



Hebrews - Chapter Ten

II Hebrews 3:1-10:18 - Jesus Is Superior to the Mosaic Law (continues/concludes)

II.c Hebrews 4:14-10:18 - The high priesthood of Jesus (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Ten

The writer continues expounding the theme of Jeremiah Chapter 31 to demonstrate the power of Jesus' sacrificial death by stating that the OT sacrifices were unable to finally deal with but, in fact, acted more as a reminder to them of their sin due to its repetitive nature (v.3). The death of Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice that dealt fully and finally with sin; therefore, there is no need for any further sacrifices.

The chapter then moves into a new major section of teaching with the writer offering exhortations for believers to hold on to the knowledge of the truth they have received when coming to faith in Jesus.

The author offers a stark warning to those who persist in wilful and unrepented sin. The consequences for such people are dire and are an indication that such people have never truly accepted the Gospel of Jesus. Those who have embraced it and endure the tribulations of life that such faith brings are saved.

II.c.ix Hebrews 10:1-18 - Christ's sacrifice once for all

In contrast to the repeated Mosaic animal sacrifices ordained under the law, Jesus came into the world according to God's will in order to eternally sanctify a people through offering himself as a perfect sacrifice once for all.

Jeremiah Chapter 31 is explicitly mentioned again in this subsection (vv.15-18), and the writer is still intending to explain how its promises have been fulfilled through the sacrifice of the Son.

¹ Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who

approach.² Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshippers, cleansed once for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?

Hebrews 10:1-2

The Mosaic Law, with its priesthood, covenant, sacrifices, and tabernacle can never make a person perfect since it is but a shadow of the true form, which is found in Christ and his ultimate sacrifice. This is confirmed in Hebrews 7:11-9:28. If the law could have made anyone perfect, then the sacrifices would have been discontinued, because those who had been coming to offer them would no longer have any consciousness of sin.

The contrast the writer is making is not the contrast between physical objects and non-physical ideas, or forms. As v.1 insists, it is the contrast between the present and the future realities. Jesus, who has gone ahead into God's future reality, will reappear when that future reality bursts into the present for the whole world. And he himself was and remains a thoroughly physical human being.

Cleansed once for all. The OT sacrifices were OK for dealing with outward impurity, but as was noted in Chapter 9, they could not affect the conscience, but they could assure people of the continuing membership of Israel despite their continued sin. However, they could never achieve the deep cleansing, the healing of memories and imaginations that the blood of Jesus has achieved and can achieve. They could not, in that sense, 'take sins away', restoring sinful human beings to an actual condition in which their consciences had been cleansed, enabling them to stand boldly and gladly in the presence of God.

³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year.

Hebrews 10:3

Reminder of sin year after year. Repetition in sacrifice demonstrates the ongoing grip of sin. The Mosaic Law thus convinces people of their sinfulness. It was not the earthly nature of the sacrifice that was wrong, for Jesus' own sacrifice was just as earthly. What was wrong was that the old sacrifices needed to be repeated over and over again, thus demonstrating that they had not really dealt with the problem of sin and its dire consequences.

⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Hebrews 10:4

impossible to take away sins. These animal sacrifices symbolised the payment for sin, but they did not accomplish it. No animal was worthy of paying the price for a human being's sin before a holy God: <<*Truly, no ransom avails for one's life, there is no price one can give to God for it. For the ransom of life is costly, and can never suffice, that one should live on for ever and never see the grave*>> (Psalm 49:7-9). The law assumes that atonement and forgiveness occur by means of the legislated sacrifices; however, last year's sacrifice does not cover this year's sins, thus leaving guilty consciences and a remaining sinful condition. A permanent sacrifice was needed to deal permanently with sin.

⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,

but a body you have prepared for me;

⁶ in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings

you have taken no pleasure.

⁷ Then I said, “See, God, I have come to do your will, O God”

(in the scroll of the book it is written of me).’

