

The God of peace

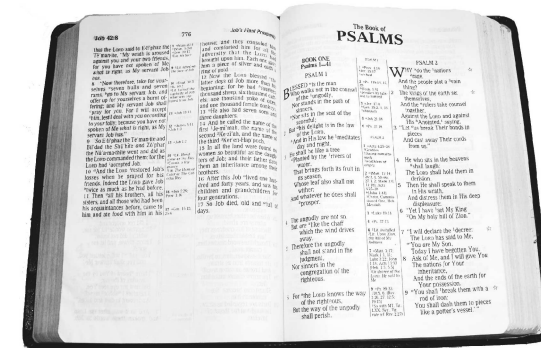
The wonderful benediction at the end of the letter to the Hebrews is a great encouragement to us all. We may be tormented by doubts and fears, we may be under intense pressure, we may feel so discouraged that we wonder just how we will persevere in the Christian life, but let us turn our eyes to the God who works in us *what is well pleasing in his sight* (20–21).

- He is *the God of peace* who gives his peace to the troubled soul (cp. Romans 16:20). The Lord Jesus gives us lasting peace so that we should not be haunted by fear (John 14:27). We lose our peace when we do not trust in God. He will keep us in perfect peace if we keep our minds upon him and trust in him (Isaiah 26:3).
- He is the God of power *who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead*. In his strength we can overcome the greatest obstacles and triumph in the most fierce conflict (Romans 8:37; Philippians 4:13). *The things which are impossible with men are possible with God* (Luke 18:27).
- He is the God of covenant. The *everlasting covenant* sealed by the precious blood of Christ binds us to God and he is totally committed to us. The new covenant is established on better promises (8:6). *He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* (Romans 8:32).

Be encouraged that our glorious God will *make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you what is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ. The God of peace, of power, who keeps his covenant, works in us! How wonderful! Why is this? Because he is also the God of grace, bestowing favour on us poor unworthy sinners. Grace be with you all. Amen* (25).

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



July 2013

Bible readings from Hebrews chapters 8 to 13

A better covenant, which was established on better promises

The Lord Jesus is the *mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises* (6; cp. 7:22). A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more parties by which one party promises to do certain things on condition the other party also fulfils their obligations set down in the agreement. A covenant involving God is different because he is the Almighty and he dictates the terms of the covenant. He promises wonderful things to those who obey him.

The old covenant did not succeed because of the failure of the people to keep it (7–8). A new covenant was needed and promised (8–13). This covenant is not sealed with the blood of sacrificial animals but by the precious blood of Christ (13:20). The Lord Jesus broke bread at the Last Supper as a symbol of his tortured body in which he bore our sins (1 Peter 2:24). He then took a cup of wine and said, *‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’* (1 Corinthians 11:25).

All the Old Testament promises relating to the new covenant are for those who trust in Christ as their Saviour and Lord. This is shown in this chapter which quotes Jeremiah 31:31–34 with regard to the new covenant (8–12). These promises are far better than those of the old covenant (6). God puts his laws in our minds and writes them on our hearts (10). He enables us to know him while our sins he remembers no more (11–12). **When God forgives, he really does forget! Satan often rakes up our sinful past. If he is attacking you in this manner, come to God in prayer. Thank the Lord that he has forgiven you completely and that Satan’s accusations cannot rob you of your salvation (Romans 8:33–34).** There is no more condemnation for the child of God (Romans 8:1). Let us rejoice in the Lord and thank him for this *better covenant, which was established on better promises.*

All Scripture quotations are in italics and are taken from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

By him, let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God

One of the great themes of the Book of Hebrews is that the sacrifice of Christ is complete (7:27; 10:10,12). Although we do not have to bring animal sacrifices to atone for sin the Lord does expect other sacrifices from us as a token of our love and gratitude to Christ.

There is the sacrifice of praise. *Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God ... giving thanks to his name* (15). To offer praise and thanks continually does involve effort, especially in times when we are beset by difficulties and trials. We should praise God for all the benefits of our salvation and for his unceasing love and care. Praise glorifies God and delights him (Psalm 50:23; 69:30–31). The Lord has chosen us that we may proclaim his praises (1 Peter 2:9). Be a praising Christian, a thankful Christian, but never a complaining Christian.

The sacrifice of Christian benevolence is also necessary. Fellowship means sharing what we have with our Christian brothers in need (16). Paul described the gifts of the Philippian church as *an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God* (Philippians 4:18). The Hebrews had not fallen short in good works but there was a real danger that they would not persevere given their discouraged state (6:10–11). Good works do not save us but they are an evidence of genuine faith (James 2:14–18).

The writer desired the prayers of his readers (18–19). The faltering prayers of the weakest believer are important. There is much to challenge us in today’s reading. **We need open hearts to praise God, open hands to show Christian love and benevolence, and concerned hearts to bear each other up in prayer.**

*Fill thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and thy ways.*

(Horatius Bonar)

Let us go forth to him, outside the camp, bearing his reproach

Some were teaching these Hebrew Christians that if they ate meat killed according to Jewish ritual ('kosher') they would have grace imparted to their souls. This was a profitless practice (9). If we are well grounded in Scripture we will *not be carried about with various and strange doctrines* (9). Animal sacrifices have been made obsolete by Christ's sacrifice (10).

The Day of Atonement points to two essential aspects of Christ's atoning work (11–12):

- The blood brought into the Most Holy Place showed that a blameless substitute had to die to bring forgiveness of sins and peace with a holy God.
- The bodies of the animal sacrificed were burned *outside the camp* which indicated that the substitute had become unclean as a result of bearing the sins of the people. The sinless Lord Jesus was rejected by the Jewish religious leaders and was cursed as our sin-bearer (Galatians 3:13). He was crucified and buried outside the city of Jerusalem.

Many of the Jewish Christians who were the first readers of this letter had been cut off from Jewish religious and social life and were probably turned away by their own families. They, too, had been driven *outside the camp*. The Lord Jesus paid a great price to save us from our sins, *therefore let us go forth to him, outside the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come* (13–14; cp. Romans 15:3; Psalm 69:7–9).

