extremes be avoided? The answer is in the text itself. We must be sure of our hope through intelligent faith in a God who has revealed Himself. And how does this faith and hope come? "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17, NIV). Our surety of hope comes through a thorough knowledge of God's Word.

When we look at Heb. 11:1 in the original language, this security comes across a little more poignantly. It can be taken to mean, "Faith is the *title-deed* of things hoped for." "Faith is a guarantee of the heavenly realities for which we hope; not only does it render them certain for us, but it envisages them as rightfully belonging to us."<sup>2</sup>

*Do faith and knowledge have a symbiotic relationship or does one destroy or negate the other?*

### 2. Examples of Faith (read Heb. 11:4-40)

*"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance" (11:13, NIV).*

A thoughtful reading of this section will bear out the fact that faith conforms to no fixed form. It is as divergent as the individuals

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who possess it. It leads Abel to offer a sacrifice of the heart, Enoch to heaven, Noah to build an ark, and Abraham to wander through a strange land. The list goes on. Others gave up royal positions, some took on royalty. For most it led to hardship, persecution, and earthly disgrace. A few conquered kingdoms, escaped the sword, and even saw the dead raised. There is no predicting what strange duties or into what unlikely places faith may lead. Faith is unique for every task, for every man, for every woman. Yet, in all its diversities, it remains an attitude expressed by one who confidently expects great things from God. And by this God is pleased.

As noted twice in the chapter, none of these faithful received what was promised (vv. 13, 39). This seems rather peculiar since their faith was based on a God who fulfills His promises. But theirs was not a vain faith. It was a faith centered on the future. It was a faith that was content to see the promise from afar, its full realization beyond their time.

This kind of faith demands the faithfulness of those who follow after. Without this, the faith of these heroes is meaningless. What would the faith of Abraham mean if Moses and the Israelites had chosen the pleasures of sin for a season? Or the faith vested in the sacrificial system if Christ had yielded to temptation? Or the faith of Paul, John, Peter, and other greats in Christian history if we are faithless? Only by the faithfulness of those who follow can the faith heroes of the past "be made perfect" (v. 40).

*In view of vv. 39 and 40, was more faith required of the ancients, by virtue of their perspective, than of us? Why or why not?*

### 3. The Call (read Heb. 12:1, 2)

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (12:1, NIV).*

Because of the responsibility each generation has to the past, the writer, in this eloquent sermon, makes a call to his readers, using the metaphor of an athletic competition. The analogies between a race and the Christian life are frequently made and familiar to all—the discipline, the sacrifice, the victory. Like the Greek athlete who ran naked, the successful Christian is to lay aside *everything* that hinders. How is this done? By looking at the perfecter of our faith.

*Is there a difference between what "hinders" and "the sin that so easily entangles"? Could it be that what hinders us in our Christian lives may not necessarily be sin?*

E. R. M.

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1. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 438.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 439.

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# Appropriating Faith

compiled by Vernon C. Kaiser

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Hebrews  
11:5, 24-28

Ellen White provides many insights on the people of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, which help us better understand why they were able to live as they did. The following quotations focus on two important figures—Enoch and Moses.

"For three hundred years Enoch had been seeking purity of heart, that he might be in harmony with heaven. For three centuries he had walked with God. Day by day he had longed for a closer union; nearer and nearer had grown the communion, until God took him to Himself. . . . To such communion God is calling us."<sup>1</sup>

"If ever a people needed to walk before God as did Enoch, Seventh-day Adventists need to do so now."<sup>2</sup>

"Think of the life of Moses. What endurance and patience characterized his life. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews says, 'For he endured, as seeing him who is invisible' (Heb. 11:27). This character of Moses does not simply mean passive resistance of evil, but perseverance in a firm consistent course. He kept the Lord ever before him, and the Lord was at his right hand to help him.

"Moses had a deep sense of the presence of God. He saw God. . . . God was real to him and present in his thoughts. When called upon to face danger, to bear insult, and to be misunderstood for Christ's sake, he was persevering to endure without retaliation.

