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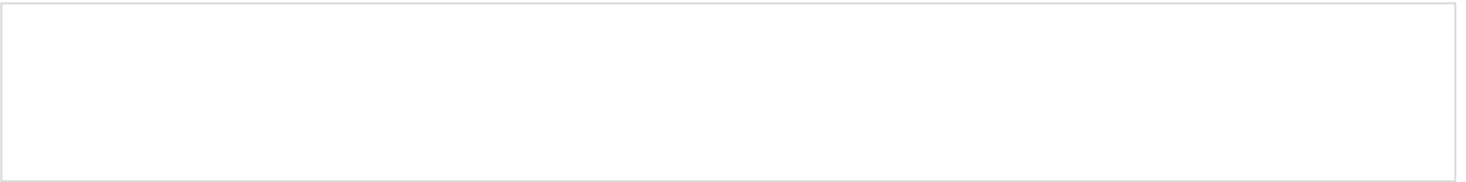
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Verse 1

**DIVISION VII**

(Hebrews 12:1-13:25)

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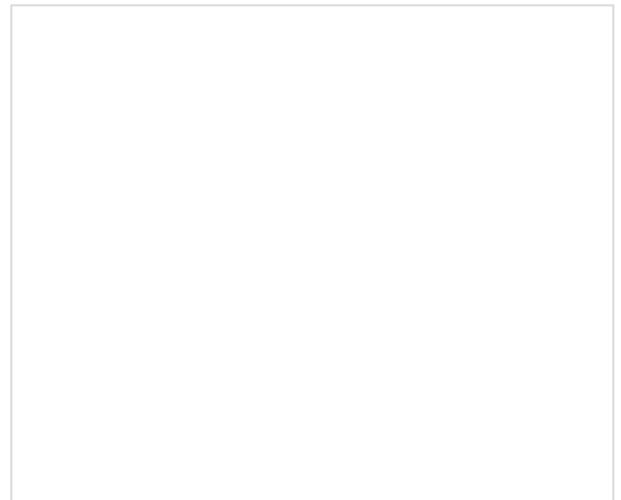
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## CHRIST'S EXPECTATIONS OF BETTER SERVICE FROM US

This final division of Hebrews is a sustained exhortation designed to establish wavering Christians more firmly in faith. In preceding chapters, the Christ has already been exalted as the source of available power in believers, and his superiority over anything available to the ancient heroes of the Old Testament has been stressed repeatedly. This great privilege and power should result in a more faithful community of believers in the love and service of God.

**VARIOUS EXHORTATIONS;**

**THE RACE OF LIFE;**

**THE CHASTENING OF BELIEVERS FOR THEIR CORRECTION;**

**A WARNING FROM EXAMPLE OF ESAU;**

**MOUNT ZION CONTRASTED WITH SINAI**

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

## THE FIFTH EXHORTATION

Here begins the fifth and last of a series of grand exhortations in this epistle, all of them having a single purpose, which was to check the threatened defection of Christians back to Judaism. The author achieved a marvelous urgency in his words and argument. The great exhortations exhibit his purpose in writing; and of all the considerations called forth from their history and from their scriptures had only one design, namely, to keep them in the holy faith. The success of the inspired author is evident in the fact that for nearly two thousand years it has been practically impossible for Christians to be proselyted to Judaism; and yet that was the big problem confronted by the author of Hebrews. True, his readers had grown up in Judaism, or at least were of Jewish background and sentiments; but the judgment of

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history can only confirm the success of Hebrews in achieving its purpose.

The analogy brought forward in this exhortation is between a foot race, such as those seen in the great Olympic games, and the race of life. This type of comparison was used a number of times by Paul; and the appearance of that apostle's favorite metaphor in this epistle surely suggests his authorship of it.

**A great cloud of witnesses** has primary application to the imposing list of Old Testament heroes just detailed in the preceding chapter; and, in the metaphor of a great athletic contest before a vast throng in a coliseum, these witnesses correspond to the spectators; but there is much difference of opinion regarding the question of whether the inspired writer intends to say that the departed faithful actually see and know all that subsequent generations do, or if, on the other hand, it is only a figure of speech, such as Napoleon used when he told his army in Egypt, "Soldiers, forty centuries are looking down on your deeds today!"

Barnes said of this expression, "It is a figurative representation, such as is common, and means that we ought to act **AS IF** they were in sight."<sup>[1]</sup> Lenski also rejects the concept of the ancient worthies as spectators, saying, "The souls of the saints are at rest; they are no longer concerned about the trials that occur on earth."<sup>[2]</sup> Macknight wrote, "The apostle did not mean to insinuate that the saints in the other world know what we are doing in this."<sup>[3]</sup> Cargill went so far as to say, "The word `witness' never means spectator."<sup>[4]</sup> It is certain that Cargill's view is not sustained by passages like these: "Confess the good confession before many witnesses" (2 Timothy 6:12), where the witnesses of Timothy's confession were necessarily spectators, else they could not have been witnesses; and the same thing is true in this epistle (Hebrews 10:28) where the mention of "two or three witnesses" requires that they too be understood as spectators. The purpose here is not to list the opposite views of scholars but to show the uncertainty of the meaning. Alford, as quoted by Milligan, affirmed that "They who have entered into the heavenly rest are conscious of what passes among

ourselves." Milligan approved that view, saying, "The spirits of the just made perfect are real witnesses of our conduct."<sup>[5]</sup> Westcott, Dummelow, and Bruce also find the meaning of "spectators" in the word, while admitting that it has other meanings as well. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has purposely used a word here that is not intended to be fully comprehended until God shall make all plain. On the question of whether the righteous dead know exactly what Christians in this age are doing, this verse, at best, could give only an intimation, and would have to be understood in the light of all else that the scriptures say on this subject. The conversation of Christ with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:30) is enlightening on this point. The view most nearly corresponding to that of this writer is the one expressed by Westcott, who said:

At the same time it is impossible to exclude the thought of spectators in the amphitheater ... These champions of old occupy the place of spectators, but they are more than spectators. They are spectators who interpret to us the meaning of our struggle, and who bear testimony to the certainty of our success if we strive lawfully (2 Timothy 2:5).<sup>[6]</sup>

**Lay aside every weight** is the order for all who would win in the Christian race. There are two classes of impediments to be avoided by the successful contender in the race of life, the first of these being "weights," as mentioned here. This class of hindrance includes just about everything that can get in the way, or impede the Christian contender's progress. Things not bad at all in themselves, but which, in the last analysis, hinder the work of the child of God must all be cast aside. Just as the runner in a race travels as lightly as possible, the Christians must avoid being weighted down with all kinds of worldly duties and commitments. What do Christians do with their time? There is the vacation cottage, the fraternal lodge, the club, the political party, the yacht, the alumni organization, the board of directors, the governing committee, the bridge club, the country club, the volunteer group, the P.T.A., the board of elections, the chamber of commerce, and a list of associations for almost any conceivable purpose, many

of them no doubt worthy - but whatever one's views about any or all such things, one fact is certain, no man can do all that and be a good Christian too! Far too many children of the King allow their time, talent, and money to be preempted by secondary things, things that must be recognized as "weights," when understood in the light of their effect on dedication to Christ and his cause on earth.