Are you suffering scorn and reproach because of your Christian testimony? Do friends and colleagues at work ignore you and shun you? The person who walks with the Lord cannot be at home in this world. **Be encouraged because the Lord is with you on your journey to the heavenly city and there are great blessings for the persecuted believer** (14; cp. 11:25–26; Matthew 5:11–12; 1 Peter 4:14).

Christ came as a high priest of the good things to come

The apostle now directs our attention to the Old Testament tabernacle and the ritual and sacrifices associated with it. The tabernacle (the word means a 'tent') was divided into two sections, *the sanctuary* (or *holy place*) and *the Holiest of All* (2–3). The high priest entered *the Holiest of All* just once a year (on the day of Atonement) with sacrifices for his own sins and for the sins of the people (7).

The tabernacle (and the temple which followed it) illustrated what Christ was to do for us, and God accepted those who came with their sacrifices. Animal sacrifices were not able to take away sin (10:4). Animals are not moral beings and their blood could only provide ritual cleansing. God covered the sins of his people until the coming of the new covenant when those sins were taken away.

While the first tabernacle was still standing there was no open access into *the Holiest of All* (6–8) but *Christ came as a high priest of the good things to come* (11). He has taken away the veil symbolising the barrier between God and men. He went into *the Most Holy Place* in heaven *once for all, having obtained eternal redemption*. Verse 12 is not suggesting that Christ actually took some of his human blood into heaven ('with' is better translated 'by' as it is in the AV). It was by virtue of his own blood shed at Calvary that he entered the Most Holy Place once and for all. Jesus offered himself without spot to God to purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (14).

Let us close with some words from John Calvin on verse 14, 'We must note the aim of atonement which is to serve the living God. We are not cleansed by Christ so that we can immerse ourselves continually in fresh dirt, but in order that our purity may serve the glory of God.' He goes on to say that nothing can proceed from us which is pleasing to God until we are cleansed by the blood of Christ.

You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:20).

To those who eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time

A mediator is a go-between who mediates between two parties in order to bring reconciliation and peace. Our sin alienates us from God and brings his holy wrath upon us (Romans 1:18; Ephesians 2:11–16). The Lord Jesus is described as ‘*the mediator of the new covenant*’ (15; cp. 8:6). As God and sinless man he is well-suited to be our mediator. God the Father speaks through his Son, and the Son represents us before the Father.

When a person makes a last will and testament, it is not enforced until after his death and then his instructions are followed for the disposal of his estate. The words ‘*covenant*’ and ‘*testament*’ are taken from the same Greek word. The new covenant (testament) required the death of Christ for us to be able to receive its promises (15–17). One of these promises is *the eternal inheritance* (15; cp. Ephesians 1:11,18; 1 Peter 1:4). Notice the other ‘eternals’ in this chapter – *eternal redemption* (12) and *the eternal Spirit* (14).

Three appearances of Christ are mentioned – past, present, and future:

- *Once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself* (26). The words ‘*at the end of the ages*’ refer to the last days which began with his coming into the world. He came to give himself as a sacrifice for the salvation of sinners. *Without shedding of blood there is no remission* (‘forgiveness’, 22).
- He is in heaven *now to appear in the presence of God for us* (24). As our great high priest, he represents us before God the Father and intercedes for us. We are able to *come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (4:16).
- *To those who eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time* (his second coming). There is judgment after death, but *Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many* (27–28). The unbeliever has every reason to fear the judgment of God, but the Christian should *eagerly wait* for the coming again of the Lord Jesus when we shall see him and be made perfect. **Are you looking forward to the return of Christ?**

Remember those who rule over you

The exercise of authority in a local church (or lack of it) is a difficult and controversial subject. When those in leadership abuse their authority, untold damage is done and Christians are deeply hurt. On the other hand, if there is no authority, anarchy, chaos and insecurity will prevail. Elders must serve and not ‘lord it’ over God’s flock (1 Peter 5:2–3). Elders must also rule, however. Look at the verses in this chapter which speak of them as those who rule (7,17,24).

Remember those who rule over you (7); this refers to past leaders of whose godly lives Stuart Olyott writes, ‘Oh, the godly men and women we have been privileged to know! What lives they lived! We have never seen their like anywhere else, And what deaths they died! They left the world filled with faith and hope’ (I WISH SOMEONE WOULD EXPLAIN HEBREWS TO ME!, page 180).

Elders must be godly men who are able to teach the word of God (7; cp. 1 Timothy 3:1–7). They have an awesome responsibility to watch over your souls and they will have to give an account in the day of judgment (17). Do you welcome their admonition and correction when they lovingly seek to point out things that are wrong or are not helpful in your life? You are to *be submissive* (17) though this is not popular in today’s environment when most people want to do what is right in their own eyes. Do not grieve your pastor (elder) by backsliding or by coldness of heart. Some Christians do not obey this command to be submissive to their church leaders. They do not take seriously the teaching of the Bible in this matter because they flit from church to church and will not commit themselves to be church members anywhere. They do not want to have church leaders.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever (8). Godly leaders are a great blessing to the church but the Lord Jesus is our great unchanging leader who means everything to us. We trust in him because he is our life, and peace, and hope, and joy. He will never fail us nor forsake us. **Let us worship him and praise him.**

Let brotherly love continue

We must never be so preoccupied with our struggles in the Christian ‘race’ that we forget others. *Let brotherly love continue* (1). We can show such love by opening our homes to entertain visitors. Abraham and Sarah once entertained angels when giving hospitality (2; cp. Genesis 18:1–16; 19:1). Christian love is also expressed in remembering those who are imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. We belong to the same church which is Christ’s body and we should feel for our Christian brothers and sisters who are suffering for the sake of the gospel and where possible, seek to help them. Christians who were once imprisoned or persecuted for their faith testify of their gratitude for the prayers and practical concern of God’s people. The Lord Jesus not only gave us the new covenant, but also a new commandment, that we love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34–35; cp. 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:16–19). Do look up these verses, think about them, and practise what they teach.

We live in a society where immorality and covetousness abound and verses 4 and 5 contain some timely warnings for us. *Marriage is honourable* but God will judge the immoral and adulterers. Most people in the world are no longer shocked at immorality and unfaithfulness in marriage. This sin is becoming more common among professing Christians. We must not allow ourselves to be drawn into this wickedness.