Hebrews 10:5-7

This quotation is from Psalm 40:6-8, a Davidic psalm applied here to the Davidic Messiah. This shows David’s awareness, as seen elsewhere in the OT, that God desired faithful hearts and lives more than mere performance of sacrificial rituals: <<*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings*>> (Hosea 6:6), which was also quoted by Jesus in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. It prophesies the coming of one who will do God’s will, and God’s preparation of a body for that person.

As so often in this letter, the writer draws attention to something written under the old dispensation which points forward, inescapably, towards the new. This quotation from Psalm 40 speaks from the heart of the OT, surrounded with the rules for the daily sacrifice, of the fact that, for all that those sacrifices were commanded by God, they are not what he really wanted.

This is not the only OT passage which states this sort of thing; compare, for example: <<*And Samuel said, ‘Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to the voice of the Lord? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams*>> (1 Samuel 15:22), and: <<*Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt-offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of – I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow*>> (Isaiah 1:10-17).

Together these passages form telling reminders, just as was seen with Psalm 95 in Chapters 3-4, and Psalm 110 in Chapters 5-8, and as is revealed through the use of Jeremiah Chapter 31 in the present section, that the OT, the earlier dispensation, points away from itself to something else, something better, something which God desired and which he had always planned to accomplish.

This was the real thing which God wanted, the real thing for which all the sacrifices and offerings of the Temple cult were simply signposts, and somewhat inadequate ones at that. Or, changing the picture just a little, they

were like shadows of the reality, not the reality itself - shadows cast by the bright light coming from God's future.

Consequently indicates that Christ came into the world to deal directly with the issues surrounding the ceremonial sacrifices and their failure to overcome the sinful nature of mankind. Although humans still have such a nature, Jesus' death has offered freedom from the burden, guilt and shame of such sin.

A body have you prepared for me. The corresponding phrase in Psalm 40:6 is translated as: <<*you have given me an open ear*>>. Literally, the Masoretic or Hebrew text reads: <<*ears you have dug for me*>> (Psalm 40:7-9 Mt). The Hebrew metaphor has been understood by the Septuagint translators in Psalm 39:7-9 LXX and by the writer of Hebrews to indicate the physical creation of a person's body.

NT quotations of OT texts are not always precise. NT authors often reword them or adapt them to suit their own purposes, yet always in a way that is compatible with their original meaning.

Since the writers who do this, especially Peter, Paul and John, are apostles chosen by Jesus and anointed by the Holy Spirit to write scripture, this practice seems perfectly acceptable. It is not something that other mere mortals should try to do in order to make a point and they should clearly indicate such deviations as their own interpretation of scripture.

In the scroll of the book it is written of me is a clear indication that Jesus confirmed that the Messianic scripts were alluding to him.

⁸ When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt-offerings and sin-offerings' (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, 'See, I have come to do your will.' He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.

Hebrews 10:8-9

The OT sacrifices were not desired, literally 'willed' by God, because of any intrinsic value they possessed. However, it was God's will for the messianic writer of Psalm 40:6-8 to come to do your will. God did ordain the OT sacrifices and offerings for the time when the Mosaic covenant was in force, but not for the future time anticipated in this messianic psalm.

I have come to do your will. Unlike the prescriptive and legalistic nature of OT sacrifices, this better dispensation is the voluntary, obedient self-offering of the Son: <<*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again*>> (John 10:17).

He abolishes the first refers to the sacrifices and offerings of the old covenant. Christians no longer have to offer animal sacrifices or keep other ceremonial parts of the OT laws, for these have been abolished. By agreeing with OT texts such as Psalm 40, the writer is not disagreeing with the scriptures but simply acknowledging that they were only ever intended as a temporary measure.

In order to establish the second means 'in order to establish obedience to God's will'. The sacrifices had to be abolished in order for God's moral and spiritual will for his people to be done.

¹⁰ And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 10:10

God's will thus provides sanctification, the state of being made holy, through a different onetime offering, namely, the body of Jesus Christ, i.e. his physical death on the Cross. The evening before his death, Jesus confirmed his own compliance to God's will despite the fear he felt as a man: <<*Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done'*>> (Matthew 26:42), and: <<*'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done'*>> (Luke 22:42).