"He could see and acknowledge God in every detail of his life."

"Moses believed in God as One whom he needed, and One who would help him because he needed His help. God was to him a present help in every time of need. . . . God was to Moses a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. . . . God will reward the man of faith and obedience. Moses was full of confidence in God, because he had appropriating faith. He needed the help of God, and he prayed for it, and believed for it, and wove it into his life experience that God cared for him. He believed that God ruled his life in particular. He knew that God had assigned to him a special work, and he would make that work thoroughly successful so far as possible. But he knew that he could not do this without the help of God, for he had a perverse people to deal with. The presence of God, he knew, was strong enough to carry him through the most trying positions that a man could be placed in. He could see and acknowledge God in every detail of his life, that he was under the eye of an all-seeing God, who weighs motives, who tries the hearts. He looked to God and believed in Him for strength to carry him through uncorrupted every form of temptation. . . . This is the kind of faith we need, faith that will endure the test."<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

What particulars about faith can we learn from Enoch and Moses?

1. *Testimonies*,

vol. 8, p. 331.

2. *Testimonies*,

vol. 7, p. 155.

3. Letter 42,

April 7, 1886.

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Vernon C. Kaiser is director of registration and records at Pacific Union College.

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# Faith For the Future, From the Past

by N. Gordon Thomas

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews contains the classic treatment of biblical faith. Indeed, the first verse, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," has to be the classic response to any question on definition of the word "faith."

The sixteenth-century reformer, John Calvin, presents a more modern meaning for faith in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He states that faith is a "firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit." It seems to me that the writer of Hebrews would easily agree with Calvin's definition. Faith is a trust in God, a belief in God, regardless of what the future holds.

It is important to note that faith is based on the evidence of what God has done in the past and the promises of what He will do in the future. Faith is not the expectation of immediate, visible reward. As vv. 39 and 40 indicate, the men and women of Hebrews 11, regardless of their faithfulness, did not receive a complete fulfillment of God's promises in their lifetime. Their reward was beyond this present life. Their faith, as should ours today, rested upon God's sure action in the past and the hope that action gives for the future.

Historical evidence is extremely important since faith has a close relationship to things in the past. Hebrews tells us to keep the past open and not closed. Through study of the past, we discover evidence of God's love and care, which builds our faith that the promises are sure and that prophecy will be fulfilled.

We cannot accept faith without reason. In fact there can be no such thing as "blind faith." Faith is built on past experience, historical facts, and witnesses. Biblical promises are based upon reasonable evidence of God's action in the past, otherwise the entire story of salvation becomes a mere fairy tale. Our faith in the second coming must rest upon the first coming and Christ's death and resurrection. His promise of the second coming is just as sure as the fact of His first coming.

The faith we must have will be stronger than death itself. Notice that Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, when dying, blessed their sons and placed their faith for the future in God and in His power over death. Whether the promises are fulfilled in our lifetime or not, we keep faith, continuing to trust God, and to be loyal to Him. Whittier put it well:

Yet in the maddening maze of things,  
and tossed by storm and flood,  
To one fixed trust my spirit clings;  
I know that God is good!

## REACT

For us today, does it take more faith to believe in the second coming than it does to believe in the first? If so, why?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Hebrews  
11:39, 40

"There can be  
no such thing  
as 'blind  
faith.' "

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N. Gordon Thomas is a professor of history at Pacific Union College.

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# What? No More Explorers?

by Jerry Dennis

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Hebrews 11:6**

Explorers. Pioneers. Adventurers. Inventors. Discoverers. The unknown. The unseen. The untracked. The unspoiled. The uncharted. All hold great fascination for me. I have often thought that I was born a few hundred years too late. No more frontiers. No more discoveries to make. The adventures of the unknown have all been experienced by someone else who got there first. Have you ever had thoughts that had the same ring to them? More than likely you have. It seems only human to think that someone else has already had all the adventure and excitement.