The ‘consumer society’ exalts material possessions and entices us to be covetous with appealing advertisements in magazines and on television. For all our gadgets and luxuries we are not content. Let us learn to be content with what we have, for *godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Timothy 6:6). Can we be anything but content when God has promised us, ‘*I will never leave you nor forsake you*’ (5)? What have we to fear when God is our helper (6)? **Our lives must show a different quality from those of unbelievers.** We must show brotherly love (1–3), we must keep ourselves pure (4) and we must be content (5). **How is it with you?**

I have come to do your will, O God

The insufficiency of the Old Testament sacrifices is again stressed. The very fact that these sacrifices were repeated year by year proved that *the law ... can never ... make those who approach perfect* (1–4). The sacrifices of the law were powerless to bring a permanent benefit to those on whose behalf they were offered. The Lord Jesus took the burden of his people’s sins upon himself and by his one sacrifice removed it. When he comes again, he will come *apart from sin* (without its burden) to complete the salvation of *those who eagerly wait for him* (9:28). The law was only a shadow of the good things to come in Christ. A thousand shadows can never equal the substance!

You may be puzzled by the words of the Messiah, quoted from Psalm 40:6–8, which state that God has no pleasure *in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin*. If God gave the law to Moses and the detailed instruction for the sacrifices, how can he have no pleasure in them? God was dissatisfied with them in the sense that they had no lasting value. He ordained them only to continue until Christ died for sins.

Sin came into the world through Adam’s disobedience, but by the obedience of one Man, Jesus Christ, *many will be made righteous* (Romans 5:19). His sacrifice is of infinite value because he came to earth as a man, and as a man he perfectly obeyed the will of God the Father. He said, ‘*Behold, I have come to do your will, O God*’ (7,9).

Jesus, *being in the form of God ... humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross* (Philippians 2:6,8). He once said to his disciples, ‘*My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work*’ (John 4:34). *By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* (10). **Let us gratefully worship our wonderful Saviour and show by our obedience to his will that we have been sanctified.**

*My Saviour’s obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.*

(Augustus M. Toplady)

I will put my laws into their hearts

Every priest under the old covenant offered the same sacrifices day after day. Sin offerings, burnt offerings and trespass offerings were unable to remove sins (11). They could not purge the guilty conscience (cp. 9:14) or satisfy divine justice. The once-for-all sacrifice of Christ for sins is again shown to be superior to the repeated sacrifices of the Old Testament. Jesus, *after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God* (12). Our great High Priest has finished his work. He now sits at God's right hand. His work is perfect and by his one offering *he has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified* (14). We need no more sacrifices, no more offerings for sin. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass, where Christ is supposedly sacrificed each day, the doctrines of purgatory and penance, deny the all-sufficient work of Christ to save sinners.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16). The Holy Spirit is a witness to the perfect work of Christ. He inspired the words of the prophets (2 Peter 1:21) and he gave the promise of the new covenant through Jeremiah (15). The words of the prophet are again quoted in verses 16 and 17 (cp. 8:8–12; Jeremiah 31:31–34). *The good things to come* (1) which we have in this covenant are wonderful:

- The Lord works in our hearts. *'I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them'* (16). The ten commandments were written on stone tablets and placed in the ark of the covenant. God's law is now in our hearts and this should be seen in our lives.
- God will remember our sins no more (17). This is one of the great blessings of the new covenant. Sins were continually remembered under the old covenant because the sacrifices were unable to atone for sin once and for all. Satan may accuse us but God has forgiven us and has chosen to forget our sins. How wonderful! Our guilt has been removed and we can come before God with a clear conscience. **The Lord will not remember our sins, but we are to remember to obey his commandments and seek always to please him.**

Let us ... serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear

Moses who spoke on earth is contrasted with Christ who speaks from heaven. If those who despised the word of God brought by Moses did not escape divine punishment, how much more will those be punished who turn away from the Lord Jesus who speaks from heaven concerning the new covenant (25; cp. 2:2–3; 10:29)!

We live in unsettled times with strife and unrest in many parts of the world. Nothing is permanent on earth but through the new covenant *we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken* (28). How wonderful! We belong to an everlasting kingdom and it is secure. God's kingdom is under sustained and powerful attack but it cannot be shaken. Satan, demons, and evil men may do everything in their power to shake the kingdom of God, but they will fail (read Psalm 2). What great privileges belong to us! We have an eternal inheritance in Christ (9:15; 1 Peter 1:4).

Great privileges bring great responsibilities. We must not be careless in our attitude to the things of God. *Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear* (28). *'Have grace'* can be translated 'hold fast grace'. Let us take that grace which is freely available so that we may persevere in serving God. The Greek verb translated 'serve' can also be rendered 'worship'. Acceptable worship is *with reverence and godly fear*. How often this is lacking among us!

We must also serve the Lord with a sense of awe and with godly fear and that means giving of our best to God. It also means that we will *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness* (Matthew 6:33). There is generally a lack of *godly fear* among us, and as a result, the work of God suffers. It was *godly fear* that moved Noah to take God's warning of judgment seriously and to build the ark (11:7). It is *godly fear* that will move us to serve God acceptably. **How do you worship and serve God?** *Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire* (28–29).

The blood ... that speaks better things than that of Abel

The apostle here contrasts two covenants (the old and the new) by showing the difference between two significant mountains (Sinai and Zion). The Hebrew Christians were forgetting the great blessings of the new covenant. They were in peril of drifting back into Judaism and were reminded of the scene at Sinai when God gave his holy law. The Israelites were so terrified of the burning fire, smoke, darkness and storm that overshadowed the mountain, the sound of the trumpet and the voice of God, that they asked that God would cease speaking directly to them. Moses himself was overwhelmed with fear (18–21; cp. Exodus 20:18–19).

We have come to a different mountain, to Mount Zion the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem where God actually dwells. We belong to an illustrious company led by our great Saviour (22–24). Here, we are not terrified but are welcomed. We have come *to an innumerable company of angels* and to the *general* (Greek = ‘festal’) *assembly and church of the first-born who are registered in heaven*. This joyful festal gathering stands in great contrast to the fearful assembly at Sinai.