**And the sin which doth so easily beset us** is the second class of hindrance the Christian contender must avoid. It refers to conduct inherently unrighteous, which is always a mortal enemy of faith. Nowhere else in the New Testament is the word equivalent to "easily besetting" to be found; and various views of what is meant by the expression have been advanced. The word from which such a modifier of "sin" comes is akin to the word "circumstance." As Bristol noted, "The Latin translation is `circumstans', denoting something that surrounds."<sup>[7]</sup> Adam Clarke observed this and defined the besetting sin accordingly, thus, "The well-circumstanced sin; that which has everything in its favor, time, and place, and opportunity."<sup>[8]</sup> If a paraphrase may be ventured, perhaps it means, "Lay aside the sin that is always so conveniently close to us."

**Run with patience the race that is set before us.** Cargill described the race Christians must run as "Neither a saunter nor a stroll, but a race, a difficult struggle"; he also said, "The word for `race' is [*@agona*] from which we get `agony.' The race of life is an agonizing, grueling course and requires Christian endurance if one is to win."<sup>[9]</sup> "Patience," then, is not merely sitting down and waiting until something happens. It means endurance and the power of perseverance, including the ability to finish what is begun. This metaphor of the race of life was especially dear to Paul who found a place for it in the last letter he ever wrote, saying, "I have finished the course, etc." (2 Timothy 4:7). Other Pauline passages involving use of this metaphor are 1 Corinthians 9:24ff; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 2:16; and 2 Timothy 2:5.

## **THE CHRISTIAN RACE**

The metaphor comparing the Christian life to a race has the following Biblically supported analogies: (1) The contender must be legally enrolled in a contest in order to win: the Christian must contend lawfully by belonging to the church and accepting full obligations of Christian service (2 Timothy 2:5). (2) Some win and some do not (1 Corinthians 9:24). (3) For the contender in an athletic contest, discipline is an absolute prerequisite of success; the Christian runner, too, must lay aside every weight and the ever-convenient sin in order to win (Hebrews 12:1). (4) A host of spectators watch a race in the coliseum; the spirits of the just behold the efforts of the Christian contender (Hebrews 12:1). (5) Patience is required of both the athletic contestant and the Christian, endurance being necessary to win in both cases. (6) The winner is rewarded, the earthly contender with a perishable reward, the Christian with an eternal reward (1 Corinthians 9:25). (7) The analogy becomes a contrast in the matter of how many may win. In the earthly contest, only one receives the prize; but in the heavenly contest, every man may do so, since his victory does not depend upon any relationship between his achievement and the achievement of his fellow contestant. If he runs well, he may win; if all run well, all may win! How much better to run in such a contest where all may win.

[1] Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1963), Hebrews, p. 292.

[2] R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938), p. 424;

[3] James Macknight, Apostolic Epistles (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1960), p. 568.

[4] Robert L. Cargill, Understanding the Book of Hebrews (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), p. 115.

[5] R. Milligan, New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1962), Vol. 9, p. 341.

[6] Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing

Company, 1965), p. 391.

[7] Lyle O. Bristol, Hebrews, A Commentary (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: The Judson Press, 1967), p. 157.

[8] Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Holy Bible (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1829), Vol. 6, p. 776.

[9] Robert L. Cargill, op. cit., p. 114.

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## Verse 2

**Looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured on the cross, despising the shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Above the great cloud of witnesses is the great King himself, Jesus our Lord; and, although some doubt may prevail concerning the ability of the other witnesses mentioned to behold our trials, there is no doubt about this in regard to Christ. Indeed he does see, know, understand, and eternally intercede on our behalf that we might indeed win the prize. How wonderful is the contrast between such a spectator of our trials as Jesus and the vile Roman emperor, sitting in the stands of the Coliseum, dispensing life or death in heartless, capricious disregard of every virtue, and with total indifference to the human feelings and emotions of the contestants. Jesus is on our side. He died for us, beholds our trials, is sympathetic with our condition; and his holy desire is for our glorious success. He suffered and was tempted in every way as are we; but he prevailed and passed through such things to joy unspeakable and full of glory; and looking unto him, as here admonished, is the means of finding grace to follow his blessed example. "Looking unto Jesus" means focusing all of one's spiritual vision upon the Lord; for it is true of us, no less than of Peter, that our strength is in beholding the Saviour; and just like Peter, who as long as he looked to the Lord walked on the sea, but who diverted his attention and began to sink, so long as Christians keep the Lord in view, they shall prevail over every trial (Matthew 14:30).

**The author and perfecter of our faith** means "captain and perfecter," or as in the **KJV**, "the author and finisher" of our faith. Christ did not merely preach faith as an obligation for others but was himself a perfect demonstration of the life of faith while living in the limitations of the flesh, in spite of all the oppositions of the kingdom of evil. During his earthly ministry, Jesus exhibited true faith in all his actions without availing himself of any of the personal advantages derived from his supernatural powers. Thus, he performed no miracle for his own benefit, feeding his faith with the same word of God available to all, and having recourse to prayer, just like all other men, and even choosing not to know certain things, such as, for example, the day and hour of the end of the world (Matthew 24:36). In the sense, then, of having lived it to the fullest, Jesus perfected our faith, and, in addition, made the atoning sacrifice and built the institution which he called "my church" as a sanctuary for all who believe him.

**Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, ...** sets forth the means of Christ's power to endure the cross. It was from the full knowledge of the joy that would flow out of his victory. For the sake of setting the shame and the joy in proper contrast, we shall note the shame first. It is nearly impossible for modern man, so far removed from the event, to appreciate the full and dreadful meaning of the cross. Paul struggled to shock people's minds on this very point, reminding the Galatians that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:33).

The death of our Lord upon the cross cast a heavenly glow even upon the rude and terrible instrument itself, encircled it with the nimbus of light and salvation, and made it to glow in the conscience of all mankind for two millenniums. Therefore, today, when people think of the cross, they think of that which is sacred in the song and story of two thousand years, that which is fashioned in gold and worn as an ornament of the good and the beautiful, that which stands in the most honored places of the world's greatest cathedrals, and that which has



become a symbol of love, mercy and truth. It is lifted to the sky atop a thousand thousand houses of worship all over the world; and it crowns the highest mountains, "towering o'er the wrecks of time." It is painted on canvas, woven in tapestry, depicted in glass, engraved upon precious metals, and fashioned in costly jewels. It provides the most recurrent theme in the literature and music of Western civilization; and, in view of all this, it cannot be surprising that people fail to appreciate the shame of the cross, as intended by the author of Hebrews. In the days when our Lord confronted the cross and perished upon it, it symbolized the very opposite of all those glories associated with it ever since. It stood for degrading, humiliating, shameful, and horrible death, and for all the crimes, debaucheries, treacheries and brutal sins of which the cross was the penalty. Christ deeply felt the ignominy and repugnance associated with the cross and found the ability to endure it only by the contemplation of a greater joy that loomed beyond it, a joy that Christ himself would possess in superlative measure, and likewise a joy that would be made available to the millions of earth who would accept it.

