

Hebrews: A Message For Today

Re-igniting Our Zeal

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In some ways, this has been the most stressful year of my life. I do not mean to imply by that that it has been all bad, because even good things are stressful to some degree. But with the good things the stresses are easier to bear, and we enjoy it, while we are doing it. I have to watch myself in this, because I do not want to complain before God. He is overseeing my life. He knows everything that is going on. And He does not give me anything that is too difficult for me to bear. I may think that it is that way, but it is not really. He is equally aware of what you are going through, and you are able to bear up what He is allowing you to go through. But, even so, it is nonetheless difficult, and I do not want to allow myself to get into a bad attitude about it.

Now I know that I am not alone in these feelings, because many of you have expressed to me sentiments similar to what I just said. You give me the impression that many of you feel as though the world is closing in on us. I do not think that I have ever experienced a year in which there were so many serious illnesses impacting upon families in the church. Do any of you feel security that the nation is in the hands of very good leadership? Are there very many of the leaders that you implicitly trust? Our President, it seems, has permanently damaged or stained the reputation of virtually every political figure in the United States (at least, to some degree) as being somewhat like him.

The church is **not** coming together. People continue to create faith issues, for those of us who are in the church, by impatiently pushing for doctrinal changes—much in the same manner that the Tkach's did, except that these people do not have the authoritative position from which to push their pet doctrine onto the church. But, nonetheless, they talk about it. They circulate it about the congregation. And they cause irritation—and sometimes anger and offense—right within the congregation.

I say **faith issues**; and this is important, because faith rises from a doctrinal base. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The Word of God contains the teaching of Jesus Christ. That is where faith arises from—from the teachings of Jesus Christ. And when doctrine is changed, it challenges what one believes. Then it either shakes one's faith *or* the doctrinal challenge, if accepted, will change the faith along with the doctrine. It is that process that effectively scattered the church away from the Worldwide Church of God.

If anyone is at all serious about his commitment to God through the church of God, all of these things impact upon a person's energy level. And one becomes so weary trying to fend off the pressures and maintain one's balance within the swirl of all of these events that are going on (1) in the world, (2) in the church, and sometimes (3) right within our own families.

God inspired a book in His Word that addresses the kind of circumstance that we find ourselves in. It is, in its own way, the hardest-hitting book in the New Testament (and, perhaps, even in the entire Bible). But, on the other hand, it is also arguably the most encouraging as well—because of the assuring tone that is contained within its subject material.

I think we all have favorite passages of Scripture that are particularly moving, or pertinent, to what we are experiencing in our lives. And even sometimes a particular book will occasionally strike an

inspiring cord within us because of the state of our life, as we are living it. But I feel that even we fail to fully appreciate the Bible's *continuing relevance*. It deals in absolutes, and yet it is always up-to-date. The whole Bible is written for us. But if there was ever a book that was written with a message of exhortation *for us* in this era—at this time in the history of the church—it is the book of Hebrews.

It stirs a great deal of controversy among the world's scholars, because it contains a number of mysteries. They do not know who wrote it, because it is not signed. They do not know specifically to whom it is written, because it is not addressed to anyone. It contains few personal expressions (such as those that Paul always wrote at the end of his books, identifying himself as being the one who dictated the letter or even wrote a portion of the letter). It does not say, "I, Peter, write unto..." or "I, James, address the twelve tribes." Hebrews has nothing like that.

As a matter of fact, it has no conclusion within it—like Paul usually gives. In fact, it is not even an epistle. It is more like a treatise. A treatise is a persuasive argument in writing. But a treatise does not contain exhortations. It is merely a detailed argument, one side of a debate, or whatever.

But the book of Hebrews arguably contains the most powerful exhortations in all of the Bible.

One thing that the world agrees on (and, in fact, commentators especially go into rhapsodies when they talk about this) is the beauty of the language. That is, the word pictures that are given by the author to express the love that he undoubtedly felt—to the very depths of his being—for the people to whom he was writing, and for the church of God, and especially for Jesus Christ. One commentator said, "By any standard, in any age, it would have to be one of the top four or five writings in the history of man."

The preface to *Barnes' Notes* on Hebrews says, "It contains the most sublime descriptions of the dignity and glory of Christ's person, the excellence of His sacrifice, and the superiority of His gospel; intermingled with hortatory matter, wherever the grand argument can admit of a pause, full of solemnity and pathos."

Adam Clarke writes, in the preface to Hebrews, "The epistle to the Hebrews is by far the most important and useful of all of the apostolic writings. It is the epitome of the dispensations of God to man from the foundation of the world to the advent of Christ." About a paragraph later, he continues, "So many are the beauties, so great the excellency, so instructive the matter, so pleasing the manner, so exceedingly interesting the whole that the work may be read a hundred times without perceiving anything of sameness, with new and increased information at each reading. The latter is an excellency which belongs to the whole revelation of God, but to no part of it in such a peculiar and super-eminent manner as the epistle to the Hebrews."