The first-born of Israel had special privileges and heirship (blessings despised by Esau, 16). The first-born was redeemed by blood and consecrated to God (Exodus 13:2,13–15). We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Let us rejoice that *our names are written in heaven* (Luke 10:20). The church in heaven (*‘the spirits of just men made perfect’*) is also in this great company. We come to *Jesus the mediator of the new covenant* whose blood *speaks better things than that of Abel* (24; cp. Genesis 4:10). **How could the Hebrews think of going back to the old covenant? How can any Christian think of going back to his former worldly way of life when he enjoys so many privileges?**

*Abel's blood for vengeance
Pleaded to the skies;
But the blood of Jesus
For our pardon cries.*

(translated from Italian by Edward Caswell).

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering

We have a great High Priest who offered himself as a perfect and once-for-all sacrifice for sinners and we have boldness to enter the presence of God by virtue of the blood of Jesus (19; cp. 4:16). The veil in the tabernacle kept the worshippers from the Holiest of All, but Christ’s body given as a sacrifice opens the way for us into God’s presence (20). There is no other way to God the Father except through the Lord Jesus (John 14:6). It is *a new and living way* (20). In the light of these facts, the apostle urges:

- *‘Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith’* (22). The same Greek word for *‘draw near’* is translated *‘approach’* (1) and *‘come’* (4:16; 7:25). A true (sincere) heart cleansed through Christ’s atoning work is able to approach God with confidence.
- *‘Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering’* (23; cp. 4:14). Jesus is the High Priest of our confession (3:1). The great heroes of faith confessed their hope, relying on the promises of God (11:13). They knew that *he who promised is faithful*. The great faithfulness of God should encourage us to persevere.
- *‘Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works’* (24). There can be no place for selfish individualism among Christians. We must be thoughtful and kind. We must first stir up ourselves if others are to be stirred. It is when our lives display the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) that our example will encourage other believers to lead more godly lives.
- We must not forsake *the assembling of ourselves together* (25). If you have no desire to be with God’s people for worship and prayer, or to hear his word preached and to encourage others, you should question whether you are a genuine Christian. Or could it be that you are in a backslidden state? **Are you growing lazy and slipshod in the Christian life? Beware! The day of Christ (his second coming) is approaching. Will you be ashamed on that day?**

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God

We have before us another solemn warning passage, which, on the face of it, implies that a Christian can fall away and be eternally lost. We know that there is ample evidence in Scripture to show that a believer cannot lose his salvation (see notes for 25 and 26 June on Hebrews 6:4–8). It is possible, however, to have all the trappings of Christianity without being truly saved.

We can receive the knowledge of the truth and not have the Lord Jesus who is the ‘Truth’ in our lives. God warns us that this is a perilous situation. If we harden ourselves against God and his Son by the wilful sin of persistently rejecting the gospel of Christ, we may go past the point of no return. *There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* (26). We reject the only sacrifice that is able to atone for sin and there is no other sacrifice that can save us. Stuart Olyott comments, ‘It is important for us to see that the apostle is here talking about professing Christians who then forsake the faith, treat it as a lie and trample on what they once held dear. He is not talking about the sins and failures that all Christian experience. How can he be? He has already promised that weak believers can find grace to help and failing Christians can find mercy, at the throne of grace (4:14–16)’, (I WISH SOMEONE WOULD EXPLAIN HEBREWS TO ME!, page 126).

Those who rejected the law of Moses were severely punished. We are warned that those who despise the Son of God and his blood shed for sinners, who insult the Holy Spirit, will be punished more severely than those who rejected Moses’ law (28–29). It is possible to make a profession of faith in Christ, to be baptised as a believer, and appear to be sanctified, but to be a false believer. When such a person apostatises, he often becomes an enemy of God and his people.

The LORD will judge his people and he will separate the true believer from the false (30). *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (31). **Let us examine our own hearts and be sure that we are true Christians (2 Corinthians 13:5).**

Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down

We have already seen that we must persevere in the Christian ‘race’ (1). To do this we must get rid of all hindrances and fix our eyes upon Jesus. Today’s reading also gives exhortations to help us in this race:

- *Strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees* (12; cp. Isaiah 35:3). J.B. Phillips paraphrases verse 12, ‘So take a fresh grip on your life and brace your trembling limbs.’ We are all moved and disturbed by the harrowing pictures of victims of famine with their matchstick limbs. There are many Christians who are spiritually famine-stricken – and the food is there for them. If we do not take spiritual food and exercise we will be weak. We must take a fresh grip on our Christian lives.
- *Make straight (right) paths for your feet* (13) by living a consistent Christian life. J.B. Phillips puts verse 13 like this, ‘Don’t wander away from the path but forge steadily onward. On the right path the limping foot recovers strength and does not collapse.’
- *Pursue peace with all men* (14; cp. Romans 14:19). Our stand for truth will bring us into conflict, but we should relentlessly ‘pursue’ peace. **We must also pursue peace in our church and guard against division. If we love to indulge in needless disputes, our hearts are not right.**
- *Pursue ... holiness* (14). God has chosen us in Christ to be holy (Ephesians 1:4). We have a holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9) and without holiness we will not see the Lord. No holiness, no heaven!
- Look out diligently lest you become bitter under chastening (15), or lest you despise your spiritual birthright and blessings as Esau did (16–17). Stuart Olyott writes, ‘He chose to think little of the things of God and found himself condemned to walk along the path he had chosen — that of living and dying without the Lord. That, dear friends, is the peril of apostasy!’ (I WISH SOMEONE WOULD EXPLAIN HEBREWS TO ME!, page 161).

Whom the LORD loves he chastens

The apostle urges, ‘Do not to despise the chastening of the LORD’ (5; quoting from Proverbs 3:11–12). The Greek word translated ‘chastening’ has the idea of the training through which children are put so that they will grow as mature people. A child who is not corrected soon becomes spoiled and self-centred and often remains the same through adulthood. It is important that we realise that God disciplines all true believers. We must not despise such training which is for our own good. Chastening is an evidence that we belong to God (6–8).