**The joy that was set before him** was the joy of reversing, at last, the tragic defeat of humanity in the Paradise of Eden; the joy of knowing that Satan's purpose of destroying man was foiled; the joy of "bringing many sons unto glory" (Hebrews 2:10); the joy of the saved entering heaven "with songs of everlasting joy upon their heads" (Isaiah 35:10); the joy of the herald angels' "tidings of great joy to all people" (Luke 2:10); and such marvelous joy that, in truth, no vocabulary may describe it, no rhetoric suggest it, or finite mind fully conceive of it. Placed in the balances of consideration, and weighed against the epic sufferings our Lord passed through, that unspeakable joy overwhelmingly prevailed. It was precisely this type of weighing one thing against another that Paul had in mind when he wrote the Corinthians, "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

**And hath sat down at the right hand of God** - this expression was discussed under Hebrews 1:3.

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### *Verse 3*

**For consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against himself, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls.**

For notes on "consider," see under 3:1. It is no casual or nonchalant notice by mortals that our Lord is entitled to receive, or that will benefit them that look unto Jesus; but it is an intense, sustained and focal attention that people should give to Jesus, never relaxing or diminishing it until they have known him in the forgiveness of sins. What is said here of the "gainsaying of sinners" is no mere reminder of such things as the Lord experienced, but a warning for Christians to be on guard against the same kind of opposition today. The victory which the Lord promised his followers over "gainsayers" (Luke 21:15) derives from the knowledge of the scriptures (Titus 1:9) and was listed as one of the qualifications of an elder. Gainsaying is a verbal attack upon a believer for the purpose of destroying his faith, and it means "to oppose, contradict, deny, controvert, or dispute." Those who resort to gainsaying are among the most despicable of mankind; for, having no faith of their own, they resort to all kinds of pettiness, quibbling, murmuring, complaining, and questioning regarding the faith of others. Stung by the serpent in their own consciences, deformed by sin, and unwilling to seek the healing of their own shame, they have recourse to a vile assault upon the faith of others, not hesitating to distort, misrepresent, pervert, or deny the most sacred truth in efforts to gain their unworthy objective.

The classical example of gainsayers were the Pharisees, especially as presented in the gospel by Matthew. They maliciously contradicted Jesus; and the record of our Lord's patient endurance of their slanderous and shameful opposition is a source of encouragement for those of any age who must deal with the cunning deceit of the gainsayer, whose strategy, in the final analysis,

boils down to this, that they will simply wear the believer out, if possible, causing him, at last, to faint and fall away. The apostles warned the Christians against fainting, and here is a good place to note that phenomenon a little more closely.

## ON FAINTING

Paul said, "Let us not be weary in well-doing; for, in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). The Christian who faints becomes a spectacular failure, sometimes throwing a whole church into consternation, this being true both physically and spiritually. Once, this writer was the visiting evangelist for a campaign at University Avenue Church of Christ, Austin, Texas; where on the last night of a gospel meeting, as the congregation stood to sing the hymn of encouragement, a young woman fainted and fell prostrate in the center aisle! The singing stopped, and there were calls, "Is there a doctor in the house?" Four men carried the lady over the platform and into a side room (in the old building). Fortunately, the lady revived, but we were never able to revive that service! It has often occurred to our thoughts that such a physical case of fainting is an excellent illustration of its spiritual counterpart. One moment, a man is a part of the community of faith, making a contribution to the services and to the forward progress of the church; but then he faints; and suddenly he is a help no more, but it takes the time and attention of several others to minister to him! Certainly, the man who faints in the service of Christ not only suffers disastrous consequences to himself, but becomes a tax and burden upon others also.

What are the causes of fainting? (1) The arrogance of wicked men was a hindrance that brought the Psalmist near to fainting (Psalms 73:1-3). (2) Hunger and thirst, physically, can cause fainting; and the same is true spiritually (Psalms 107:5). People long separated from Bible study, prayer, and preaching tend to faint. (3) Adversity can cause one to faint (Proverbs 24:10). (4) Sin causes fainting (Lamentations 1:22). (5) Fear sometimes results in fainting (Luke 21:26), especially fear of men and of what they may do. (6) The chastening of the Lord can be an occasion of fainting, as the author

of Hebrews pointed out a moment later (Hebrews 12:5). (7) In the physical world, some dreadful disease, such as cancer, can cause men to faint; and this has its counterpart spiritually; and, in a world where there are all kinds of pernicious doctrines of men denying every truth taught in God's word, once such evil teaching enters the heart, it can cause fainting and death.

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## Verse 4

**Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.**

The sufferings of Christ, even unto death, are here contrasted with the sufferings of the Hebrews; and the interjection of the word "yet" appears to be the bluntest kind of warning that such a dreadful experience may indeed be waiting for them, just ahead. Westcott said:

This statement is in no way opposed to the view that the epistle was addressed to the Palestinian church out of which St. Stephen and St. James had suffered martyrdom.<sup>[10]</sup>

Addressed to the second generation of Hebrew Christians, this epistle would gain deeper significance in calling to remembrance the first generation martyrs by the reminder that his readers had not yet crowned their faith after the example of Stephen and James. Sin is personified in this verse, being represented as the antagonist of Christians; and so it is. Some of the struggles of faith are against people, but the great struggle is against sin.

### ENDNOTE:

[10] Brooke Foss Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

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## Verse 5

**And ye have forgotten the exhortation which reasoneth with you as with sons, My son, regard not**

**lightly the chastening of the Lord, Nor faint when thou art reprov'd of him; For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, And scourges every son whom he receiveth.**

This quotation is from Proverbs 3:11,12, and it is here applied forcefully to all citizens of the new institution. The exhortation, in this reference, takes a new turn. He had just been speaking of the fact that they had not been required to seal their faith with their blood; but now he stresses that even the hardships and sufferings which they did experience, far from being anything unusual, were exactly what they should have expected; and he charges them with having forgotten that the sufferings of Christians are grounded in the benevolent purpose of God who imposes upon his children the kind of chastening that will strengthen and correct them. The doctrine of the chastening of God is neglected today; and it is likely that some have scarcely heard of it; but, of course, it is a valid teaching of the scriptures, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament; and the knowledge of it in Christian hearts can be the source of glorious light on many a dark day.

### **THE CHASTENING OF GOD**

The nature of chastisement is explicit in the diversity of troubles and sorrows that are imposed by the Lord upon his children, usually in the sense that he allows such things to befall them, with the holy and benevolent intention of improving the quality of their spiritual lives. An Old Testament example is Job who suffered the loss of wealth, loved ones, reputation, health, and honor - all upon the specific permission of God. David also suffered chastening in the matter of Shimei's throwing stones and cursing the king (2 Samuel 16:9ff); and David's submissiveness to that sore trial was evidenced by his saying, "The Lord hath bidden him." It is, therefore, a mistake for the Christian to view his tribulations in a sense of stoicism, or as a result of blind chance, or as the operation of the law of averages. There is an eternal purpose of God toward his children; and that purpose is personal and corrective - such is the meaning of chastisement. The full nature of it is revealed in that it wears many faces, appearing and reappearing in an

infinite pattern of sorrows and hardships. It is the experience of all of God's children, there being no exceptions whatever, the absence of it denoting no favoritism on God's part, but the illegitimacy of the one apparently favored. It is a severe experience, as revealed by such a word as "scourgeth," applied to it here, and is not to be understood as any mock trial or superficial difficulty; but the child of God is confronted with actual tribulations designed to test the hearts of all them that pass through them. The chastening of Israel (Isaiah 1:5,6) showed "wounds and bruises"; and the true Christian bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus (Galatians 6:16).