But wait! There really are more frontiers! There are more great adventures! Eternity . . . space . . . a new earth . . . an infinite God . . . a recreated you . . . your own journey of faith. For you are a pioneer in your own right, exploring the uniqueness of your own personal relationship with the very Creator of all adventures. You are a pilgrim on your own trek from here to eternity. You have your own ark to build, your own Egypt to forsake, your own Jericho to encircle, your own Philistines to rout in the night, your own lions to face, your own Amazon to chart!

Success on your personal adventure requires faith—like Enoch's, Abraham's, Gideon's, etc. Hebrews 11:6 summarizes that kind of faith, and we can break the verse down into a simple, three-part "how to."

**1. Acknowledge the necessity of faith** ("And without faith it is impossible to please God").<sup>1</sup> Faith is accepting the unseen on someone else's word. The word of a "reliable someone" who knows, who has been there before.

**2. Believe that God is** ("Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists"). God was real to Abraham. He was real to Gideon. He was real to Noah. Remember Moses? "God was real to him and present in his thoughts" (see Tuesday's lesson).

**3. Believe that the rewards of the journey will come** ("and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him"). Some of the rewards are present, but the ultimate rewards are future.

Armed with such faith, you can begin your journey into the unknown with eagerness, excitement, and confidence!

## REACT

What modern "adventures" in faith might correspond to the incidents recorded in Hebrews 11: Noah's ark building, Abraham's offering of Isaac, Moses' forsaking of Egypt, Rahab's harboring the spies, the people's marching around Jericho, etc.?

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations from the New International Version.

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Jerry Dennis is an admissions advisor at Pacific Union College.



# A Litany of Violence

by Bill Kellerman

Commentators more or less agree . . . that [Hebrews is] a speech, more than a letter. The Greek is, they say, impeccable. But more than that, the book has about it a power and a style of good rhetoric, of moving speech. It's a sermon. And given the context, I don't think it's a convenient exaggeration to call the book a revival sermon. It may be the earliest example of revival preaching in the church.

Nowhere is that clearer than in the passages in chapters 11 and 12. This chunk is where a preacher can get on a roll. It begs to be read aloud. You can feel the rhythm in it. You can feel the cadence. And here comes the refrain, "by faith," again. And the preacher, in picking up that refrain, is riding the wave that's there, telling our more immediate history in the same rhythm and with the same refrain. She adds new names, but it's the same story. As every gospel sermon must, that refrain comes to the foot of the cross and to the resurrection in a great sweep that has your heart pounding and the tears in your eyes. Properly so.

Then you wish that the preacher would step back and wipe the sweat from her brow and sigh, say a benediction, and let us all go home with a warm glow about faith. But, instead, she downshifts just a tad and changes all the tenses of the verbs to the present tense and says, "In our struggle against sin, we have not yet resisted to the point of shedding our blood." And when it says your knees go weak, they go weak.

Like every good revival sermon, it gets concrete. It comes home, closer than we want it to come home. I would like to propose that that line—"In our struggle against sin, we have not yet resisted to the point of shedding our blood"—is the hermeneutical key, as the theologians say, to the litany that's just been read. That's where it's been heading all along.

That litany of faith is also a litany in which violence comes up over and over—officially sanctioned violence in particular. . . .

Moses lives because of an act of disobedience to the Pharaoh's decree, which calls to mind the massive disobedience of the midwives who refused to kill the first-born sons. Moses is the prototype of that civilly disobedient act, hiding in the bullrushes, refusing the life of the Pharaoh's court. Not to mention walking out from under the Pharaoh's rule.

Rahab, at great risk, the risk of her life, defies her own king to shelter and harbor in sanctuary the spies of Israel. Joshua, in what is the pre-eminent liturgical direct action, takes down the walls of Jericho. And so on. . . .