¹¹ And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, 'he sat down at the right hand of God', ¹³ and since then has been waiting 'until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.'

Hebrews 10:11-13

Previous arguments are summarised, focusing on the efficacy of the single sacrifice offered by Christ.

Every priest stands day after day shows that his work of offering sacrifices under the old covenant would never have ended without the ultimate sacrifice of God.

That can never take away sins was discussed in comments made in vv.1-4.

He sat down. Culturally, the majority of people in the 1st Century stood to work and then sat down to rest, indicating their work was completed. Christ's sacrificial work has ended, and now he sits at the right hand of God: <<*The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'*>> (Psalm 110:1), which is one of David's messianic psalms cited also in Hebrews 1:13. It shows that the securing of full and final forgiveness of sins has been accomplished.

A chart outlining the references to Psalm 110 in Hebrews can be found in the supplementary material on the website.

Other scriptures confirm that Jesus is now at the right hand of God, including: <<*So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God*>> (Mark 16:19), <<*But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God*>> (Luke 22:69), <<*Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear*>> (Acts 2:33), <<*Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us*>> (Romans 8:34), <<*God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places*>> (Ephesians 1:20), <<*So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God*>> (Colossians 3:1), <<*And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone*>>

into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him>> (1 Peter 3:21-22).

¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Hebrews 10:14

By a single offering indicates that Jesus does not have to make a repeated offering of himself to the Father, as ordinary mortals did. It is true, of course, that the continuing work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary is now to intercede for his people: *<<Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them>> (Hebrews 7:25).* This was something prophesied about the Lord's servant: *<<Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors>> (Isaiah 53:12).*

Perfected for all time does not mean that believers are now already sinless, but that Christ has fully earned their perfection, which will certainly be applied to Christians in God's good time. The eternal perfection of the saints: *<<Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect>> (Hebrews 11:39-40), and: <<But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect>> (Hebrews 12:22-23), stems from the once-for-all nature of Jesus' sacrifice. Hence, believers look to Christ and not to themselves for a cleansed conscience, full forgiveness of sins, and total flawlessness in the future.*

Those who are sanctified, i.e. those who are made holy, is used also in v.10 as well as: *<<For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters>> (Hebrews 2:11), and: <<Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood>> (Hebrews 13:12).* The Greek present participle allows for the idea of progressive sanctification in this life and/or present positional sanctification of the believer as one, who from the start, is deemed perfectly holy, that is the saints in: *<<For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do>> (Hebrews 6:10), and: <<Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy send you greetings>> (Hebrews 13:24).*

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,

¹⁶ 'This is the covenant that I will make with them

after those days, says the Lord:

I will put my laws in their hearts,

and I will write them on their minds',

¹⁷ he also adds,

‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Hebrews 10:15-18

The new covenant passage from Jeremiah Chapter 31, refer also to Hebrews 8:8-12, is cited as the utterance of the Holy Spirit, thus supporting the preceding argument, especially v.14.

The internalisation of God’s laws in v.16 means that God’s people now do his will, not yet perfectly, but in intention and endeavour, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I will remember their sins no more indicates that Christ’s single new covenant offering was eternal, and such forgiveness means there is no longer any other offering for sin. The new covenant’s superiority to the old is shown most clearly in the full and final forgiveness of sins.

Christianity is not a religion that imagines itself going round and round in a circle, coming back to the same point. It is not a religious system at all. It is about events that move forwards, in an historical sequence, from a beginning, to a development, to a climax, to the results of that climax. Part of being a Christian is for believers to know where they belong within that story, and to celebrate what it means: that God’s dealing with sins, and establishing his new covenant with humankind, have been achieved once and for all.

III Hebrews 10:19-12:29 - Call to faith and endurance

The exposition of the superiority of Christ and his salvation culminates in exhortations to faith and perseverance (Hebrews 10:19-39 and 12:1-29), and in an extended series of examples of how faith endures through hope in God throughout Chapter 11.