The purpose of chastisement, as revealed in the following verses, is totally benevolent and springs from the infinite love of God for his weak and sinful human children. Three designs are involved: (1) that of correcting our faults; (2) strengthening our faith; and (3) promoting our eternal welfare. It is not God's will that his children should have everything they desire in this life. Riches and luxuries may cause pride to flourish in the heart; success in life's various projects may cause people to trust in themselves; and even true righteousness may lead to despising others; but against all such eventualities, the chastening rod of the Lord is upon the believer.

The response of Christians to chastisement is fourfold: (1) The child of God must not despise it (Hebrews 12:5). (2) He must not faint under the impact of it. See above under the subject of "Fainting." An example of how not to respond to chastening is that of Peter, when Jesus permitted Satan to "sift" him, that being only another name for chastening (Luke 22:31). Peter's response to it at first was to faint, but he quickly recovered. (3) He must submit to it (Hebrews 12:9), saying at all times and under all circumstances, "O Lord, thy will, not mine, be done." He must not murmur nor complain. (4) He must be exercised thereby (Hebrews 12:11), meaning that he shall cooperate with the divine purpose and strive for the deepening and strengthening of his faith under the chastening circumstances, giving God the glory, and making sure that he appropriates the profit the Lord intended him to have as a result of it.

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## Verse 7

**It is for chastening that ye endure; God dealeth with you as sons; for what son is there whom his father chasteneth not?**

The chastening of sons by their fathers has gone out of style in the current generations; and, had these lines been addressed to the present age, they might well have been reversed, "What son is it whom his father does chasten?" Our age is the loser, however, in the abandonment of a principle old as humanity and which carries the sanction of divine approval. During a total eclipse of the sun in 1970, a beautiful young girl, age 13, was told by her mother not to look directly at the sun; but in the true spirit of a generation raised on Dr. Benjamin Spock's formula of permissiveness, the young lady gazed at the sun intently for several minutes, and was totally blinded for life by the experience. She had never been chastened, at least not effectively; and now she must endure the frightful penalty of a life of darkness. Ninety-one teenagers in New York City have perished from the use of drugs in five months; and for the vast majority of them, if indeed not for every one of them, the reason for their tragic death was lack of discipline and correction.

Speaking of Dr. Spock's influence upon the parents of America in this era, it is perhaps among the most shameful delusions of the present day. There are literally hundreds of child-abuse cases before the New York City judges every month, the average being over three hundred monthly; and, in the absolutely bestial conduct of parents involved, one may read the result of the permissive rearing of children. Sure, a **DISCIPLINED** parent may exhibit the self-control and humiliating subordination to the willful disobedience of a child brought up on the Spock principle; but when that child, in turn, becomes a parent, he does not merely by the biological experience of parenthood suddenly become a disciplined father or mother; no, indeed, such a parent is still the spoiled brat, as exemplified by the conduct of a

father living three-quarters of a mile from where these words are written, who became vexed at the conduct of his little five year-old daughter, hung her up to the shower curtain rod and beat the flesh off her bones with the buckle end of his belt! The child's screams aroused neighbors who called the police, but the pitiful victim was dead on arrival at the hospital. Christian parents who believe our age has discovered a substitute for the discipline taught in the scriptures, a discipline that God himself enforces upon his own spiritual children, and which, in the verses before us, is presented as an eternal aspect of God's law, such parents will succeed only in multiplying the number of delinquents until, unless checked, the ruin of the whole civilized order could result.

Certainly, God does not intend, in a spiritual sense, that his children shall approach the ultimate test without the advantage of the corrective blessing of heavenly discipline.

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## Verse 8

**But if ye are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.**

This is only to say that there are no exceptions, that God does not overlook any of his children in meting out the needed chastening; and that, should there appear to be any omissions, it is not a mark of divine favor but a total rejection and alienation from God.

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## Verse 9

**Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of Spirits and live?**

Hebrews 12:7-11 are actually commentary on Proverbs 3:11,12; and coming from the pen of inspiration, the light shed on this subject is most helpful. In this verse,



the contrast is between the fathers of our bodies and the Father of our spirits; and, as Barmby noted,

If a dutiful child submits patiently to the chastisements of his earthly parents, although he has derived only his body from them, how much more submissively should we bear the divine corrections, seeing they proceed from him from whom alone we have received our spiritual and immortal nature!<sup>[11]</sup>

#### **ENDNOTE:**

[11] J. Barmby, *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), Vol. 21, Hebrews, p. 366.

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### **Verse 10**

**For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good for them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.**

The punishment imposed by earthly parents is, at best, subject to error and to its admixture with caprice, anger and other elements of parental shortcoming; but the chastening of God is never unreasonable, never more than the child of God can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13), and is never imposed from any unworthy motive on the part of God. It is solely for the profit and ultimate holiness of the recipient.

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### **Verse 11**

**All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness.**

Several things appear here. The chastening of God is not expected to be a pleasant or delightful experience, but

"grievous," its purpose being to "exercise" the believer by forcing him to adapt to straitened, hazardous, painful, sorrowful, or discouraging circumstances; and its purpose being the ennoblement of spiritual life, the strengthening of character, and the enhancing of the prospect of eternal life. The most wonderful people on earth are those who have passed through the chastening experiences of life, whose faith, love, and understanding and sympathy are grounded in the true love of God and man; and whose lives, as a result, have been expanded and beautified.

'Tis sorrow builds the shining ladder up,  
Whose golden rounds are our calamities,  
Whereon our firm feet planting, nearer God,  
The spirit climbs, and hath its eyes unsealed.

- James Russel Lowell

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## Verse 12

**Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the palsied knees; and make straight paths for your feet, that that which is lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed.**

Here, once more, as throughout the first twelve verses of this chapter, the image of the great Olympian contest is the vision in the author's mind; thus, the limp, relaxed hands and the palsied knees bring to mind a boxer who is "out on his feet," or a runner who is about to falter in the race. See Isaiah 35:3 which has nearly this same language.

**Make straight paths for your feet** again suggests the language of Isaiah 35, and is a reference to encouragement of the weak and faltering by smoothing the way before them. It is the stronger members of the believing community who are to do this, or at least take the lead in it. In view of the difficulties and temptations through which all must pass, every Christian should be concerned with removing obstacles, in every way possible, from the course of his fellow believers. Perhaps, if their paths are made "straight," even the

lame, the feeble, and the injured may yet press on to victory. The tenderness of these lines is moving.

The exhortation thus far has dealt with the metaphor of the great athletic contest in such a place as the ancient Coliseum, with a digression in Hebrews 12:5-13 for the discussion of chastening; but, in the next verse, the author leaves the athletic metaphor and states the same urgent exhortation in more classical terms.

Before leaving the teaching here, as it concerns chastening, it should be remembered that here is an explanation of many of the tribulations that come to God's faithful children. Here is the theological framework underlying the words of Paul who said, "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Also, our Lord did not say, "Blessed are ye **IF** men shall reproach you," but "Blessed are ye **WHEN** men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matthew 5:11).

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## Verse 14

**Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord.**

**Follow after** is translated "pursue" by some and carries with it the idea of diligence and urgency, "peace" being personified here and designated as the quarry which people are to pursue.