It's no wonder that at the end of it we come to the execution of our Lord, which is, of course, the real hermeneutical key to that list. But that understanding has gotten away from us. (*Continued in next week's Opinion.*)

## OPINION

Key text:  
Hebrews 12:2, 3

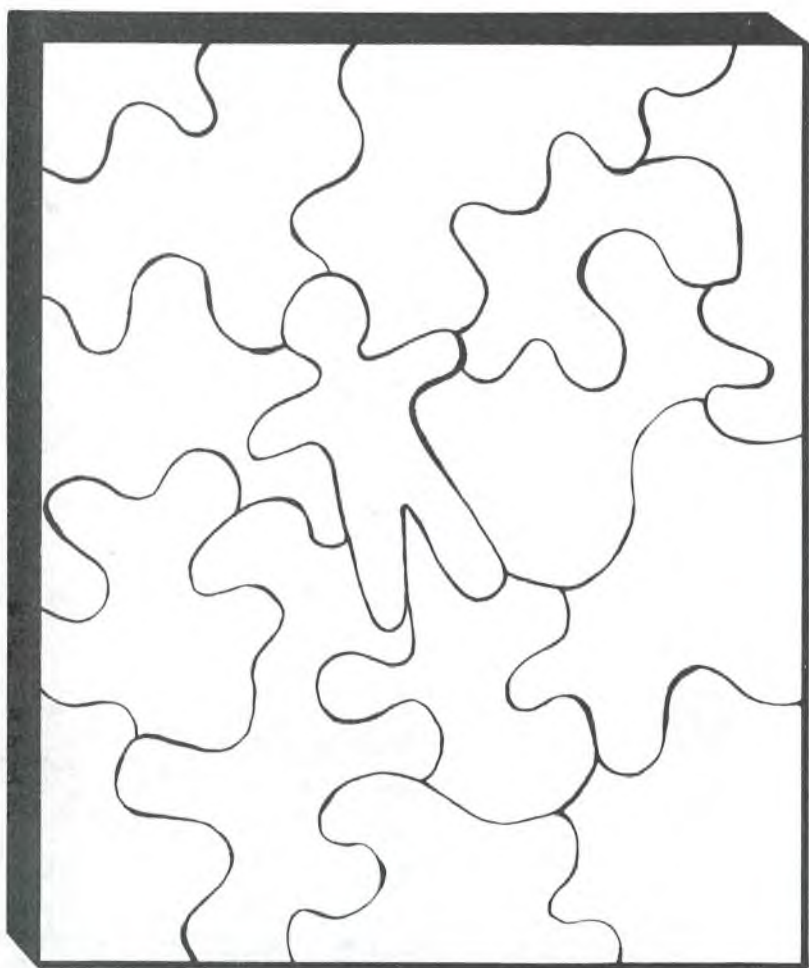
**"The litany of faith is also a litany in which violence comes up over and over."**

Excerpted from Bill Kellerman, "The Curse and Blessing of the Wilderness," *Sojourners*, June 1985, p. 26. Reprinted with permission from *Sojourners*, Box 29272, Washington, D.C. 20017.

Bill Kellerman is a United Methodist pastor in Detroit, Michigan.

# Brought Home by Faith

“You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant” (Hebrews 12:22-24, RSV).



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# A Fateful Refusal

It was the height of the tourist season, and despite the heavy heat of the afternoon, a few diehards, braving the sweltering sun, were out to "see the sights" from the top of the hill.

A father and son, natives to the city, slowly made their way up the worn path, letting the tourists push ahead in their excitement as they scurried ant-like to see all that was to be seen.

"Let them sweat," said the father.

The son made no reply and continued to study the ground just ahead of each step. As they reached the top of the hill, the son turned to the father and said, "Dad, if we are God's people, why do all these fanatics and weirdos keep popping up all the time, claiming some new truth?"

The father, taken aback by this question from his boy, hid his surprise, scratched his chin, and replied, "Well, son, it's partly because of these 'fanatics and weirdos,' as you call them, that I believe we are God's people. You see, by them the devil is trying to lead us astray."