The problem with these Hebrews was that they had forgotten the words from Proverbs regarding chastening, and they were in all kinds of trouble (5). The Lord may use sickness, loss, disappointment or he may withdraw the sense of his presence in order to correct us. The experience of chastisement is very painful, but we must always remember that the Lord chastens us because we belong to him, because he loves us and delights in us (6–9; Revelation 3:19). *Whom the LORD loves he chastens* (6). The Puritan John Trapp describes chastening as God’s ‘love tokens’. He chastens us to wean us from worldliness, pride, coldness of heart and many other sins. William S. Plumer writes, ‘If chastening seemed to be joyous, it would quite fail of its proper effect ... Grief, when blessed of God, is a medicine to the soul’ (COMMENTARY ON HEBREWS).

Chastening makes us more godly; it is *for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness ... nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it* (10–11). **Let us learn to recognise chastisement when it is sent by God and pray for grace to learn the lessons that he would teach us.** *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word ... It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes* (Psalm 119:67,71).

Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward

The struggling Hebrew Christians were losing heart and some may have been tempted to abandon the Christian faith. They are now encouraged to persevere by looking back and then by looking forward.

They are first reminded of *the former days* after they were enlightened and saved. They had then *endured a great struggle with sufferings, reproach and persecution*. They had also shown compassion on those who had been imprisoned for their faith and they had joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods knowing that they had *a better and an enduring possession* for themselves in heaven (32–34). ‘In heaven they shall have a better life, a better estate, better liberty, better society, better hearts, better work, everything better’ (Matthew Henry).

They are also encouraged to look forward. In the light of their former suffering, they are urged, ‘Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward’ (35; cp. 3:6). The Greek word translated ‘confidence’ means ‘boldness’ and is translated ‘boldness’ in verse 19 of this chapter. God will reward them for all that they have done for him and his people (6:10). Their present suffering is not worthy to be compared with the glory that awaits them (Romans 8:18).

We need to persevere just as much as those wavering Hebrew Christians. We need to do the will of God so that we *may receive the promise* (36). Verse 38 warns, ‘The just (‘righteous’) shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’ May you be able to affirm with confidence in God, ‘But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul’ (39). When we turn to chapter 11, we will see God’s ‘portrait gallery’ of great men and women of faith who endured and *died in faith* without receiving the promises of God (11:13,39). **Are you going through difficult and perplexing times? Do not cast away your confidence; there is too much to lose. The rewards are great for those who trust in God and persevere.**

By faith

This is one of the most encouraging chapters in the whole of the Bible. You will find it helpful to read the whole chapter through before looking at shorter passages in more detail. The previous chapter urges us, ‘*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful*’ (10:23). The apostle now demonstrates how God has shown his faithfulness and he describes some of the exploits of godly people. *They died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, they were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* (13).

They confessed their hope. Look at all the sentences beginning ‘*By faith*’ and be encouraged by the testimonies of these great men and women of faith. *The elders* (‘ancients’) *obtained a good testimony* by faith (2; cp. verse 39). God bore testimony to their character, declaring that they were righteous and that they pleased him (4–6).

What is faith? The English Standard Version of the Bible translates verse 1, *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*. This faith places its confidence in the promises of God, though we cannot presently see any fulfilment of them. The world says, ‘Seeing is believing’ but the Christian says, ‘*We walk by faith, not by sight*’ (2 Corinthians 5:7). Thomas thought that seeing was believing and was afterwards ashamed of his unbelief (John 20:25–29). The Lord Jesus said to his disciples, ‘*Have faith in God*’ (Mark 11:22). God delights in those who really trust in him and in his promises.

How can we have faith? If faith does not come by sight, how does it come? *Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17). There it is! Pay close attention to the preaching of God’s word. Read your Bible every day and obey it. Memorise passages of Scripture. **You will find your faith growing stronger and by faith you will persevere in the Christian life.**

The joy that was set before him

We have seen that the Christian life is likened to a race which we must strive to complete. We have been encouraged by the exploits of the great heroes of faith and we are now urged to fix our eyes upon the Lord Jesus as we run this race. We have therefore repeated yesterday’s reading. *Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God* (2).

The Lord Jesus endured the terrible suffering on the cross because of *the joy that was set before him*. For that joy he despised the shame of being denied, mocked, beaten and scourged. He endured *hostility from sinners against himself* (3). What was *the joy that was set before him*?

- It was to accomplish the will of God the Father. Jesus said that his food was to do the will of the Father who sent him, *and to finish his work* (John 4:34). His death on the cross was the accomplishment of the will of the Father (John 12:27–29).
- It was to destroy the works of the devil (2:14; 1 John 3:8).
- It was to be exalted to sit down at the right hand of the throne of God where he would have great honour (2; cp. 1:3; 8:1; Philippians 2:5–11).
- It was to *see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied* with the salvation of many, whose sins he bore on the cross (Isaiah 53:11).

The message to those struggling Hebrew Christians and to us is to persevere whatever our trials, struggles and suffering. We must fix our eyes upon Jesus, and like him keep in mind the joy that is set before us. That joy is to have the privilege of seeing our wonderful Saviour and of being with him for ever in heaven. We will then worship him and adore him; we will enjoy everlasting peace and happiness and have the satisfaction of working for God with nothing to hinder us. We will be delivered for ever from the remains of sin. **Whatever your troubles and disappointments persevere because glory awaits us (Romans 8:18).**

The race that is set before us

The accomplishments of the great men and women described in chapter 11 bear witness to the fact that ordinary people can become extraordinary through faith in God. The Christian life is a race (1). The Greek word translated ‘*race*’ (‘agon’) was used to describe the contests in the Greek games. It means ‘a struggle’ and our English word ‘agony’ comes from it. ‘Agon’ is also translated ‘*fight*’ (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7). **The Christian life involves hard struggle, but we must succeed and we can! How are we to do this?**

- We must *lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us* (1). Notice the distinction between ‘*sin*’ and ‘*weight*’. ‘*Every weight*’ describes those things which are not wrong in themselves but become wrong because they take a greater priority in our lives than is good for us. They weigh us down and handicap us in the race. If we cling to sin, it will greatly hinder us, or stop us in the Christian race. This is sinful and will ruin us. We must be ruthless with any sin in our lives and get rid of anything that encourages sinful thoughts. Many a Christian has been ensnared through pornography that is so easily available on the internet and television. Indwelling sin will not quietly yield to our attacks upon it – there will be a struggle (4).
- We must beware of continually looking inward at ourselves. We must look to our great Saviour, the Lord Jesus, who endured great hardship and suffering to save us (2–3).
- We must not despise God’s chastening (5–11). We will think more about this in a couple of days’ time.