III.a Hebrews 10:19-39 - The full assurance of faith

The truth of Christ’s person and work leads to encouragement to draw near to God (vv.19-25), and to exhortations against shrinking back from faith (vv.26-39).

III.a.i Hebrews 10:19-25 - Exhortation to draw near

Since the priestly work of Christ has established the privilege of access to God, the author exhorts his readers to approach God faithfully, to firmly maintain their confession, and to find ways to encourage others.

¹⁹ Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus,

Hebrews 10:19

Therefore since. Verses 19-21 draw upon Christological arguments made earlier in the book.

Confidence to enter. The readers have the privilege of following the Messiah into the heavenly sanctuary as recorded in: <<*he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption*>> (Hebrews 9:12), and: <<*For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf*>> (Hebrews 9:24). Confidence in access to God is based upon Christ's saving work: <<*Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope*>> (Hebrews 3:6), and: <<*Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*>> (Hebrews 4:16). Refer also to v.35.

By the blood of Jesus is explained by the author fully in: <<*But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!*>> (Hebrews 9:11-14), and is commented on there.

²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh),

Hebrews 10:20

By the new and living way. This entrance (v.19) has been newly inaugurated by Christ's consecrating work, and it is living just as God himself is living: <<*Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God*>> (Hebrews 3:12), <<*how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!*>> (Hebrews 9:14), and: <<*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering*>> (Hebrews 12:22), see also v.31; as the word of God lives: <<*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*>> (Hebrews 4:12), and as those who follow Christ truly live: <<*Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live?*>> (Hebrews 12:9).

Through the curtain. The veil of the heavenly tabernacle: <<*Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of Holies*>> (Hebrews 9:3), lies open due to the sanctifying work of Christ: <<*We have this hope, a sure and steadfast*

anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek>> (Hebrews 6:19-20), <<But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption>> (Hebrews 9:11-12), and: <<For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf>> (Hebrews 9:24).

That is, through his flesh. Although some suggest that Jesus' flesh is itself the way, the word order, and the neuter gender of the Greek *tout' estin*, rendered that is, makes it much more likely that Jesus' flesh is identified with the tabernacle curtain or veil, which was torn open just as Jesus' own flesh was metaphorically torn at his death: <<At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split>> (Matthew 27:51).

²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

Hebrews 10:21

Great priest. Jesus is the superior High Priest as noted and commented on in Hebrews 5:5-10 and 7:11-8:7.

House of God is a reference to the church, both the original Hebrew church and now those that follow Jesus. The author contrasted Moses and Jesus in their respective roles as leaders of the house: <<Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also 'was faithful in all God's house.' Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope>> (Hebrews 3:1-6).

²² let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 10:22

Let us approach. In the first of three exhortations in vv.22-25, Christians are called to act faithfully upon their confidence to enter into God's presence by the blood of Christ (v.19): <<Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need>> (Hebrews 4:16), <<Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them>> (Hebrews 7:25), <<And without faith it is impossible to please God, for

whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him>> (Hebrews 11:6).

A true heart. In context this is a cleansed, i.e. sprinkled, and believing heart in full assurance of faith that is submissive to God (v.26). This looks back to the promise in Jeremiah 31:33, that God will place his laws in his people's hearts and write them in their minds. They become truly human beings, from the inside out. It starts with the heart and works its way into the rest of the personality, thinking, behaviour and whole life.

In full assurance of faith believers have the full promises of God fulfilled for they can see the Father through his Son: *<<Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?'>> (John 14:9).*

Hearts sprinkled clean indicates that Jesus' atoning work purifies the inner person. Refer to comments made on Hebrews 9:14 and vv.15-18.