"Yes, but Dad, how do we know these guys aren't right? For instance, what about that guy who said we should all move out to the country and wait for God's coming there?"

"Well, you know he lost a lot of his followers when he told them that God had shown him

that he should purify their wives by sleeping with them! You see, son, you can't always tell right off the bat exactly where these guys are going to lead. And some of what they say is true. But there are a few things you can look for. One of the important ones is, do they uphold the standards of the church? Another is, do they unify the church, or do they tear it apart?

"Take for instance this latest guy," the father continued. "A lot of people followed him. He was a good preacher. But the next thing you know, he was criticizing church leadership and eroding church traditions. It always hurts the church. The public loves this kind of stuff. You see it all the time—'church rocked by scandals.'"

The father gave a long sigh and stared off. The two were quiet for a while, but then the father, shaking his head, continued, "But this is the worst I've seen yet. Oh, the church will survive. It always does. And tomorrow or the next day the public will find something else to talk about. But the government stepping in, oh what a mess! It sure didn't help our image."

"What happened, Dad?"

"Well, fortunately, son, it's over now. The government put an end to it. There, yesterday, on that hill, they crucified him."

E. R. M.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Hebrews 12:3-13:25  
(see especially 12:25-27 for today)

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# Approaching Zion

## LOGOS

**Theme:** We can preserve in our journey of faith despite inevitable hardship, knowing by faith that we already enjoy the spiritual reality of the heavenly city and are thus guaranteed a place in that city when it becomes a tangible reality in the transformed earth.

### 1. Discipline Explained (read Heb. 12:3-13)

*"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons" (12:7, 8, NIV).*

Having given some of the examples of past faithful, our author exhorts his readers to continued zeal in their Christian lives. Once enthusiastic, the readers are now showing signs of lethargy. The imagery is still that of a race. After a strong start, perseverance is faltering. The cause can be inferred from the previous verses. They have taken their eyes off Jesus, who is the source of strength (v. 2).

Turning away from Christ is not usually a sudden and conscious choice. Most often it is gradual, unnoticed with passing time. The hectic pace of an overly busy life, fanaticism, disenchantment with the church, or the enjoyment of some sin that so easily besets—these are among the many causes of flagging zeal.

Another is the temptation that the Christian lifestyle costs too much, involves too much pain, and asks that too much be given up. The Hebrews seem to have been tempted in this direction. The context suggests some sort of persecution as the cause. But as the author gently points out, they have not resisted to the point of shedding blood (v. 4). They are reminded that trials serve as discipline, not as a form of punishment and God's displeasure, but as learning or schooling, and thus serve as evidence for God's love.

*If God uses hardship as discipline, is He then responsible for suffering?*

### 2. A Warning to be Faithful (read Heb. 12:14-29)

*"See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?" (12:25, NIV).*

After his brief digression on discipline, the author returns to his call to faithfulness by exhorting his readers to live at peace and to be holy (v. 14). This call for peace, coupled with holiness, extends beyond the pursuit of a peaceful existence. It indicates that we are conduits through which the blessings of God's peace flow into the lives of those surrounding us. This peace is not ours to hoard but through us it is to pervade society so that "no one misses the grace of God" (v. 15, NIV).

The author illustrates the result of rejecting God's grace by reminding the readers of Esau. Though Esau came to want the bless-

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ing he had forfeited earlier, it was then too late. The gravity of sin cannot be passed off lightly. When one deliberately and continually chooses evil, there comes a time when repentance is impossible, even though the sinner may rue the results of his choice. It is not that God is unforgiving, but that the sinner has lost the capacity for true repentance. "[T]he tears of Esau were those of a man past hope, they are not shed on account of having offended God; so the ungodly, however they may deplore their lot, complain and howl, do not yet knock at God's door for mercy, for this cannot be done but by faith."<sup>1</sup>

However, for those who do repent, provision has been made, not in the tangible forms given at Mount Sinai, but in the intangible reality of Mount Zion. Ours is not the hope of the Old Testament sacrificial system, but in the present reality of that system fulfilled in Jesus Christ. "Therefore . . . be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe" (v. 28, NIV).