And yet among church members, I dare say that the book of Hebrews is the least known and understood of all the New Testament writings. We know of the faith chapter, which appears in chapter 11. We know isolated things (like Melchizedek). We know the priestly imagery that appears; but we often miss the author's thought—that goes from beginning to end.

Scholars perceive many uncertainties; but they are very sure of its theme, and why it was written, and why it is of such major importance to **us**. It is written to Christians. Of that there is no doubt. Most probably they were Jews, and most probably they were in the area of Palestine and beginning to

scatter over other portions of the world. These Jews were in a situation that was somewhat similar—and perhaps we might even go so far as to say very similar—to ours, but one that was in a far more advanced state of development. They, too, were approaching the end of an age.

Their "age" began with Christ's birth. It continued on through His preaching, His death and resurrection, the founding of the church, the preaching of the gospel by the apostles (first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles as well). And it moved toward 70 AD and the dissolution of Jewish life in Palestine. Their world, as it were, was ending.

Our "age" began with the calling and conversion of Herbert Armstrong in 1927, the beginning of the Philadelphia era in 1933, the founding of Ambassador College, the preaching of the gospel around the world, Herbert Armstrong's death, and the scattering of the church—and toward the dissolution of man's rule on earth.

Hebrews was written to an older, established group—some of whom might have been in the church twenty or thirty years. I say "30" because it is believed that the book of Hebrews was written sometime between 62 AD and 67 AD. The destruction of the temple had not taken place yet, but persecutions were beginning to arise directly upon the church (in places like Rome). And there were, undoubtedly, persecutions brought into the Palestine area by the Jewish culture that was surrounding the church in that area.

We know that, at one time, persecution had been reasonably violent, and that James, the brother of John, had been killed. We know that Paul was persecuting in that area, early in the life of the church. Of course, his persecuting of it had ended, but others picked up on it because they were of the same mindset that he had been.

And so the stresses of thirty, in some cases, **very difficult years** in the church—far more difficult than most of us have ever had to face. Most of our difficulties seem to involve things like employment and money issues. But nobody is chasing us down the street, to tar 'n feather us. But we are going to find, as we go through here, that these people were NOT going through a bloody persecution; but persecution, in some form, they were going through.

A problem confronted by Hebrews had to do with *the times* that these people lived in, and *the attitudes* of the people toward the times—as contrasted with the good news (I mean the gospel of the Kingdom of God) which these people had heard, and were also supposed to be living. These people were being pressured by the times that they were living in! Not a bloody persecution, but there was a great deal of **psychological pressure** that was being brought to bear upon those in the church.

The nature of their pressure was economic. It was social—from the culture around them, and maybe even from within their immediate families. It was moral, because of the decadence that was within the area of Palestine especially. And the people religiously were constantly being pressured to go back to the world of Judaism. You know that is true, from the epistles that Paul wrote. It is interesting that others in that time period were *distracted* by the very success of "the work" and even their own individual prosperity that God had showered upon them.

Even as we are constantly *pressured* to go back to liberal Protestantism, by which we are surrounded, something was happening psychologically to these people. I will describe it in this manner. This is something that I got from a psychologist of this world. What I am going to describe is a kind of thing that **we** can very easily, if we are not careful, fall victim to as well.

If somebody who was known to you (maybe even somebody who was close to you) came up to you, and seemingly with no provocation whatsoever, punched you right in the nose and you fell back on your butt—of course, wondering "What in the world is going on?"—the chances are that the very first emotion that would hit you would be one of surprise. "What did I do to deserve this?" You would be ready to gather yourself together, and get up on your knees. As one foot is pushing you up off the ground, and you just get up again, and *wham!*—right in the ole kisser again. By now, the attitude is beginning to change. It is no longer surprise. You begin to feel the color coming up in your neck, and maybe the hair standing on the back of your head, and anger is beginning to surge into you.

Nonetheless, you get up again. And just as you get on your feet, *wham!*—right in the nose again. By this time the anger is giving way to rage. Still, you gather yourself together and stand up again, and *wham!* you get hit right in the kisser again, and down you go. Now the rage is beginning to give way to another reaction. Another emotion is beginning to hit your mind, and you are beginning to think, "When is he going to quit? When is going to be the end of this? I can't stand it much longer."