**Peace with all men** is the objective of Christians at all times and places. Jesus gave his blessing to the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), and Paul commanded believers to be at peace with all men, "if it be possible" (Romans 12:18). The same qualifier, as to its possibility, is present by implication here, since both peace and sanctification are to be sought, and since true holiness sometimes makes peace difficult if not impossible of attainment.

**Sanctification** is a reference to practical holiness as manifested by the pure and virtuous lives of God's

children, being that state of life at the opposite pole from the sins enumerated in the next verse. It does not refer to any so-called second blessing, or special endowment of the child of God, making him invulnerable to temptation, or giving him any advantage not enjoyed by all Christians.

**Without which no man shall see the Lord ...** These words show the vital necessity of the peaceable and holy lives of Christians. The holy life is not an elective or optional matter for Christians, but is demanded and required of all who hope to enter heaven. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8); none others need apply.

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## *Verse 15*

**Looking carefully lest there be any man that falleth short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.**

This verse emphasizes that God's grace which has appeared to all people (Titus 2:12) and brought salvation to the world, may yet be ineffective in some because of their failure to abide by the conditions upon which salvation is offered. It should be noted that it was not merely the faith of those which the author questioned, but their conduct.

**Root of bitterness** is reference to an evil man, as Macknight said, "A root of bitterness is a person, utterly corrupted, and who by his errors and vices corrupts others."<sup>[12]</sup> Likewise, Westcott said of a bitter root that it is "a pernicious man, not a pernicious opinion."<sup>[13]</sup> The analogy between a man and a root, as required by this metaphor, is interesting. Christ himself was called a root (Revelation 22:16), though, of course, not a bitter root. He is called the "root and offspring of David," the unique Saviour of mankind, and in the same verse, "the bright and morning star." Thus, the bitter root of this passage is the opposite of Christ. The fitness of the application of this metaphor is seen in the comparisons below.

## **THE ROOT AND THE STAR**

The contrast between a root and a star is little short of infinite; and only an inspired author could ever have dared to combine the two metaphors and refer both of them to Christ in a single verse of scripture (Revelation 22:16): (1) There is the contrast between what is **NEAR** and what is **FAR**. (2) There is the contrast between what is **INVISIBLE** and what is **VISIBLE**. (3) There is the contrast between the **EARTHLY** and the **HEAVENLY**. (4) There is the contrast between the **LOCAL** and the **UNIVERSAL**. A root is a local thing, while a star transverses the galaxy. (5) There is the contrast between the **SLOW** and the **SWIFT**. A root does not even appear to move; a star travels many thousands of miles per second! (6) There is a contrast between the **SMALL** and the **GREAT**. (7) There is the contrast between the **LOW** and the **HIGH**. Any student will quickly see how Christ, in one sense or another, is all of these things.

Now the root of bitterness, taking the first of each pair of contrasts above, is a small, local, earthly, invisible, low character, working slowly and very near believers; and the aptness of such a person's being called a root of bitterness is seen in the astounding results of evil that can be produced by such a person, through whom the many may be defiled. One little root is capable of producing a mighty tree.

[12] James Macknight, op. cit., p. 570.

[13] Brooke Foss Westcott, op. cit., p. 407.

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## Verse 16

**Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one mess of meat sold his own birthright.**

On the question of whether or not Esau was a fornicator, it may be observed that the Old Testament does not so designate him, nor is the deduction that he was, mandatory from the teaching of this verse. The answer turns upon the intent of the modifying phrase, "as Esau." Does it apply to "fornicator" as well as to "profane person"? Relying solely upon the Genesis account of Esau and the ordinary implications of the word

"profane," it would appear to be a safe speculation that Esau was both profane and an adulterer, each sin being inherent in the other.

## **FORNICATION**

The command, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," as it stands in the Decalogue, is likewise binding upon Christians, with the added condition that the thoughts and attitudes antecedent to that sin are also forbidden. No situational ethics can justify transgression of this law of God. People may not, therefore, decide that under circumstances pleasing to themselves and their companions in sin, and because of the mutual approval of their actions by the sinners themselves, they thereby have the right to take the law into their own hands. Even if such a sin should be seen as no sin against either of the partners to it, there is a third partner involved in all human actions, namely God himself; and God has forbidden it. Joseph, while a slave in the house of Potiphar, refused to commit adultery with his master's wife, not on the grounds that it would have been a sin against a woman like her, but as he said, "How can I sin **AGAINST** God and do this wickedness?" (Genesis 39:9). The sin of fornication, or adultery (and for all practical purposes, the sins are one), is destructive and antagonistic. It is **AGAINST** the following: (1) primarily against God, as noted above; (2) against one's body (1 Corinthians 6:18) (this being true no matter how "body" is understood, whether the physical body, the body of the family, the social body, or any corporate body, many a corporation having been wrecked by adultery); (3) the church, as stated in the text; (4) marriage, that institution being able to survive any assault except this (Matthew 19:6); (5) the life of the nation; and (6) against one's very soul (Proverbs 6:32).

**Profane person** is the opposite of a holy person. Horace wrote, "Odi profanum vulgus, et arceo", which translates, "I abominate the profane vulgar and drive them from the temple." Our word "profane" still carries the inherent meaning of unfitness to enter the temple. Adam Clarke, wrote, "The Latin `profanus', from which we have our word, is compounded of `procul a fano', `far from the temple.'"<sup>[14]</sup>

**Esau ... sold his birthright.** This remarkable incident (Genesis 25:29ff), involving the transfer of the birthright for the smallest considerations, only a pot of lentils, prompts a look at just what the birthright entailed. It was the most extensive right that could change hands on the basis of heredity and included: (1) the right of primogeniture, that is, the right of the firstborn to receive a double portion of his father's earthly possessions. Under it, Esau would have been the head of Isaac's house, and in a sense the ruler of his brethren. (2) The right to convey the blessing to his own posterity. (3) The right of the priesthood, making its possessor the patriarchal religious leader of his people. (4) The right of custodianship of the sacred promises regarding Messiah and the promised "seed" of Abraham. It seems nearly unbelievable that any man with any regard at all for sacred and holy things should have despised them all and bartered them away for a bowl of beans.

But the lesson in this is very pointed for the readers of Hebrews. They too were on the point of giving up something even more valuable than the bartered inheritance of Esau. In their threatened return to Judaism, they would have been giving up all the realities of which Esau's forfeiture has been only typical. Furthermore, if they went back, it would prove to be just as irrevocable as was the tragic decision of Esau, a point that he elaborated immediately in the next verses. The irreversible nature of such a defection would have sprung not from any inability of God to forgive and restore them, but from the very nature of people themselves. In the course of man's moral defections, there are some thresholds which, once crossed, admit of no returning.

#### **ENDNOTE:**

[14] Adam Clarke, op. cit., p. 780.