Bodies washed is most likely a reference to baptism: *<<Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him'>> (Acts 2:38-39), <<And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptised, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name>> (Acts 22:16), <<And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God>> (1 Corinthians 6:11), <<Therefore let us go on towards perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith towards God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement>> (Hebrews 6:1-2), and: <<This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right>> (Hebrews 9:9-10), which employs ritually pure water: <<But a spring or a cistern holding water shall be clean, while whatever touches the carcass in it shall be unclean>> (Leviticus 11:36), <<Then the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord; the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water>> (Numbers 5:16-17), and: <<I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you>> (Ezekiel 36:25).*

²³ Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold fast. The second exhortation of vv.22-25 calls forth a faithful, unwavering embrace of the confession of our hope, i.e. the church's assent to the teachings concerning Christ and his work: *<<Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high*

priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also 'was faithful in all God's house'>> (Hebrews 3:1-2), <<Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession>> (Hebrews 4:14), <<Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others>> (2 Corinthians 9:13), and: <<Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses>> (1 Timothy 6:12), teachings that produce hope: <<so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek>> (Hebrews 6:18-20), and: <<There is, on the one hand, the abrogation of an earlier commandment because it was weak and ineffectual (for the law made nothing perfect); there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God>> (Hebrews 7:19).

For he who promised is faithful. Confident hope in God's promises stems from God's trustworthy character: <<By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old – and Sarah herself was barren – because he considered him faithful who had promised>> (Hebrews 11:11).

²⁴ And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Let us consider. The third and final exhortation in vv.22-25 calls for serious thinking about other Christians with a purpose to stir up or provoke them in their love and service, their good deeds. Christian perseverance is thus also a community endeavour.

Meet together. Community encouragement toward perseverance requires being together. That some were neglecting this duty may have been among the motives for the author's warnings throughout this book.

There are many reasons why people stop attending church today: social or family commitments, a disagreement with the leaders, not liking some of their fellow believers, etc. However, a key factor in the 1st Century was often the fear of persecution that could come about simply by associating with others. Believers should not fear such persecution, either then or now, yet it does still exist and it was always known that it would: <<Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted>> (2 Timothy 3:12).

Encouraging is about voicing exhortation with the goal of strengthening another's faith: <<But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin>> (Hebrews

3:13), and: <<*I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly*>> (Hebrews 13:22).

The Day approaching refers to the coming day of Christ's return and the associated judgment, (v.37) and: <<*so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him*>> (Hebrews 9:28). The prophets often wrote about this approaching day with trepidation: <<*Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?*>> (Amos 5:18-20). People hoped that the day of the Lord would mean judgment against Israel's enemies. But it involves judgment on sinners universally, including Israel, which now includes all those who believe in Jesus. Despite the prophecies, Paul placed his trust in Jesus for this life and the day to come: <<*For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him*>> (2 Timothy 1:11-12).

III.a.ii Hebrews 10:26-39 - Warnings against shrinking back

The author warns of the impending judgment upon those who wilfully reject the faith. Yet his purpose is to exhort the readers in their faith, a faith that he affirms based on their past perseverance.

²⁶ For if we wilfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,
²⁷ but a fearful prospect of judgement, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Hebrews 10:26-27

Wilfully persist in sin. The author realises that believers will continue to sin just as the people of God had always done. However, the warning here is against those who deliberately continue to sin and refuse to repent.

After having received. The author refers especially to people within the Christian community, who have thus heard the truth. The fact that they go on sinning deliberately even after they have received the knowledge of the truth indicates that the people in view are not and never were genuine believers; that is, these are people who have never genuinely embraced the Gospel in a way that has resulted in a life of faith, obedience and the bearing of fruit. The apostle writes of some from his own church in Asia that were in this category: <<*They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us*>> (1 John 2:19).

No longer remains a sacrifice for sins. This could refer to the inability of wilful, unrepentant sinners to be restored: <<*For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the*

goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt>> (Hebrews 6:4-6), or more likely to the fact that there is no place for them to turn for forgiveness outside of Christ's sacrifice, which they have rejected.

A fearful prospect of judgment. All people face judgment but: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt>> (Daniel 12:2), <<And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him>> (Hebrews 9:27-28), and apart from Christ's sacrifice his adversaries receive eternal damnation. However, those who do believe will not be judged with regard to their salvation: <<*Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life>> (John 5:24).**

A fury of fire that will consume the adversaries is a stark warning for those who choose not to believe in God and is a warning echoed elsewhere: <<*But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the godless>> (2 Peter 3:7).*

These verses then, function as a means used by God to call genuine Christians to faith, obedience, and perseverance; and, if there is no evidence of fruit in their lives, to challenge such people to give fearful consideration as to whether they are in fact genuine believers.