The Christian race is not easy, but the Lord Jesus *endured the cross and hostility from sinners against himself* (2–3) so that we could be in this race. He will never leave us nor forsake us. **Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.**

By faith we understand

Some unbelievers have the mistaken notion that faith is the enemy of reason, and that to have faith is a sign of stupidity. Nothing could be further from the truth. Biblical Christianity does not bypass the mind. It encourages us to think. Beware of those people who claim to have healing gifts but who tell us not to rely on our minds in assessing their claims. That is not faith, it is credulity. We read in verse 3, *By faith we understand* (perceive with our minds) *that the worlds were framed by the word of God*. The Bible has no place for the godless theory of evolution which is taught as fact but it is far from being so. Many who reject God’s word will believe the most fanciful stories that support evolution. G.K. Chesterton once said, ‘When men cease to believe in God, they do not believe in nothing; they believe in anything.’

Our universe did not come about by accident nor by chance. It is the handiwork of God (Psalm 19:1). Many wonder whether the ages of the rocks prove the world to be millions of years old rather than a few thousand. We must remember that God created a mature world, rocks and all. Adam was a fully developed man on the day he was created. God miraculously brought the universe into being by his word. The expression, ‘*God said*’ is found ten times in the first chapter of Genesis. *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made* (Psalm 33:6). He upholds *all things by the word of his power* (1:3).

When God made the world he did not use existing materials. The things which are seen were not made of things which are visible (3). God made the world out of nothing. **Let us worship and praise our great Creator.** ‘*O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with honour and majesty*’ (Psalm 104:1).

Note: For those who are interested in the scientific issues concerning creation and evolution, I recommend the literature and videos of ‘Creation Ministries International’ (UK/Europe) and their beautifully produced colour magazine, ‘Creation’. Their address is:– 15 Station Street, Whetstone, Leics. LE8 6JS (Website = www.CreationOnTheWeb.com).

Without faith it is impossible to please him

Today's reading reminds us of three great men of faith – Abel, Enoch and Noah. Each of these men *obtained a good testimony* (2, 4,5; the words 'testimony' and 'witness' are translated from the same Greek word). Three aspects of godly living are portrayed in their lives:

- The worship of a man of faith. *By faith* Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God. Abel believed (what he had obviously been taught by his parents) that he needed to make a blood sacrifice to atone for sin and he offered up such a sacrifice from his flock. Cain refused to worship with a blood sacrifice, though God gave him the opportunity to do so (4; cp. Genesis 4:1–7). Those with true faith approach God on his terms.
- The walk of a man of faith. *By faith* Enoch walked with God in a world which was becoming increasingly godless and violent. Enoch's testimony was that he pleased God (5; cp. Genesis 5:24). *Without faith it is impossible to please him* (6). We insult God if we refuse to trust him. He will never fail us. When we come to God we *must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him* (6). Believing that God 'is' means far more than saying, 'I believe in God.' It means believing in God as he has revealed himself in his word, by his works, and in Christ. Some say, 'I have my own idea of God' but their idea of God is not found in the Bible. God is eternal, sovereign, infinitely powerful and wise, holy, just and merciful in all his ways. He will reward *those who diligently seek him*. Lazy Christians cannot expect much blessing in their lives. We must diligently seek him and that means perseverance. God does hear and answer those who come to him in faith (cp. James 1:6–7).
- The work of a man of faith. *By faith* Noah worked for God, preparing the ark and preaching righteousness to those around him (7; cp. 2 Peter 2:5). Notice the connection between faith and righteousness (4,7). Noah was motivated by *godly fear*. **True faith is seen by righteous living. Does your life testify that you please God?**

Having obtained a good testimony through faith

We may long for the spiritual success which the heroes of faith enjoyed, but are we willing to suffer for the Lord? Look again at the catalogue of suffering found in these verses. The apostle Paul spoke not only of knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection, but also of knowing *the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death* (Philippians 3:10). If we are faithful to Christ, we must expect the world to hate us, as it hated him (John 15:18–21; 1 Peter 4:12–16).

Among the brave heroes of faith were those who died under torture rather than compromise God's commands. They knew that they would obtain *a better resurrection* (35) and would be with their Lord in glory (some commentators, eg. William S. Plumer, believe that this refers to the torture of brave Jews during the time of the Maccabees). According to Jewish tradition, the prophet Isaiah was slain during the reign of Manasseh. He was fastened to a plank of wood, which was then sawn through, killing him (37).

The world hates men and women of faith and treats them with contempt, but it is not worthy of them. They have the approval of God, and that is all that matters (35–38; cp. 1 Corinthians 4:12–13). The Old Testament heroes of faith who *obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise* (39; cp. verse 2). We have the advantage over them because we have seen the promise of Christ's coming fulfilled, and they cannot reach perfection without us (40; cp. 12:23). If they persevered without receiving the promise of Christ and all that he brings as the Mediator of the new covenant, how much more should we persevere? We know him as our Saviour and we are able to *come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (4:16). **Stuart Olyott comments, 'The final proof that my faith is real will be that it is still with me when I die. In my dying moments I will still be looking forward. When all else has left me — even my last remnants of health and consciousness — faith will remain'** (I WISH SOMEONE WOULD EXPLAIN HEBREWS TO ME!, page 146).