*What is the purpose of the comparison between Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion? What does the apostle mean by saying that believers already "have come" to the heavenly Jerusalem?*

### **3. Closing Words (read Heb. 13:1-25)**

*"May the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (13:20, 21, NIV).*

This last chapter of Hebrews gives the impression of a preacher running out of time. Knowing he has only a few minutes left, he tries to pack as many points in as he can.

The admonitions given are familiar to all Christians. Have brotherly love, be hospitable, remember those in prison (this most probably refers to fellow Christians imprisoned for their faith), and maintain fidelity in marriage. There is also the counsel to remember church leaders, the warning against false doctrine, and again, a declaration of the superiority of the sacrifice of Christ.

But there is one charge that some Christians might have some difficulty with. "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority" (v. 17, NIV). Now it might be argued that these leaders are those in the church. But these have already been mentioned in v. 7. So it is apparently both spiritual and secular leaders that we are to obey "so that their work will be a joy" (v. 17, NIV).

*To what extent are we to obey secular leadership? Do we obey even if the leadership is totalitarian and atheistic or regularly violates the principles of peace and justice?*

E. R. M.

1. Calvin's Commentaries. *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*. p. 198

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# Scenes From the Future of the Redeemed

selected by Ted Wick

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Hebrews  
13:22, 28

"In the Bible the inheritance of the saved is called a country. There the great Shepherd leads His flock to fountains of living waters. The tree of life yields its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the service of the nations. There are everflowing streams, clear as crystal, and beside them waving trees cast their shadows upon the paths prepared for the ransomed of the Lord. There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God's people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home."<sup>1</sup>

"The people of God are privileged to hold open communion with the Father and the Son. . . . We shall stand in His presence, and behold the glory of His countenance. . . .

"There, immortal minds will contemplate with neverfailing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. . . . Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.

"All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar. . . . With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. . . . With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—sun and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity. . . .

"As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption, and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; . . .

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that GOD IS LOVE."<sup>2</sup>

"There the  
grandest  
enterprises  
may be  
carried forward,  
the loftiest  
aspirations  
reached."

1. *The Story of Redemption*, p. 431.

2. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 676-678, emphasis supplied.

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Ted Wick is the chaplain at Pacific Union College.

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# We Are Family

by Ken Downing

After eleven chapters of formalizing a theology of faith that is rich in imagery, history, and biography, it is almost a letdown for the author of Hebrews to turn in these last two chapters to details of specific ways to behave. It is as if he began to worry that the brethren would get so excited by this concept of righteousness by faith that they would forget that the law and works were important also. How many times have *we* been reminded that faith without works is dead as we promote Ingathering and other worthy projects, fearful that faith alone won't produce!

But to write these chapters off as an inability to let go of a tradition of works righteousness is to project onto the author of Hebrews our own shortcomings. Recent developments in psychology, specifically the field of family therapy, give us some valuable insights into what the orientation of these chapters might be. The best current model for therapeutic change is based on "social learning theory." This view holds that everything interacts with everything else to form a "system." Thoughts, behaviors, and the environment all interact to influence and be influenced by each other.

For families there are clear boundaries between parents and children and in healthy families these boundaries are flexible enough to allow interchange. There are also clearly understood rules which govern the relationships, and trust based on love is the essential ingredient that makes the system function smoothly. This loving trust allows the family members to act "as if" their positive behaviors will be rewarded, if not immediately, then in the future.

In chapter 12, the author of Hebrews places his theology in a family context and throughout the remainder of the book speaks of positive behaviors between family members and with the Father. Because of sin, God apparently cannot interact directly with us as He was able to in the Garden of Eden, but He still asks us to act as family and to exhibit behaviors that indicate our willingness to act "as if" we were currently residing in His home. This acting is based on loving trust (faith) but it also serves to reinforce and recreate the loving trust. In that context, faith without works is dead because without the reinforcement of behavior and the feedback of an environment filled with family (brothers and sisters in need), that measure of faith given to each person will die just as a flame vanishes in a vacuum without oxygen. Hebrews 12 and 13 are not a complete prescription for how to be a Christian, but one man's inspired attempt to impress upon us that faith must interact behaviorally with others or there will be no faith or family or life itself, now or in the hereafter.