²⁸ Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy 'on the testimony of two or three witnesses.'²⁹ How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 10:28-29

These verses argue from the lesser to the greater, a technique used by the author in Hebrews 2:1-4 and 9:14. In the Law of Moses, the death penalty comes upon those who blaspheme God or who worship other deities, with examples stated in Leviticus 24:13-16 and Deuteronomy 17:2-7. So in the superior new covenant the expectation of judgment would be even stronger.

How much worse punishment will be deserved by the one who? The description that follows is of a person who has deliberately, consciously, and persistently deserted 'the living God' (v.31), renouncing Christ and the community of faith. Refer to Hebrews 6:4-8. It is a description of outright apostasy, involving a person who has done three specific things:

1. Spurned the Son of God.
2. Profaned the blood of the covenant.
3. Outraged the Spirit of grace.

Such rejection of the knowledge of the truth (v.26), through wilful disobedience, is tantamount to trampling upon God's Son, reckoning his blood to be defiled, and insulting the Spirit who has offered such grace and bore testimony to Jesus; the one who does this deserves eternal judgment (v.27).

Some have argued that the statement by which they were sanctified, Greek *hagiazō*, also translated as 'set apart', indicates that the people in view here were true believers. Given the immediate context, it seems more likely that they were sanctified should be understood in the sense of people who have been 'set apart', or identified as active participants in the Christian community of believers, but who have subsequently committed apostasy by renouncing their identification with other believers, by denying the knowledge of the truth that they had heard, and by repudiating the work and the person of Christ himself. Such apostasy is thus evidence that their identification with the Christian community was only superficial and that they were not genuine believers. This is probably what Jesus had in mind when he said: *<<And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven>>* (Luke 12:10). Another view is that the author is confident that the grave warning in these verses will be the means by which those who are truly elect will be braced to persevere in faith and obedience, and so to be saved. Refer to the comments made on Hebrews 3:14 and 6:4-8 regarding these issues.

³⁰ For we know the one who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 10:30-31

Vengeance is mine, I will repay is taken from the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 32:35 that is also used by Paul in Romans 12:19. It brings hope to believers today just as it did to Israel originally in that, beyond defeat and exile, God will restore his people.

It is a fearful thing. There are many Christians today, and indeed many unbelievers, who think they have nothing to fear from God. What they fail to appreciate is that God did not change from the image often portrayed in the OT of a vengeful God, whose righteous judgement had such dire consequences for those guilty of sin. Jesus is portrayed by some as a fluffy bunny or a hippy that just goes around loving everyone. The images of fire and vengeance - they are only images, but that does not mean the reality is any the less fearful - are as frequent in the NT, if not more so, as they are in the OT.

The living God, to whom everyone will give an account of their life: *<<And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account>>* (Hebrews 4:13), is neither to be trifled with nor presumed upon.

The living God, also referred to in Hebrews 3:12, 9:14 and 12:22, is here portrayed through two citations from Deuteronomy 32:35-36 as the heavenly judge, who will judge even his own people, i.e. fall into the hands of the living God.

³² But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,
³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting.

Hebrews 10:32-34

Recall those earlier days. Having severely warned his audience, the author reminds them of the previous evidence of their faith in persevering amid suffering: <<*Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same diligence, so as to realise the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*>> (Hebrews 6:9-12).

Enlightened likely describes the initial entrance into the Christian community through explanation of the Christian faith: <<*For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit*>> (Hebrews 6:4). This is an indication that a person has come to recognise and accept the truth about God, the world, their own self and their neighbour; they have come to see the light, or as the apostle puts it: <<*But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God*>> (John 3:21). Some have suggested that this may also have included baptism.