But you drag yourself again, just as you confront the problems that hit your life. You gather yourself and you get up. And just about the time that you get steady on your feet, *whoop!* right in the kisser you get hit with another one, and down you go. Eventually, brethren, you are going to come to the place where you are thinking, "I don't care what he does any more. I just wish he would stop." And you will have reached the point of **apathy**. You no longer care.

That was described by Abraham Maslow, and it is a true cycle. It is a series of emotions that we go through when we are hit by a seemingly unending set of pressures. We eventually become apathetic to what is going on around us, and we do not care.

Well, that is what happened to the people in the book of Hebrews. It was not a bloody persecution. It was **constant pressures** being applied *to the mind*. Economic pressures, health pressures, persecution on the church pressures, social pressures, family pressures, you name it—one coming right after the other in a wave that never seems to end. And we need to confront this **because** things are not going to get any better! And the pressures are going to continue to build. We had better have a **Resource** to whom we can go to in order to weather the storms of psychological damage that might be inflicted upon us because we have nothing to resist the tribulations (pressures) that are coming upon us.

The outward effect on these people is very clearly given by the apostle Paul in Galatians 6. Apathy has an effect—where we not only no longer care about life itself, but we no longer care about God. It begins to wane.

Galatians 6:7-10 Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. [That is the way we want to go!] And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

There is a witness that God wants from us. He knows how much we can bear, and He wants to prepare us for the things that are coming. And so trial, upon trial, upon trial is going to come upon us. It is part of the preparation that we have to go through, to see whether or not we are going to **endure to the end**.

Matthew 24:13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

II Thessalonians 3:10-13 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But you, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

Apathy makes a person feel tired—like not doing anything. And there comes a time when we have to 'buck it up' and sacrifice ourselves, and push ourselves, and do right things that we do not want to do, and not allow the weariness to overtake us. That kind of psychological weariness can make us sick of body, so that we will not be able to do anything.

It is all in the mind. (Remember David Maas' sermon yesterday.) We do not want to go through cognitive distortions that wreak a physical effect on our bodies and a psychological effect at the same time—both of them working *against us* to keep us from accomplishing within the work of God. That is, so that we are not malleable in His hands—because we will do nothing. We will just lay there, in apathy, waiting for the inevitable end.

The people to whom Hebrews was written were somewhat punch-drunk with the repeated hardships of the daily grind—with society's moral, economic, and social problems; wrangling and division within the church; as well as the stresses of overcoming. But turn with me to Revelation 2, and we will pick up a principle here.

Revelation 2:7 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Remember that each message is written for each of the groups. So what is written to the Ephesians applies to those of us who come along in the Laodicean period of time.

Revelation 2:2-5 I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you cannot bear them which are evil. And you have tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars. And have borne, and have patience, and for My name's sake have labored, and have not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love. Remember therefore from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent.

Please understand that these people had not "lost" their first love. They had the Spirit of God. The love was there! But they had *left* it. They were not using it. They had become weary with all of the pressure that had gone into their lives, into their minds. And so they were *leaving* the love; but the Spirit of God was there—and that is the Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. These people needed to get turned around. They had become apathetic regarding spiritual things. They were becoming without feeling, because of these stresses.

The book of Hebrews amplifies and provides reasons for and advises on *how to recapture that zeal* for what they had formerly loved with a great deal of emotion and enthusiasm. It does this by reminding us of **THE IMMENSE VALUE** of the awesome gifts that we have been given. And, of course, what we should do with them.

Matthew 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

This is a warning to us—that the iniquity that is in the world will cause a loss of love in the church. And I think that if you understand the progression of events that is in Matthew 24, then verse 12 is in that period of time of the Tribulation. We are leading up to that, and we are in the period in which the stresses against the church—from the world—are increasing. And as they increase, it can have the psychological effect—because we begin to get weary of dealing with it—of becoming *apathetic* (that is, without feeling for what we formerly loved so dearly).

So the iniquity is in the world; but the *resisting* of it is a constant stress, because it exerts tremendous pressure through an appealing façade—to give in, and to just go along with it. As one lives with it and everybody else is doing it, when the world's behavior becomes acceptable—thus giving evidence that the apathy is taking over.

We need to look at every aspect. (In some ways, these are really minor things.) How do they dress? What kind of music do they listen to? What are the world's movies like? What are their attitudes in dealing with each other—in stores, on the street, in communities? In many places, you can hardly get anybody on the street to wave to you. I see it in my neighborhood. I go out walking every morning. I usually make an effort to say "Hello." But you would be surprised how many people avert their eyes. It may be a little thing, but we should not be like that. In that kind of a sense, we ought to be like an open book—like a little child. But there are so many things along this line. The iniquity is in the world, but it pressures **us** into doing things like it does, and then it becomes our behavior.