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Hebrews  
12:5-7; 13:1

**"Trust based on love is the essential ingredient that makes the system function smoothly."**

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Ken Downing is a doctoral student in psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

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# You Ain't Seen Nuthin' Yet!

by Ted Wick

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Hebrews 12:4**

I was a freshman at Campion Academy. All the boys were taken on an outing to climb Long's Peak during the first month of school. The older boys who had made the climb before told us in grisly detail about its horrors. There was the "cable"—a metallic rope which you had to hang on to at one point in the climb, or you would fall to certain destruction. And there was the altitude sickness which could hit the class bully as quickly as the weakest ones.

The anticipation clearly outweighed the reality. A couple of friends and I had completed the cable route by noon and were on our way down from the 14,200 foot summit as we met the very one who had told us the tales of terror the night before. We were very pleased with ourselves to be sure. It was a test of our manhood.

Whether valid or not, warnings from the "experienced" are common.

The college student tells the academy student, "College is much more work and far more difficult than academy."

The medical student tells the college student, "Med school isn't much harder than organic chemistry, it's just that there is so much more material that you have to learn. The tests take three to four hours for just one class!"

The doctor tells the medical student, "Residency is not more difficult in the classroom sense, but you work around the clock, you never see your family except when you're too tired to keep your eyes open! Not to worry, residency only lasts four years."

Or it could go like this:

"Just wait until *you* have children of your own."

"Just wait until *your* kids become teenagers, then you'll understand."

"Just wait until *your* kids leave home, and the house is empty."

"Just wait until *you* have to retire."

"Just wait until . . ."

It seems as though everyone considers their present experience to be difficult. Such tales of woe about going through life are enough to scare one about growing up and growing older. Stories about the time of trouble and crises before Jesus comes provide nightmare material for many Adventist children whose second grade teachers read for the class *Now* or Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

However severe our trials might seem, the author of Hebrews reminds us, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:4, NIV). In other words, "Compare your struggles with what Jesus experienced and you will see how little difficulty you face in comparison. He has faced it all—nothing is too hard for Him and no matter what your experience, nothing need cause you fear as though God could not help you."

## REACT

Do we tend to exaggerate the horrors of the "time of trouble," or not emphasize them enough? What principles does Hebrews 12 suggest for making it through persecution?

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Ted Wick is the chaplain at Pacific Union College.



# Freedom to Die

by Bill Kellerman

## OPINION

Key text:  
Hebrews  
12:12, 13

*(Continued from last week's Opinion.)*

I skipped over Isaac in the litany, but I want to come back to him because the passage about Abraham's call to kill Isaac, the one by whom the whole world was to be blessed, has always been enigmatic to me. During the Vietnam War, a Buddhist monk by the name of Thich Nhat Hanh, who was exiled in Paris, entered into a kind of reconciliation work. He gave me an angle on this passage. He was once asked straight on by someone if he would be willing to sacrifice Buddhism for the sake of peace. And he knocked the guy over by saying, "Of course. If I weren't willing to sacrifice Buddhism for the sake of peace, I would have already sacrificed Buddhism."

If our commitment to the survival of the line and the community and the institution is more important than faithfulness, we've already sacrificed the line and the community and the institution. At the point where the church becomes more concerned about its own survival, it's already taken on the prime aspect of every principality on the planet: fleeing death and, thereby, worshipping it.

So, what is the discipline that chapter 12 of Hebrews talks about? It's the time the community was living in, the wilderness they were suffering—the sense of being stuck in a long haul and warned that they hadn't even begun to resist yet. It's the wilderness that God, by grace, grants to purify and transform the community. It's the worst of times which are the best of times. It's the curse that by the grace of God is the blessing. Because we become who we're called to be.