Who through faith ... out of weakness were made strong

An apt title for these verses would be 'Faith's Conquests'. The apostle remarks that he could say more if he had the time, but he gives the names of other great worthies; he gives a brief account of the tremendous exploits wrought through faith in God by these and others not named. They *subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions ...* (33). Great victories were won and kingdoms were conquered. How was this relevant to the discouraged Hebrew Christians to whom this letter was written? How is it relevant to us? We are not engaged in physical warfare like some of God's servants of old, but we are engaged in a warfare that is more fierce, and our enemy, Satan, is very subtle (2 Corinthians 10:3–4; Ephesians 6:12). The Hebrews were aware of this (10:32; 12:4) and needed to take heart from the example of the heroes of faith.

We have to *fight the good fight of faith* (1 Timothy 6:12). We may be tempted to think that we have to be exceptionally strong to overcome great obstacles but that is not so. Many of these people were well aware of their own weakness (eg. Gideon – Judges 6:15), but *out of weakness were made strong* (34). We may feel very weak and inadequate but we belong to God who is almighty and wonderful in all his ways. *God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty* (1 Corinthians 1:27). **Do you feel weak or discouraged? Trust in the Lord, take hold of his promises and he will strengthen you so that you will be able to declare, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Philippians 4:13).**

The heroes of faith mentioned in this chapter *obtained promises* (33). We have *a better covenant which was established on better promises* (8:6). Think about some of the great promises in the Bible and rejoice in the Lord who gave them to us. Do you really believe them? The great missionary William Carey achieved much because he obtained promises through faith. He said, 'Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.'

By faith Abraham obeyed

True faith in God will result in obedience to his will. *By faith Abraham obeyed* (8). God promised Abraham to give him a land and that a great nation would descend from him (he and Sarah were at that time an elderly, childless couple; see Genesis 11:30; 12:1–3). Abraham believed God's promises and obeyed him but the path of obedience is not always easy and it can be very costly. Abraham had to leave his own country and his relatives to step out into the unknown in obedience to God's will. When we obey God, we must always remember that there are no uncertainties or unknowns with him. Our future is safe in his hands.

When Abraham arrived in Canaan, God told him that this was the land of promise (Genesis 12:7). He was not able to settle in one area of Canaan and was like a foreigner among the pagan Canaanites (Genesis 12:6; 13:7). Though living in tents, he believed God's promises, having his eyes on a heavenly city (10–11).

Sarah, at first weak in faith regarding the promise of a son (Genesis 16:2; 18:9–15), by faith *received strength to conceive ... because she judged him faithful who had promised* (11). Her faltering faith became strong. **Do you lament the weakness of your faith? You do not have to remain like that. Take heart from Sarah's experience because she became strong in faith.** Concerning the promise of a son in their old age, we read of Abraham's faith in Romans 4:19–21: *He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief ... being fully convinced that what he had promised, he was also able to perform.*

If the invisible God is real to us, and if we are fully convinced that God's word is true, and that he is faithful in keeping all his promises, we will gladly obey him whatever the cost. The reward of obedience to God far outweighs any suffering or difficulty that we may be called to endure. Obedience also grows out of love to the Lord (John 14:15); it is the only path to blessing in our lives (Deuteronomy 28:1–2).

These all died in faith

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob believed that God is faithful and that he would keep his promises (13; cp. 10:23). They did not cast away their confidence (10:35). *These all died in faith not having received the promises* (13). They did not live to see the fulfilment of all that God had promised them. It was many years after they died that Israel became a great nation as God promised. They did not see the coming of the Messiah and his great sacrifice to save sinners. They were not disappointed that they died *not having received the promises* (13) because they were convinced that God is true and that he keeps his word. They honoured God and he was *not ashamed to be called their God* (16).

Do you see what made the difference in their experience? God was real to them and they were looking forward to going to the heavenly country and city which he had prepared for them (16). *They were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* travelling to a heavenly country. *They all died in faith* (13). If we want to die in faith, we must live for God now, trusting in him, and always embracing his promises.

Our problem is that we do not think enough about heaven, the second coming of Christ and the glorious future which is ours. Could it be that we are too preoccupied with the things of this world? If we are heavenly-minded:

- We will set our *mind on things above, not on things on the earth* (Colossians 3:2).
- We will rejoice in God for the promises of heaven (1 Peter 1:3–4).
- We will not lose heart when our faith is tried (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).
- We will remember that *our citizenship is in heaven* and we will eagerly look forward to Christ's return (Philippians 3:20–21).

Are we good witnesses to the fact that God has saved us and that he has worked in our lives? Do we want to die in faith? Let us then show by our behaviour that we are living by faith.

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish

Jericho was fortified by huge walls on top of which houses were built (Joshua 2:15). The Lord told the Israelites to march around the city once each day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day. This may have seemed a foolish way to conquer a walled city, but God wanted his people to trust in him. *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days* (30). When the people shouted at a signal from Joshua, the walls collapsed and Jericho was conquered (Joshua 6:15,20).

The man or woman of faith must do things in God's way. A modern application of the Jericho incident is that we must trust that God will use the preaching of the gospel for the salvation of men and women. The Lord stresses in his word that this is the way we are to evangelise the lost and to build up the church. It is through the preaching of the word of God that men and women are brought to faith in Christ. Faith comes by hearing God's word (eg. Romans 10:14–17; 2 Timothy 4:1–5). It is through the '*foolishness*' of preaching the message of the cross that God saves souls (1 Corinthians 1:21). It is a sign of unbelief to abandon the preaching of the plain gospel and to resort to worldly methods such as drama, mime and pop-gospel concerts in the hope of attracting sinners to Christ.