The sufferings the writer lists include public reproach: <<*He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward*>> (Hebrews 11:26), and: <<*Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured*>> (Hebrews 13:13); imprisonments and associating with those in prison: <<*Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured*>> (Hebrews 13:3), and the plundering of their possessions. Officially sanctioned persecution seems likely here, especially regarding imprisonments. The author lauds their endurance, their compassion, and their confidence in their future, eternal better possession.

Many Christian readers today know exactly what it is like to suffer public ridicule and physical abuse, to stand alongside those who suffer it, and to find their property being looted, with the authorities looking on and doing nothing to prevent it. The writer insists, though, that such horrible and frightening moments are to be seen - and, he says, were seen by those early Christians - as themselves a sign of hope. The outrageous lawlessness of plundering other people's property, with apparent sanction from the authorities, is a pointer to the fact that, although we still live in the evil present age, there is coming a new age in which God will give his people a better possession.

³⁵ Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. ³⁶ For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Hebrews 10:35-36

Given his readers' previous perseverance through persecution (vv.32-34), the author encourages continuing confidence (v.19), with: <<*Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope*>> (Hebrews 3:6), and: <<*Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*>> (Hebrews 4:16).

They are to exercise endurance: <<*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set*>> (Hebrews 12:1), by practicing the will of God: <<*Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen*>> (Hebrews 13:20-21), with the goal of inheriting the promised salvation: <<*Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it*>> (Hebrews 4:1), <<*And we want each one of you to show the same diligence, so as to realise the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*>> (Hebrews 6:11-12), <<*But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises*>> (Hebrews 8:6), and: <<*For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant*>> (Hebrews 9:15).

³⁷ For yet

‘in a very little while,

the one who is coming will come and will not delay;

³⁸ but my righteous one will live by faith.

My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back.’

Hebrews 10:37-38

This quote from Habakkuk 2:3-4 encourages perseverance; it announces that the wait for the end will be short, that faith is required from the righteous, and that shrinking back invites God's displeasure; and this displeasure, as the next verse clarifies, means final judgment.

Habakkuk was prophesying the calamity that would befall the nation as the mighty Babylonian army swept all before them. The people did not heed the prophets then, so God did not intervene. The writer is using this historic

instance to warn his readership not to ignore the warnings of what they will face if they do not turn back to God through his Christ.

If, as many believe, this letter was written in the early to mid 60's AD, then the author, if he lived through the Jewish-Roman war of AD66-73, may well have pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD70 as confirmation of what he was saying here. God had again punished those who had rejected the call through his Christ.

In a very little while reflects the belief among the early disciples that Jesus would return during their lifetime, most obviously stated by Paul: <<*Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed*>> (1 Corinthians 15:51-52), and it seems later confirmed by the Lord in the revelation he gave to John: <<*The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*>> (Revelation 22:20). However, it seems this is part of the mystery and that God expects all believers in each generation to be prepared for the return of the Christ at any moment by the way they live their daily lives. What is evident is that, with the coming of Jesus, the devastating judgment on the one hand, and the rescue from it on the other, are not far off.

My righteous one will live by faith. This quote was also used by Paul: <<*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'*>> (Romans 1:17), and: <<*Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'*>> (Galatians 3:11). Clearly it was a well-known text in early Christianity. What Habakkuk seems to have meant was that, when everything all around seemed to be turning upside down and inside out, God's true people would hold on and last the course. Faith was what would matter - God's faithfulness to them, and their answering faithfulness to God.

The NT writers seem to have latched on to the sentence in Habakkuk not least because they believed that the time of trouble for Israel that had begun with the Babylonian invasion had continued, more or less, right through to their own day; and that now, with the coming of the Christ, God was at last making the way through to the new age in which salvation, rescue and deliverance would come to birth.

³⁹ But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.

Hebrews 10:39

The author reasserts his confidence in the readers, associating himself with them using the first person plural we.

To shrink back invites divine displeasure (v.38) unto destruction (vv.26-27), but faith results in salvation, i.e. preservation of the soul.

Those who have faith and so are saved. This final statement is one of such great hope for it based on the very promise of Jesus: <<*For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it*>> (Mark 8:35).