This is just hypothetical, of course. But what if one judged himself against the world ten years ago and one judged that he was 50% more righteous than the world; and then today, if he did exactly the same thing, and figured that he was at least 50% more righteous than the world today? However, if the world had become more unrighteous during that same period of time, then even though he may be 50% more righteous than the world now, he has actually gone backwards in that ten years—right along with the world.

The world has a way of making things "acceptable" because it is always there, exerting its pressure. And we are coming close to what happened to the Hebrews. We are going to see, as we go through here, that **sin** (immorality) *per se* was not their problem. I believe that the word "sin" only appears three times in the book of Hebrews. That was not the problem. They had a problem of the heart! It was their attitude. And their sin lay in the fact that they were falling short of the glory of God in the attitude that they had toward God and toward His Way. And what it was producing was a lack of growth. *They were going backwards*, and yet they thought they were okay. In chapter five, Paul punches these people verbally right in the nose.

Luke 21:34 Take heed to yourselves [Jesus says], lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting. . .

"Surfeiting" means indulging in one's appetites excessively. It could be food. It could be drink. It could be a lot of things. I do not want to spend a lot of time on this, but what I do want to bring to your attention is that the world is pushing, pushing, pushing the overuse of our appetites all the time. You cannot turn on the television without them **pushing** automobiles at you. "Spend your money on this." **Pushing** foods at you. **Pushing** foodless foods, dangerous things like Coke, and Pepsi, and Mountain Dew and a whole host of those kinds of things that are not good for your health; but they are pushing, pushing, pushing constantly and repetitiously at you. "Do this." "Try this." "Use your

time this way." They are constantly keeping us "under the gun." It is the stress that comes from *resisting* what they are pushing at us—in the sale of their products, in the sale of their way of life, in the sale of their attitudes.

That is the issue in the book of Hebrews. The people had not given in to immorality. But whoever wrote that book (and my own personal feeling is that Paul is the author of it) knew that sooner or later the stress is going to get to them. So Jesus says here:

Luke 21:34 Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that the day come upon you unawares.

Do you see the end result of this? Jesus said that the end result is that we forget when it is that we are living—so that the day comes upon us unawares.

Luke 21:35-36 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch you therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

So the thrust of Jesus' exhortation here is that we should be continually expecting His return. It is a major part of the focus that we must have. And if I can say, this is a major underlying theme in the book of Hebrews. It is not the major thing, but in an overall sense it is a major underlying theme. The exhortations in that book are for **us** to make sure that we change our focus, and to make sure that our focus is on the return of Jesus Christ and being **prepared** whenever that time comes. And not allowing this world to hammer away at our minds—taking up our life, our time, with things that should not be our concern.

Do we need some of the things that the world hits us with? Yes, we have to live. But we have to have enough understanding to not let them wear away, where they become a major part of our life. So the thrust of Jesus' exhortation is that we should be continually expecting His return. Apathetic people are in a stupor to the reality of their spiritual condition. And so He is warning us not to allow ourselves to become secure and self-satisfied with this life and the good things that it furnishes—but to **jolt** ourselves awake!

Now, let us go back to some familiar scriptures in Revelation 3 again—just to remind us of the Laodicean era, because we are living in it.

Revelation 3:15-17 I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I would that you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

It is a sad fact that this is the direction that the church is prophesied to move toward as we approach the end. There is a fairly close parallel between Laodiceanism and the Ephesian condition. Laodiceans are essentially without a proper feeling for God, and the truths of God. The condition has reached the place where they feel as though they no longer need them.

Now a warning here: None of this means that the Laodicean is a lazy person. They are rich and increased with goods. And one does not become "rich and increased with goods" by sitting on one's duff. But we see their strong feelings and their vigor are for the wrong things. Therefore, they are without proper convictions concerning the things of God. They are apathetic. They are drifting. They are blind, spiritually. How would a blind person be able to "make it" in a world that is loaded with all kinds of obstacles? They would step very gingerly, would they not, for fear of running into things. And they would run into things, because they are **blind**.

The Laodicean is not making progress toward the Kingdom of God. They have stopped. They are sliding backwards, just like the Ephesians. The problem with the Laodiceans is that their strong feelings are for the wrong things. Thus, without proper convictions about the things of God, they are apathetic and drifting.

In Hebrews, the apostle shows the overriding reasons why we can have hope for salvation. It is because we have access to God through a great High Priest who is living, who is able, and who wants to help. This is in contrast to the high priest of Judaism, who was subject to the same problems as the people that he was supposed to be helping and who could only administer death.