A choice is being offered: to be children of God, or to be outside the offer. The offer to be children and heirs is set against the bondage of slavery and being orphaned and abandoned.

The inheritance that's being offered is that litany of the faithful, the promise of suffering, the hard times that make you go weak in the knees. And the tough question that the passage turns to is, "Are you the Hebrews or not? Is this your community or not? Do you choose this, or will you sell your birthright for a bowl of soup, for the immediate pleasures of this world?" It's a question of our identity.

In none of this do I want to be morbid or morose or simply offer dire warnings of what we yet may see. Because all of this hinges on the cross and the resurrection. That's what authorizes our freedom. We live in the resurrection, which is why we're free to die. As Martin Luther King Jr. says, "You don't know what you're living for until you know what you're willing to die for."

The resurrection is what this is all about. This passage in Hebrews says that in the struggle—in exactly this struggle—is your healing, is your wholeness, is what makes you well. It's the source, by the grace of God, of your holiness. Hold on, dear friends. We've not yet resisted unto death or unto life.

## REACT

What, to you, is worth dying for?

**"The inheritance that's being offered is the hard times that make you go weak in the knees."**

Excerpted from Bill Kellerman, "The Curse and Blessing of the Wilderness," *Sojourners*, June 1985, p. 27. Reprinted with permission of *Sojourners*, P.O. Box 29272, Washington, D.C. 20017.

Bill Kellerman is a United Methodist pastor in Detroit, Michigan.

## THIS QUARTER'S ARTIST

Patwick (that's accepted nomenclature for Mrs. Pat Wick) calls herself "the Dabbler." With good reason. She dabbles in watercolor, graphics, counseling, teaching, supervising students, radio, writing, speaking appointments, parenting, and marriage—not necessarily in that order.

Pacific Union College is her palette and home. Her business phone is at the Campus Center where she dons the title of coordinator during the schoolyear, counting herself the lucky one to be able to work with college students. Such work is "the original fountain of youth," she says.

Pat's husband, Ted, is the campus chaplain at PUC. They have two daughters: Patrice, a senior at Sacramento State University, and Jana, who is in her second year at PUC Prep.

About her artwork in this issue, Pat offers the following reflections:

Cover: Fledgling faith—vulnerable, insignificant, needing to learn to fly.

Lesson #1: In the dark—questioning faith.

Lesson #2: Seed of truth raises us to understanding—affirming faith.

Lesson #3: Circle of celebrating—dancing for joy.

Lesson #4: Stepping out alone—quickest remedy for failing faith.

Lesson #5: Message from the Holy Spirit—basis for faith.

Lesson #6: Pyramid—faith in a brother (every gymnast understands this one!)

Lesson #7: Dive in, you can only learn by being airborne—standing on the board only causes fear (the call of faith).

Lesson #8: He remembers us—faith in a better priest.

Lesson #9: No rubber stamp Christians allowed—the need for a better covenant.

Lesson #10: Jesus climbed discouragement and death for us—the better sacrifice (best).

Lesson #11: Whew! Walking on the water—encouraged by faith.

Lesson #12: Life's maze—my favorite—that's the faith journey.

Lesson #13: We're a piece of the puzzle, we've found our spot—brought home by faith.



"Doing 14 illustrations on the subject of FAITH was a FAITH VENTURE in itself," Pat concludes. "Since faith is a simple concept on the surface with all kinds of hidden messages once you are faithing, I tried to use stark, simple illustrations. Here's hoping you find some hidden meanings as you contemplate this series of lessons. Bon voyage!"

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Last year, Everett rented a plane and flew a dying young mother home to Arkansas so she could spend her last days in the support and comfort of her family.

When world attention was focused on the famine in Ethiopia, Everett wanted to contribute in a personal way. So, for six months, he used his nursing skills working with a Christian organization helping famine refugees.

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