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## **Verse 17**

**For ye know that when he afterward desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place for**

**a change of mind in his father though he sought it diligently with tears.**

Esau had sold his birthright, and the bargain stood. He got the pot of lentils! His later grief and tears over his wretched lapse appear very pitiful, even though thousands of years have passed since that tragic event occurred. This shows how inexorably the tides of mortal affairs move to the wide seas, and how far past all human calculation are the consequences of sin. Of course, it would be a mistake to question or blame the judgment of Isaac in withholding from Esau the birthright he had consented to sell for a trifle. There is every reason to believe that Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob, and that only considerations of the greatest moment could have compelled him, at last, to permit the blessing to rest upon Jacob, who, as far as Jacob's intention was concerned, had procured it through fraud. But long before the "afterward" spoken of in this verse, it became apparent to Isaac that something had gone wrong in Esau, the profane; and Isaac's wisdom taught him that Esau was disqualified and incapable of so sacred a trust. Esau had become such a man as **COULD NOT** be the head of the tribes of Israel, nor stand in the forefront of the people as a priest of God. Whether or not Isaac, at the time it happened, knew that God's hand was in Jacob's receiving the blessing, he certainly knew it by the time mentioned here when Esau sought earnestly to change the matter; thus it is said that Esau found no place for a change in the mind of his father.

Perhaps, in this context, it should be noted that Jacob's procuring the blessing through means of deception, even though he bought it, was also reprehensible; and the judgment of God overtook him for that, and he received retribution in kind for what he had done. Jacob deceived and lied to his father; but he too was deceived and lied to by his sons in the matter of the sale of Joseph; and there is every reason to believe that Jacob carried the memory of that shameful hour of his deception of Isaac, like a burning coal in his bosom, throughout all the 147 years of his life. With all his sins, however, Jacob did possess the one redeeming characteristic of regard for sacred things and faith in the promise of God, which enabled him to become a true



prince of God, that being the meaning of the name "Israel," given to Jacob by an angel of the Highest (Genesis 32:28).

The remaining 12 verses (Hebrews 12:18-29) present a contrast between the law and the gospel, particularly between the awesome events at Sinai, where the law was given, and the even more awesome spectacle of the enthronement of Christ on the right hand of God in heaven. The Hebrew law-giving was a frightening and awe-inspiring experience for Israel and Moses; but when properly understood, the Christian's law-giving is even more impressive. First, the author recalls from the book of Exodus some of the circumstances of that former event.

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## **Verse 18**

**For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest.**

Bruce thinks that a reference to "conversion" is in the words "For ye are not come" and as used in Hebrews 12:22, "Ye are come."<sup>[15]</sup> The mountain that might be touched, of course, was Sinai; and the blackness, darkness, and tempest refer to the dramatic outflashings of God's power in the violent demonstrations of nature accompanying that event (Exodus 19:18).

### **ENDNOTE:**

[15] F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 371.

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## **Verse 19**

**And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that no word more should be spoken unto them.**

The sound of God's voice was so terrible that the people did not wish to hear it again and so entreated God to speak only to Moses who would convey to them the message of the Father (Exodus 20:18ff). "The sound of the trumpet" is of special interest since a trumpet sound is associated with the final judgment and the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:52). Also, the seven angels with seven trumpets are a feature of John's vision of the last things (Revelation 8:2)

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## Verse 20

**For they could not endure that which was enjoined, if a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned.**

**That which was enjoined** means that which was commanded; and the thing God had commanded Israel, cited here, was that they should kill any beast that might inadvertently touch the mountain, not kill in the ordinary way, but by stoning or casting it through with a dart (Exodus 19:12f). The significance of this is that the mountain was held so sacred that any beast touching it thereby became holy itself (as when Korah's censers were offered, Numbers 16:28), so holy that Israel could not even touch the beast that had touched the mountain; hence, they were not to kill the beast by touching it in any way, but by stoning or casting through with a dart.

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## Verse 21

**And so fearful was the appearance, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.**

The fact of Moses' being afraid is mentioned in Deuteronomy 9:19; but the exact quotations given by the author here could well have come to him from some other source, or perhaps from his own independent knowledge of it by reason of his inspiration. The emphasis is that the most frightening things taking place on Sinai were so utterly terrifying that godly Moses,

despite his royal education, was also exceedingly afraid and trembled at the sight of it. This makes it clear that it was not the unreasonable and ignorant fear of a nation of slaves which came at times, but a truly justified fear of the majesty and power of God.

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## Verse 22

**But ye are come to mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels.**

For notes on "angels" and the "city of the living God," see under those titles following Hebrews 1:14 and Hebrews 11:10.

At this place, the author turns to a presentation of the glories of the central authority in Christianity, a contrast being at once evident in the two mountains. Sinai was an alien mountain in a foreign land; and Zion was the poetic name for Jerusalem, the name of the eminence upon which the city was built, and which enshrined the deepest emotional affection of the whole Hebrew nation. The prophets had extolled the word of the Lord as going forth from Mount Zion (Isaiah 2:3); it was toward Mount Zion that the captive Daniel had prayed in Babylon; and even Jesus Christ referred to it as the "city of the great King" (Matthew 5:35).

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## Verse 23

**To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.**

For some of the implications of "firstborn," see under Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 1:6. The general assembly and church of the firstborn is a designation for the whole community of the redeemed in heaven and on earth; and because of the classes of beings, other than people, mentioned here as being citizens of that place, "the general assembly" possibly has a much wider

inclusiveness than usually thought of in this matter. Westcott said:

The description of the scene of the divine kingdom to which Christians are come is followed by a description of representative persons who are included in it, with whom believers are brought into fellowship. These are angels and men, no longer separated, as at Sinai, by signs of great terror, but united in one vast assembly.<sup>[16]</sup>

This view would make the "general assembly" and the "church of the firstborn" to be actually two entities, the latter a component of the first, yet distinct from it. "Who are enrolled in heaven" is a reference to the Book of Life and to the names of the redeemed of all ages written therein.

## THE BOOK OF LIFE

In the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City, the tourist may see a golden book, encrusted with precious stones and handsomely engraved, where certain names are inscribed. The book was a gift from a wealthy family and is an excellent example of beautiful and extravagantly expensive books to be seen all over the world; but how far beyond all earthly books is the Lamb's book of Life. O to be written there! One of the consolations of scripture is in this very thing, that the names of Christians are indeed written there in the book of life, there where God has inscribed it and where none but he may blot it out. Jesus confirmed that our names "are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). Paul actually gave the names of some, that is, Clement and certain faithful women, whose names are written there (Philippians 4:3); Moses revealed that his own name is so written (Exodus 32:32); and the prophet Daniel mentioned that they shall be found "written in the book" (Daniel 12:1). The apostle John spoke of that book as containing the names "written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain" (Revelation 13:8).

A study of the various references to the book of life reveals the following: (1) Christians' names are written

in it; (2) the ancient faithful, such as Moses, are therein; (3) those whose names are not inscribed in it shall not be saved (Revelation 13:8; 20:15; 21:27); (4) even though inscribed there, a name can be blotted out, and for sufficient cause will be blotted out (Revelation 3:5).

Regarding the subject of when the names of the saved are inscribed in the book of life, it would appear to be at the time of their entry into the kingdom of God, that is, when they confess Christ and are baptized into him. An incident from the gospel of Matthew strongly suggests this. Christ had previously promised his disciples that whosoever should confess him before men would also be confessed by Christ before God and his holy angels (Matthew 10:32); and the first ever to make such a formal confession was the apostle Peter, saying, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16); Christ then and there confessed Peter, saying, "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of John" (Matthew 16:17). The parallel between the two confessions is significant and supports the conclusion that Jesus was honoring the promise to confess the souls who confessed him. If this is true, then he still does so; and those who confess Christ and are baptized into him are confessed in heaven at the same time; and the conjecture may be allowed that such is the occasion of names being inscribed in the book of life.