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe (31). She had been brought up in heathen darkness but she heard about the greatness of the Lord and believed in him (Joshua 2:9–11). *By faith* she was spared from perishing and was joined to the people of God (31). She later married Salmon and David king of Israel descended from her. She is found in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:5). How great is the God of grace who reached out to Rahab and redeemed her. He transformed her broken and blighted life and then so wonderfully used her. **Let us persevere in making known God's word and pray that many, like Rahab, will by faith come to Christ for salvation. No one is too hard for God to save!**

By faith they passed through the Red Sea

Read Exodus chapters 11,12 and 14 for the background to our short reading. The Lord had revealed to Moses that he would slay the first-born in each Egyptian household. The Israelites were told to slay a lamb for each of their households and to sprinkle its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. God promised that if they did this, they would be spared the judgment that would come upon the Egyptians. He said, ‘*When I see the blood, I will pass over you*’ (Exodus 12:13). Moses believed what God said about judgment and he obeyed God’s instructions for Israel to escape that judgment. *By faith he kept the Passover* (28). It is *by faith* that we believe that God’s warnings of judgment and hell are true. *By faith* we come to Christ, trusting in his sacrifice and shed blood for our forgiveness and cleansing from sin. Without such faith there can be no eternal life and heaven.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea (29). The people were hemmed in and trapped by the Egyptian army. There was no escape. They had to go forward into the sea. The people had very little faith until encouraged by Moses (Exodus 14:10–15). He told them, ‘*Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD ... the LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.*’ Though Israel was surrounded on all sides they had the living God above them. They went forward not knowing how God would deliver them. They had to trust him where they could not possibly see how the Egyptians would be defeated and they were wonderfully delivered. **However dark our circumstances, however hopeless our situation appears to be, let us always look to God with whom nothing is impossible. The Lord will never fail us!**

Notice that the Egyptians also attempted to go through the Red Sea as they pursued the Israelites, but they were drowned (29). The difference was that they had no faith in the Lord but were presumptuous. Many thousands repeat the same mistake today. They presume that they will have the same end as the Christian and go to heaven, but they have no faith in Christ to save them. If you are not a Christian, beware of making the same mistake.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac

Sarah, Abraham’s wife, was unable to bear children. When she was well past the age of childbearing God promised that she would bear a son, who would be the ancestor of many nations (18; cp. Genesis 15:1–6; 17:15–17; 21:12). Abraham believed the promise that God had given to him, and eventually Isaac was born, just as God had promised. God gave Abraham his greatest test when he commanded him to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:1–19). To obey God, humanly speaking, would have been the height of folly. No right-thinking man would slay the son whom he loved so much. Had not God given clear instructions concerning the sanctity of human life (Genesis 9:5–6)? Could there be a greater test of a man’s faith?

Abraham obeyed God and would have slain his beloved son but for God’s intervention. Such was his faith that he reasoned that, as God’s promises were in Isaac, God was able to raise him from the dead if he offered him up (19). What tremendous faith! Such a faith makes all the difference in dark and perplexing periods of trial. ‘Abraham believed that God could and must resolve the problem. No solution seemed possible unless God raised Isaac from death to become the father of children. Abraham believed that this was fully possible with God, his faith thus triumphing in a fresh way over death by the hope of resurrection (19). Such faith turned a way of darkness into a pathway of hope!’ (A.M. Stibbs, NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY, first edition 1958, page 1108).

Though Abraham did not have to offer up Isaac, God recognised his faith and took the intention as accomplishment. *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.* In a figurative sense Abraham also received his son back from the dead (17). Such faith delights God. When he tests us, it is to strengthen our faith and to bless us (cp. Genesis 22:15–18). Christian, are you perplexed with God’s dealings with you? Remember just how much he loves you. He did not spare his own Son the Lord Jesus in order to save you (Romans 8:32). **He tenderly cares for you and he will provide for you. Trust him!**

By faith Jacob, when he was dying ... worshipped

We saw a couple of days ago that we need to be heavenly-minded and to live by faith if we wish to die in faith. Our reading today points us to the examples of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, all of whom died in faith. Each had seen the Lord work in many wonderful ways in his experience. You may wonder why the apostle takes us back to comparatively small incidents in their lives. In blessing their sons, the dying patriarchs knew that the Lord would perform his word concerning them. They had no doubt concerning the promises of God. There is no hint of any dread or doom in their dying because they *died in faith*. Jacob acknowledged God again and again when he blessed the two sons of Joseph before he died (Genesis 48).

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, ... worshipped. He raised his frail, dying body, leaning on his staff for support as he worshipped God (21). He was a worshipper to the end, full of hope and expectation. A.W. Tozer describes the worship of God as ‘a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love’ (WORSHIP, THE MISSING JEWEL OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH, page 9). We need to apply our minds to think about God and his glorious character when we worship him. It is only then that we will know this ‘humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love’.

Jacob’s example is a rebuke to many of us. He worshipped in great weakness as he faced death, but some of us may miss worship on the Lord’s Day, having the most flimsy excuses. God the Father seeks true worshippers (John 4:23–24). Consider the eagerness of the football fan to watch his favourite team in action. He would never be late for the game and he can hardly wait for it to start. By contrast, many Christians wearily drag themselves to worship and hardly make it for the opening hymn. Something must be wrong. Oh, for more joy and enthusiasm! Can we honestly say, ‘*I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go into the house of the LORD”*’ (Psalm 122:1)?

He endured as seeing him who is invisible

Moses’ parents trusted in God and were bold in the face of the barbaric decree of the Egyptian king. We read that *they were not afraid of the king’s command* (23). They were prepared to risk disobeying the king in order to save their baby son and God greatly rewarded them. Moses was given the finest education at the expense of the royal family whose head would have destroyed him in normal circumstances.

Moses was a great man of faith even though he had his moments of doubt and hesitancy (cp. Exodus 3:11; 4:1, 10–15). Faith in God often involves costly choices. Moses had enjoyed great privileges as a prince in Egypt but there came a time in his life when he had to renounce these privileges. He refused honour, pleasure and wealth (24–26). He chose instead suffering and reproach – he *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin* (25). Never forget that sin wraps up its pleasures in a very appealing manner but they soon pass away. What was Moses’ attitude to the reproach of Christ? He esteemed it *greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*. He knew that for him God had a priceless reward (26). We should be encouraged that God does reward faithful service (1 Corinthians 3:14).

It was *by faith* that Moses fearlessly contended with Pharaoh and led Israel out of Egypt (27). He persevered (*endured*) in the face of repeated setbacks as he demanded that Pharaoh allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. What was his secret? *He endured as seeing him who is invisible*. There was a ‘God-consciousness’ about his life. He could not see God with his natural eyes but he had the spiritual eyesight to see the hand of God working in his life. He knew that God was with him. He spent much time in prayer with the invisible God. **We cannot see God, but we too must look to him, trust him, and spend time with him in private prayer if we are to persevere in the Christian life and in our work for God.**