In addition to that, there was a ritualistic sacrificial system that was symbolic (that could not forgive sin, nor justify the sinner) and a covenant that contained no spiritual promises or hope. We have a *better* covenant, with *better* promises—justification through the blood of Christ, hope because He has already "made it" and He is at God's right hand. He administers the Spirit of God. He is able to give us strength and life.

There is a key word that needs to be in one's mind whenever you start studying through the book of Hebrews. The word is "**better**." The word might be "**superior**." The word might be "**greater**." All three can be used, because they indicate a comparison between what we have been given (either from the world, or even the religion of Judaism) with some other thing.

Hebrews 1:1-4 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds. Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Being made so much better [There is that word.] than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Hebrews 1:14 Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

The first chapter lays the foundation for the theme that is going to run through this entire book. *Christ is superior* to angels. In chapter one, the author lays his foundation for getting the readers to focus on **the message**. The message is important—not only because it is thrilling and of weighty content, but also because of from Whom it came. In times past, the message came through agents (intermediaries)—either angels or prophets that were sent. But this message came right from the top—the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Christ is **greater** (superior) to any angel or prophet. All of those who came before Jesus Christ are "inferiors."

And so, when God introduced His message through His Son, it was given from the very highest Source that it could possibly come from. Therefore, the intention of this is that we understand that this message requires that we give **the highest priority** to it than anything in life. **Nothing** supersedes the message that came from the Son of God. Nobody can give a message anywhere near as great.

The message that Moses gave was, of course, right and true; and it was powerful. But it is not to be compared with the message that came from the Son of God. That is the theme! Christ and what He has to give us (be it words, be it His ministrations as the High Priest, be it His death, be it His covenants)—it does not matter what it is, absolutely nothing in life can compare. We have been given *the most awesome gifts* that any human being could possibly be given.

That is the way he starts off—with a cannon going off! How dare we be apathetic toward this message! It is not stated, but that is what he meant. Do you not realize where this message came from? Right from the One for whom all things were created and by whom all things were created. The One that created Adam and Eve, the One that gave him the breath of life, and the One who right now sustains **you** with His power. And yet the world, and the pressures that it puts on us, has a way of turning our ear toward other things, does it not? And we—including myself—give in to it so often, so easily. It shames me.

In chapter two, we are given the very first indication of what motivated the writing of the book of Hebrews. Verse one begins, "Therefore..." You see, as a result of what he just said in chapter one. "Therefore," means here comes a conclusion.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

"Lest we should *let them slip*." There it is. That is where their sin lay. They were *neglecting* what they were given.

Hebrews 2:2-4 For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him. God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

The way that William Barclay has translated that first phrase is very interesting. He says, "We must, therefore, with very special intensity[which is just the opposite of 'apathy']pay attention to what we have heard."The wonderful message that these people heard was drifting from their minds.

This word "drift" (or "slip" as it is translated in the King James) is used of something that is negligently, carelessly, or thoughtlessly lost. It is used of a ring that slips from one's finger. It is used of a thought that is slipped into a conversation. Or a boat that slips away from the dock because the knot that was tied slips apart, and so it drifts away. It is used in Greek literature of something that slips from one's mind. So here we have a major warning for us today—as we enter the most distracting, enervating, and fearful time in man's history.

Now there is another picture here that I feel is equally compelling. That is of a man who is on a journey. He is carrying a goatskin. That is what they used, back in those days, to carry water inside. This man has a goatskin bag, filled with water, thrown over his shoulder. He intends to use the water that is in that bag, to refresh and reenergize himself, whenever it is needed. Anybody would do that who had to walk a long way on a journey. However, it is cracked. The goatskin bag is cracked, and the water is dripping out; and he does not know it. The water inside of it is slipping away. Finally, when he gets to the place where he wants to take a drink to refresh himself, he reaches back and his bag is empty. Nothing is left.

It sort of reminds you of the Ten Virgins and the oil. Half of them have none when they need it—because it has slipped away. They have been negligent of buying it from the sources that they could have gotten it from, whenever they had the time. But now the Bridegroom is coming, and they have no oil. That kind of oil cannot be transferred from one person to another. And so they have to desperately go out and get it on their own.

Hebrews 2:5-10 For unto the angels has He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place [David] testified, saying, "What is man, that You are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that you visit him? You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honor, and did set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Beginning in verse 5, the remainder of that chapter shows us what **a great future** is being carelessly cast aside by these people because of their apathy. God wants to fill His creation, His universe, with His children administering His government in every part of it. And right now, **our birthright** is this earth. We share in its inheritance—along with Abraham, because we are his children. We share it with Jesus Christ, because Jesus confirmed it for Abraham; so now we can inherit it.