**To God the judge of all** reveals that in some special sense God **IS** in the heavenly city, although God is everywhere and is "all and in all"; nevertheless, there is a sure sense in which God shall not merely be in that eternal city, but the center of it, with his throne in the midst of it and his face as the light of it.

**And to the spirits of just men made perfect** refers to raised and glorified people who have passed through death after the tribulations of life, or who have been changed in a moment at the sounding of the resurrection <sup>[16]</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, op. cit., p. 413.

trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:51f). The number includes not Christians alone, but all of them who in prior dispensations did the will of God.

**ENDNOTE:**

## Verse 24

**And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.**

The appearance of Christ in the heavenly city, as stated in these verses, harmonizes with the entire New Testament, especially Revelation, where Christ is invariably spoken of as closely associated with the Father in his throne, the throne of God being actually called "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:1). The existence of such a thing as this is most instructive. Necessary deductions include these: (1) the universe is a controlled entity; it is under law and does not operate aimlessly, nor is it standing alone and isolated to run down of its own accord; there is a throne, with all that implies; (2) the government of the universe is personal, not a robot, but a "Thou" being the center of it; (3) the universe is undergirded with justice, this being explicit in the character of him on the throne; and (4) mercy is the great feature of universal government as applied to humanity, this being assured by the fact of the Lamb also being on the throne.

For observations on the "voice of the blood of Abel" see under Hebrews 11:4. Here the English Revised Version (1885) gives an alternate reading, "better things than Abel"; but it certainly does no violence to God's word to speak of the message of Abel's blood, for God himself said, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10).

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## Verse 25

**See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not when they refused him that warned them on earth; much more shall not we escape who turn away from him that warneth from heaven.**

This is a recapitulation of the argument in Hebrews 10:28-30, to the effect that, if God punished the disobedient of the old dispensation, the punishment of the disobedient under the new dispensation is even more certain, this being due to the greater dignity of the mediator, Christ being superior to Moses, etc. In this verse, the emphasis is upon the contrasting citadels of the authority of Moses and that of Christ, Moses speaking from earth, Christ from heaven.

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## Verse 26

**Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but the heaven.**

As in the case of the author's seizing upon a verse of scripture never before particularly noted and making it the basis of the entire elaboration upon the subject of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:11ff; Psalms 110:4), the very same thing is done in this place, where he refers to the earthquake at Sinai, and then to Haggai's prophecy of another such disturbance (Haggai 2:6), making the latter a prophecy of the end of the world. Such faith and perception on the part of the author of this epistle is a moving demonstration of the trust that may be reposed in every word that God has spoken. There are no unimportant scriptures.

That a great earthquake will indeed occur at the end of the present world order is assured in Revelation, where it is related that the heavens and the earth shall flee away from the great white throne and the judgment of God (Revelation 20:11).

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## Verse 27

**And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain.**

Many commentators on Hebrews refer repeatedly to the works of Philo, inferring in some cases that ideas in Hebrews are borrowed from him; but this verse refutes the so-called connection of Hebrews with the works of Philo. The eternity of matter is a theory rejected totally by the inspired author of Hebrews. The great earthquake that shall mark the dissolution of the earth and all that is in it is not merely a possibility, but a certainty; and the basis for that certainty is that it has "been made"! It is not eternal, but a **THING**, created by Almighty God to serve a purpose, and certain to be removed when that purpose is fulfilled. Thus, as he nears the end of his epistle, the author again emphasizes the great truth he stated in the first chapter (Hebrews 1:10-12), namely, that the world will wear out and be removed, like a garment, rolled up; it "shall perish."

Bruce said:

When, in accordance with the divine promise, this cosmic convulsion, takes place - when (in Dryden's words) the last and dreadful hour This crumbling pageant shall devour - the whole material universe will be shaken to pieces, and the only things to survive will be those that are unshakable.<sup>[17]</sup>

The doctrine of the world's end and the cataclysmic developments associated with it are so forcibly brought to view here, that a little further study of such a theme is due.

## **THE END OF THE WORLD**

The end of the world and its replacement with new heavens and a new earth do not appear to be merely a peripheral concept but a central doctrine of Christianity. The doctrine of the end of the world was bluntly stated in the great commission itself, as enunciated by Jesus, who promised to be with his disciples, "even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). Peter spoke at length on the subject, saying, "The earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10) and giving extensive attention to the doctrine of the last things and the fiery judgment of God that shall



terminate them in the total dissolution of the material world.

Scientifically, the end of the world must be viewed as a foregone certainty. Whether from the failure of its energies when the sun is at last burned out, or by the cataclysmic engulfment of the earth by the sun, one or the other being certain to come eventually, the earth must be viewed as having a terminator at the end of its course. There can be no scientific projection of an eternity for our earth. The more likely termination of the earth would appear to be in the second contingency mentioned above, and seemingly suggested by the remarkable words of Peter. People cannot know with certainty, or even any degree of probability, what the final fate of the earth may be; but its eventual doom is a basic Christian teaching. It is brought forward here to establish the greater stability, certainty, and unshakableness of the kingdom of Christ which will survive whatever happens.

Projecting some possible understanding of Peter's fiery destruction of the earth as harmonized with the earthquake here connected with that event by the author of Hebrews, one gets the thought of some cosmic force that may shake our earth out of its orbit and bring it into the gravitational field of the sun, where it would be swallowed in fiery death. Regarding the theory of a sudden explosion or expansion of the size of the sun, see this writer's discussion of it in his commentary on Matthew.<sup>[18]</sup>

[17] F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 383.

[18] James Burton Coffman, Commentary on Matthew, (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1968), chapter 28.

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## Verse 28

**Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: for our God is a consuming fire.**

There is a marked resemblance in this exhortation with that of Peter who said,

Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day God? (2 Peter 3:11,12).

This appeal to the holiness of God and his burning wrath toward all evil issues in the declarations that "Our God is a consuming fire." People cannot fully understand what God is like, and any understanding of his nature should always include the concept of his love and sympathy for his human children. The emphasis here is upon another phase of God's character. Bruce said:

It is an aspect of the character of God revealed in the Bible that plays little part in much present-day thinking of him; but if we are to be completely "honest to God," we dare not ignore it. Reverence and awe before his holiness are not incompatible with grateful love and trust in response to his mercy.<sup>[19]</sup>

Of the utmost importance is the proper identification of the "kingdom that cannot be shaken," as mentioned here. It is the same as that church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail (Matthew 16:18). Certainly this identification is of eternal consequence, and it is the prayer of this writer that the following discussion of it might aid some soul in arriving at such a certainty.

### **CONCERNING THE KINGDOM THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN**

The church of the New Testament and the kingdom of Christ are one institution, not two. Jesus himself used the terms "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably in his announcement at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:18); and it is mandatory to view the Lord's words there as a reference not to two institutions but to one. Added to this is the fact that the entire reservoir of New Testament scriptures presents the church and the kingdom as coinciding and interlocking in all their details

and characteristics. A careful attention to this, with a little patience, will prove the church and the kingdom to be one institution, in very much the same way that two triangles may be proved congruent by a proposition in plane geometry.

<LINES><MONO>

Christ is the head Christ is king in of the church the kingdom (Ephesians 1:22). (Colossians 1:13).

One is baptized into One is baptized into the church the kingdom (1 Corinthians 12:13). (John 3:5).

The church is an The kingdom likewise everlasting is an everlasting institution kingdom (Ephesians 3:21). (Daniel 2:44).

The apostles are in The apostles are in the church the kingdom reigning (Ephesians 2:20). with Christ (Matthew 19:28).

The church is The kingdom is identified with the identified with the "washing of "times of regeneration," that regeneration," that is, the new birth is, the times of the (Titus 3:5). new birth (Matthew 19:28).

The Lord's table is The Lord's table is in the church in the kingdom (1 Corinthians 11:26). (Luke 22:29,30)

The word of God is The word of God is called the word of called "the word of faith, that is, of the kingdom" the gospel Paul (Matthew 13:19) preached (Romans 10:8).

The seven parables All seven of them of Matt.13 have are identified with been understood for the kingdom of ages as applying to heaven the church. (Matthew 13:19,24,31, 33,44,45,47 etc.)

The gospel of Christ The teachings of and his church are Christ are called called the

the "mysteries of "mystery," kept in the kingdom of silence; etc. heaven" (Romans 16:25). (Matthew 13:11).

Christ's church is The kingdom is also called the "Israel identified as that of God" (Galatians 6:16). same "Israel of God" (Matthew 19:28).SIZE>MONO>LINES>

Such a comparison may be extended to embrace every salient feature of the church and of the kingdom, and the result is always the same as that shown above. Only one other such similarity will be noted here; and, due to its importance, a little fuller discussion of it is included.

### **THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM BEGAN AT THE SAME TIME**

The first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ must be regarded as the birth of the church and the kingdom. The references regarding the establishment of the church of Christ on Pentecost are extensive, but one is enough to show the truth; it is Acts 2:41. It was the first occasion recorded where the gospel invitation was extended under terms of the great commission, where every person was invited to obey it, and where those who did so were added to the church. Note carefully this inspired utterance:

Then they that gladly received  
his word were baptized: and  
there were added **UNTO THEM**  
in that day about three  
thousand souls (Acts 2:41).

But **AFTER THE DAY OF PENTECOST**, concerning those who obeyed the gospel, it is stated that "the Lord added **TO THEM** day by day those that were saved" (Acts 2:47).

The argument here regards the words **UNTO THEM** (Acts 2:41) and **TO THEM** (Acts 2:47). The words belong in the second reference but not in the first, as a glance at the English Revised Version (1885) will show, since the words **UNTO THEM** in Acts 2:41 are italicized meaning that they simply do not occur in the Greek. Thus, if these two passages are studied without the humanly added words in Acts 2:41, they read as follows.

The Lord added in that day  
about three thousand souls  
(Acts 2:41).

The Lord added **TO THEM** day  
by day these that were saved  
(Acts 2:47).SIZE>

Thus, the statement of the Holy Spirit is that God aggregated, or added, the souls on Pentecost, in the sense of forming them together for the first time as a body; hence, he did not say God added **TO THEM**, there being no **THEM** to which they could have been added on that day. But ever afterward, the saved were added **TO THEM**. One may indeed be thankful for the candor of scholars who so frequently add the words "to them" in Acts 2:41, where they do not belong, but who also write the words carefully in italics that the student may discern the truth. The whole subject of the establishment of the church on Pentecost is a large one and does not fall within the objective here, the principal reliance being upon the generally accepted

conviction that the church began on Pentecost.

That the kingdom of God began on Pentecost is proved from necessary inference deriving from a number of passages. Christ prophesied that the kingdom would come with power during the life span of himself and his apostles, saying, "Verily I say unto you, there are some here, of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, until they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). The phraseology used by the Lord suggests that some would taste of death before the kingdom was established, that being fulfilled in the death of Judas and also of Christ. Judas and Christ both tasted death before that memorable Pentecost arrived. It is thus incorrect to think of the kingdom being established at any other time in history, except the lifetime of the apostles. How about the speculations that it was set up in 1914? Should it be concluded that the advocates of such notions are correct and that the holy Head of our blessed religion is wrong?

Pinpointing the actual date of the kingdom's beginning is possible by a study of a series of references to the kingdom **BEFORE** the day of Pentecost, and another series of references **AFTER** Pentecost, the first series invariably

speaking of the kingdom in the future tense, and the second series always using either the past or present tense. Thus, in Mark 9:1; Matthew 19:28; 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 26:29, to name only a few, the kingdom is always spoken of as a future institution. Even such examples as "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:30), and certain others referring to the kingdom's being preached, are not statements that the kingdom was in existence; but they have reference to the fact that "the kingdom" was then manifest in the person of the king, Christ, or that its principles, or mysteries, were being promulgated. The apostles well understood that the kingdom was not set up before the resurrection of Christ, or they could not possibly have asked Jesus, after his resurrection, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Therefore, it is upon the most solid grounds that one may conclude that the kingdom was not set up until after Christ's resurrection.

After Pentecost, all references to the kingdom are in the past tense, or present tense, making it to be an institution in existence. Note the verb forms in the following: (1) Christians have been "translated" into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). (2) The author of Hebrews, in the

verse at hand, speaks of "receiving" a kingdom thus making it a present fact. (3) The apostle John said of himself and other Christians that Jesus "made us to be a kingdom" (Revelation 1:6). A little later, John said, "I, John, your brother and **PARTAKER** with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience **WHICH ARE IN CHRIST JESUS**" (Revelation 1:9). Note the present tense of the verbs. The kingdom is just as much a reality when John wrote, as are the tribulation and patience. All three **ARE IN Christ!**

Searching the entire field of time between the references to the kingdom as future, and those making it already a fact, is there any specific time, event, or place designated in the scriptures as "the beginning"? The answer is affirmative. Acts 11:15 has a firm reference to the day of Pentecost as "the beginning"; and it is all but conclusive that the "beginning" of the kingdom, or church, is meant. What else, if not the kingdom or church, began on Pentecost?

The fact that the exact date of the beginning of the kingdom cannot be more definitely determined should not be discouraging, because, as the great high priest after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus Christ fulfilled the type also in this, that the exact date of the



beginning or ending of his priesthood is obscured and undetermined. (See notes under Hebrews 7:17). Some of the same veil of secrecy also lies on the beginning and ending of Christ's kingship, that too being a perfect analogy between the type and the antitype.

The nature and extent of the kingdom of Christ are manifested in the entire sweep of Christianity through the ages of probation, "throughout all ages, world without end" (Ephesians 3:23). It is a spiritual kingdom, "not of this world," yet in it. Christ is the only head of this kingdom, either in heaven or upon the earth (Matthew 28:18-20); nor is his kingdom ever to be thought of as giving place to another. Even the "everlasting kingdom" (2 Peter 1:11) is in no sense another kingdom, but only an extension and fruition of the present kingdom, at which time Christ will "deliver up" the kingdom to God (1 Corinthians 15:24).

**ENDNOTE:**

[<sup>19</sup>] F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 385.

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◀ Hebrews 11    Hebrews    Hebrews 13 ▶

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