There is a word here that is important. In verse 10, when it says *captain*, the word in the Greek is *archegos*. It means "founder" (one who founds something), "originator." It means, "head," "chief," "pioneer," "scout." It simply depends on the context in which it appears. An *archegos* is someone who begins something in order that others may enter it.

Jesus was enabled to become the *Archegos* through suffering. The suffering also, then, identifies **us** with Him—because we also suffer. It is a little poke in the ribs, by the author here, to let these people know that their suffering has purpose. It has meaning. It is not unusual. Therefore, we are not to allow it to cause us to become apathetic and lethargic in our dealings with the Word of God. Rather, we are to plunge ahead; knowing that our *Archegos*, the One who went before us, suffered too—in order that He might be made fit to be our High Priest. He had never experienced what it was like to be a human being. But He was going to be our High Priest. And so His Father in heaven made sure that Jesus went through experiences that made Him **feel for us**.

Thus, He was made perfect—fit for use. It does not mean "perfect" in the sense of "without flaw." It means fit for use; and that *use* is to ensure our salvation. And so we are to understand—by comparing ourselves with Him—that what we go through (all of these stresses that come upon us) are working an eternal purpose within us. They are for our good—to bring about the situation where we too are "perfect"—*fit for use* in His Kingdom.

He made it! He is already there. We can make it. It is a foregone conclusion in the mind of God that **we** can make it. He looks at things as though they were already accomplished. In His mind's eye, He has so much confidence in His own ability that He is sure that He can get us there. Somehow or another, He will bring that about—to make sure that we have whatever we need. And it is good for us to understand that our sufferings are not intended to produce apathy. Rather, they are intended, really, to prepare us and to produce excitement in knowing that the great God is working in us—and that He is preparing something that is going to be able to be *used eternally!*

Hebrews 3:1-2 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him that appointed Him. . .

There is another little reminder. If Christ was faithful, why cannot we be faithful? He was faithful in His sufferings.

Hebrews 3:2-6 Who was faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this Man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who has built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by some man; but He that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant [a slave], for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after. But Christ as a son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

Christ is greater, better, **superior** to Moses! Whoever the author was, he handled this very delicately—very nicely. He could have caused offense, by seemingly putting Moses down. Moses was held in very high regard by the Hebrew people, but here was One greater than Moses. And yet he was able to put it across in such a way that he showed that Moses, indeed, was faithful; but he was faithful as a servant within the house of which Jesus Christ is the Builder.

But notice the word "confidence" in verse 6. In Hebrews 4:16, the exact same word is translated **boldness!** These people were not rejoicing. And they were not bold any longer. Their apathy had them just sort of lying there, taking life in. They were observers, but they were not doers. They were neglecting what had been given to them. And so here is an exhortation: ***Be bold in overcoming and growing. Be confident in doing those things. And rejoice in the greatness of the message that we have been given.***

Like I said, you cannot receive a greater message than the one that you have been given. It just is not possible to hear any news that is any greater than what God is preparing for His children. Hebrews 3:7 begins an exhortation about what we should do—what we should extend our boldness and our confidence in.

Hebrews 3:7 Wherefore (as the Holy Spirit saith, "Today [Do not delay! Get started right now!] if you will hear His voice. . .

And then it goes on to exhort these people, through comparisons of what happened to the children of Israel in the wilderness and relating it to the kind of situation that they were going through. It is the Bible's way of saying, "You either use it, or you lose it." And they were in the process of losing it, but the writer was trying to get these people to **use it**. Then, as they used it, they would understand. What they lacked, in an overall sense, is stated in chapter 4.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear [meaning, be respectful], lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

They would not use it. They would not step out. They held back, because the bottom line was that they did not really believe it. Now we are getting to an issue. Do you believe what you are hearing from the Word of God? If you do not believe it, I guarantee that you will do nothing. We only do what we **believe**. Everybody in the world operates by this principle—they *do* what they *believe*!

But do they believe God? The answer is, "No." That is one reason that I began this Feast by saying what I did. "We are here because we believe." And because we believe in the right way, we **obey**. Do you know that, in chapter 3, Paul equates *belief* and *obedience* as being synonymous? That is a very interesting study. In that one sense (even though they are significantly different), the effect of one should be the product of the other.

And so Paul says essentially the same thing. That is why you will find words there, "belief, unbelief"; and then when you look in the margin, and it says "obedience" and "disobedience." The words can be taken either way. **We do what we believe**. Are you beginning to see the real problem here? The reason these people were apathetic (the reason these people were neglecting things) was because their belief system had undergone a serious change from the time that they first heard.

When Satan—as the tool of Almighty God—blew the Worldwide Church of God apart, he knew exactly how to do it. The way to do it is change the doctrines! When the doctrines change, the belief system changes. And, when the belief system changes, those who believe the same basic way will flock together. Those who believe other ways will also flock together. And those who believe a different way will flock together.

And that is what happened. We filtered our way into groups—very likely, I would have to say, with the guidance of God—into areas where our belief systems were very similar. And that is what happened to the Israelites there in the wilderness. They did not believe God, and they failed. They all died. That whole first generation died, as a result of their disbelief.

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight. But all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Basically, what this is saying is that the Word of God is always an issue in our life. Again, do not disconnect this from what I said at the beginning. This message that they heard was the most important thing that can be given to a human being. The greatest gift is to hear this message. Not John Ritenbaugh's message! I am talking about **the Gospel Message**—because it is around this that our belief system is to be conformed. And so the Word of God is always an issue in life. That is what these two verses are saying. It tests a person's life, because it sets the standards of acceptable behavior and attitudes. That is, those things that come from God.

Now there is a very vivid picture here in verse 13. There are two things that men have been able to find that this is generally used for in Greek literature. It pictures, on the one hand, a priest prepared to sacrifice an animal and he has turned the head of the animal up, to put it into a position to cut its throat. In other words, the animal had to look into the eyes of the executioner and the executioner had to look into the eyes of the animal. That is what it means when it says that "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

The second one is, in some ways, even more vivid. It was something that was drawn from the Olympic games. Wrestling was a part of the sports that were done during those games. And in this picture here, one of the competitors was about to be pinned by the other. And his opponent has a grip on him, so that the loser's shoulders are on the mat; and his face has been turned into an upright position—so that he has to look directly into the eyes of his conqueror.

Everybody has to face, directly, God's Word. And if we want to think of the Word of God as being the living Jesus Christ, we must always remember that judgment of us has been committed to Him. We all have to pass before the judgment seat of Christ. And we are doing it right now, because judgment is on the house of God.

What are we doing with the message? How is it affecting our lives? Is the world having such an impact upon us that it is creating *its fruit* in us? (That is, apathy toward the things of God, but maybe great interest toward the things of this world.) Like I said, the Laodicean is not lazy. He is rich in the wrong things, and expending his energy on the wrong things. And he tells God, "I have need of nothing."

In chapter five, the subject switches to a comparison between Christ as High Priest. That is, that He is superior to Aaron. In chapter five is the punch in the nose that Paul gave to those people there. Just think, if this epistle was written in the mid '60s AD, some of these people may have been in the church for thirty years. And yet he tells them that they have reverted, they have regressed, to being infants—babies who could no longer stand the meat of God's Word. They needed milk fed to them. And so he says (in verse one of chapter six), "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us **not go on to these simple things—the elementary things.**" It is a pretty harsh spiritual punch that he gives them.

There is a beautiful, vivid picture once again—in verse one—because where this verse says, "Let us go on to perfection." it more literally means "Let us be carried forward to perfection." It is God who calls. It is God who supplies His Spirit. He gives us everything. He enables us to do all these things. And so He says, "Let us be carried forward!" And the picture gets even more grandiose—because the real picture is of a tidal wave sweeping into the land, and carrying everything before it. Who is going to stop a tidal wave? This is just so vivid. Allow yourself to be *carried forward* by this tidal wave—by yielding to the Word of God.

In chapter seven, he uses the Melchizedek imagery. And in this case, he uses it because he wants to show us that the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ is **greater than** the Levitical priesthood.

In chapter eight, we get to the New Covenant. And the heart and core of what he has just said is this. (That is what that first phrase means.)

Hebrews 8:1 Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum. . .

The heart and core is that we have a priesthood without beginning or end, which was confirmed by an oath of God. That is founded on the personal greatness of Jesus Christ—not on a legal appointment, or racial qualification. It is a priesthood which death cannot touch. He has offered a sacrifice that need not be repeated. A priesthood so **pure** that it need not sacrifice for its own sins. Who in the Levitical priesthood, or the Aaronic high priesthood, can even begin to compare to that? There is nothing.

All of this, then, makes Jesus the Guarantor and the Mediator of a new and better covenant—which establishes a **better relationship with God**, through Him, with us (as God's children). It establishes access to God that does not depend upon our own achievement. It is a covenant with better promises—the forgiveness of sin, for one; the promise of His Holy Spirit, another; the promise of access to Him, as another.

I do not know whether or not we really appreciate what this all adds up to. That which Jesus Christ has done for man—this is the practical means of salvation. That is, in His dying for us, and what He now continues to do in His office of High Priest in the very presence of God, and this giving of access to us to the very throne of God through Jesus Christ. It is the relationship that we now have with God (through the covenant, through the work of Christ) which provides salvation.

In chapter nine is the first of a series of verses showing the inadequacies, the insufficiencies, of the Old Testament system. There is no access to God, no forgiveness. Christ's sacrifice not only cleanses us from sin, but it also opens access to God.

Chapter ten shows the insufficiency of animal sacrifice as compared to the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. Again—better, superior, greater! At the end of chapter ten, he says:

Hebrews 10:35-39 Cast not away therefore your confidence [which is what they were doing], which has great recompense of reward. For you have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith. But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure with him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Everything in this book is so wonderfully and psychologically arranged in building to a climax, and chapter eleven is the beginning of the climax. He has made his statements about the greatness and superiority of Jesus Christ, His message, His priesthood, His sacrifice and all of the things that go with that. Of course, chapter eleven gives us the reasons that made it possible for those great men and women of the past to do what they did. They **believed God**. That is all it comes down to.

They were convicted about the things that God said. It was not a mere preference that they had. Do you know the difference between a *preference* and a *conviction*? Your preferences will change. They

can be adjusted. Convictions about truth do not change. And at the end of chapter eleven, he starts naming other people whose lives were impacted by faith in the message that they heard.

Hebrews 11:35 Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance.

What an important principle there is. But how were these apathetic people accepting deliverance from the trials of life? They ran from them. They did not rise to meet the challenge. They accepted deliverance. They accepted the easy way out. And rather than make the sacrifice to make sure that they were **faithful** to the message that they had been given, they would simply back away from it. That relieves the pressure. They accepted deliverance.

Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

Hebrews 12:4 You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

It was not a bloody thing that they were involved in; but they were 'losing it,' just as surely as anything. They were losing the **psychological battle** that was going on, because of the pressures of the times (which they were giving into). And it almost seems as though these people, who had formerly been pilgrims and marching with great strength toward the great goal that God has set before us, had now reached the place where they were merely strolling along. They were comfortable—perhaps with the feeling, "Well, I agree with God; and therefore I have it made." Then Paul brings Esau into this.

Hebrews 12:12-16 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down [Does that not give you a picture of tiredness?], and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby may be defiled. Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

I bring this up because Esau accepted deliverance. His stomach or his appetites were crying out to him to be fed, to be taken care of. And he ended up giving up his *birthright*—something **exceedingly important**—for a bowl of soup. That was his "deliverance." Have any of **us** done that yet? I do not know. But it at least tells us the way Paul (or whoever the author of Hebrews was) felt. (Of course, the ultimate Author is God.) Esau gave up.

Hebrews 12:25-27 See that you refuse not Him that speaks [God, through Jesus Christ]. For if they escape not who refused Him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaks from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." And this word, "Yet once more," signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Can your convictions be shaken? What a series of exhortations there are in this book! We did not even begin to touch them all. Really powerful stuff, for this age of God's church.

Through much of chapter 13, he points out specific areas to work on: Brotherly love, entertaining (being hospitable), remember them that are in bonds and suffer adversity as being yourself also in the body. Work on your marriage! It is honorable, a gift from God. The main "work area" for getting prepared for God's Kingdom is your marriage.

Hebrews 13:5 Let your [conduct] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as you have: for He has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you."

Later on he talks about giving the sacrifice of praise to God, and being thankful for the things that we have received. There is much there, in this chapter.

I want you to look that last phrase in verse five again—"I will never leave you, nor forsake you." According to Adam Clarke, this verse is peculiarly emphatic. He says that there are five negatives in this short sentence, so that a literal translation is scarcely possible. But it goes something like this: "No, I will not leave you. No, neither will I not utterly forsake you." In common language, if we had to write that into English, it says: "***I will never, never, never, never, NEVER leave you.***" What an exhortation! What a promise from the great God!

"Get off your duff," He is telling these people, "and get to work! Throw off your apathy. Do the things that need to be done." Some of us may feel "punch drunk"—having to hang on, just to keep on going. But give yourself time to somehow readjust your focus. This is no time to drop the ball. We have a wonderful promise that He will never leave us. Christ is alive, and He loves us. It is His will that we be in His Kingdom. And He wants to make the most of us that He possibly can.

Be patient! Guard against being emotionally drawn onto twiggly things. All of us—every single one of us—have a part in this drama that is unfolding on earth. But men, you see, come and go. Jesus Christ is the real Leader; and He is the same "yesterday, today, and forever." He is permanent. His preeminence is forever. His leadership is forever. He is **faithful** in following the patterns that He has established in His Word.

So, take heart. Fight your problems. Do not give in to apathy. That is, the apathy that the world induces. Do not accept the easy deliverance, which the carnal mind and this world offer. God will help, as only He can. And when your problems are over, you are going to say, "I didn't do it. **The Lord is my Helper.**"