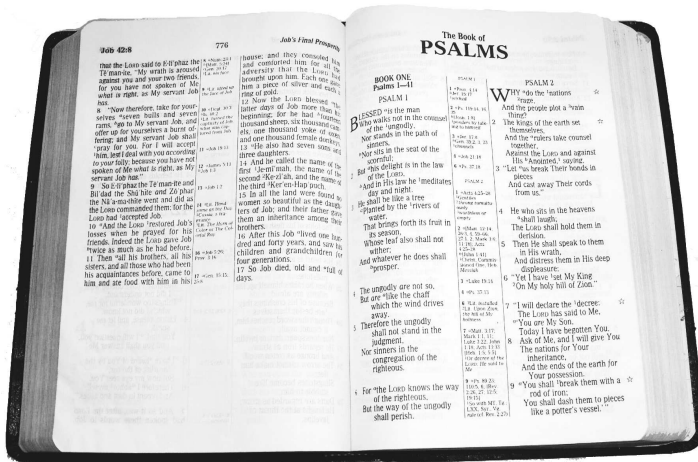


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



November 2019

Hebrews chapters 10 to 13
Psalms 9 to 12

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

Verse 26 solemnly warns us that there is a sin so wilful and persistent for which no sacrifice can atone. 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 on Hebrews 6:4–8). It is possible, however, to receive *the knowledge of the truth* and yet not be saved. There are those who once appeared to walk with God but now reject the truths that they once seemed to hold dear. They deliberately persist in their sins which they know are an offence to God. If we harden ourselves against God and his Son we may go past the point of no return. This is the sin of apostasy when *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* (26).

God warns us that those who apostatise are in a perilous situation. 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). 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 apostatise often becomes enemies of God and his people. There have been some high profile cases of evangelical leaders who have done this in recent times. I sorrow over some who once were pastors and close friends who have turned away from God. Some have set up their own churches in opposition to those they once pastored.

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).

Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward

The Hebrew Christians were losing heart because of persecution and some were being 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 were being persecuted and on the apostle when he was in prison. 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; cp. 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. *These all 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* (the godly people of old) *obtained a good testimony by faith* (2, 39).

What is faith? – *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (1). The Greek noun translated ‘*substance*’ means ‘confidence’ or ‘assurance’. The noun translated ‘*evidence*’ means ‘proof’. This faith places its confidence in the Word of God and in his promises that are yet to be fulfilled. 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.**

By faith we understand

Some unbelievers have the mistaken notion that faith is the enemy of reason, and that to have faith in God is a sign of stupidity. Nothing could be further from the truth! Biblical Christianity does not bypass the mind but rather encourages us to think.

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 Charles Darwin's 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 or 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. He led a righteous life and enjoyed fellowship with God. Enoch's testimony was that *he pleased God* (5; cp. Genesis 5:24).
- 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?**

Without faith it is impossible to please him (6). We insult God if we refuse to trust him because 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 exists means far more than saying, 'I believe in God.' It means trusting in God as he has revealed himself in his Word 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).**

By faith Abraham obeyed

True faith in God will result in obedience to his will. *By faith Abraham obeyed* (8) but the path of obedience is not always easy and it can be very costly. God called Abraham to leave his own country and his relatives to step out into the unknown. We must always remember however, that there are no uncertainties or unknowns with God. Our future is safe in his hands.

God promised Abraham to give him a land. When he 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 a foreigner among the pagan Canaanites (Genesis 12:6; 13:7). Though leading a nomadic life in tents, he believed God's promises, having his eyes on a heavenly city (9–10).

God also promised Abraham that a great nation would descend from him (12). He and Sarah were at that time an elderly, childless couple (see Genesis 11:30; 12:1–3) but Abraham believed God. 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.* Abraham's faith was a rebuke to the unbelief of those Hebrew Christians to whom he was writing.

If God is real to us, and if we are fully convinced that his Word is true, and that he is faithful in keeping all his promises, we will gladly obey him whatever the cost. 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). **The reward of obedience to God far outweighs any suffering or difficulty that we may be called to endure.**

These all died in faith

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob believed that God is faithful and that he would keep his promise (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 died *not having received the promises* (13) but they were convinced that God is true and that he keeps his Word. They honoured God and pleased him; 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 confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* travelling to a heavenly country. They were looking forward to going to the city which he had prepared for them (16). *They all died in faith* (13). If we want to die in faith, we must live for God now, trusting in him, and embracing his promises.

Our problem is that we do not think enough about heaven, the second coming of Christ and our glorious future. 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 Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac

God had promised Abraham that Sarah 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 and 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. Not only that, God had given clear instructions concerning the sanctity of human life (Genesis 9:5–6). Could there have been a greater test of a man's faith?

Abraham obeyed God and would have slain his beloved son but for divine intervention. He reasoned that, as God's promises were in Isaac, the Lord would raise him from the dead if he offered him up (19). No one had ever been raised from the dead at this point in human history. He had great faith in God! Such a faith makes all the difference in perplexing periods of trial. A.M. Stibbs writes, '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!' (NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY, first edition 1958, page 1108).

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. and in a figurative sense, he received his son back from the dead (17–18). Though Abraham did not have to offer up Isaac, God recognised his faith and took the intention as accomplishment. 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 spared Isaac but 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

You may wonder why the apostle takes us back to comparatively small incidents in the lives of the patriarchs but in blessing their sons, they knew that the Lord would perform promises concerning them. Jacob had deceived Isaac to receive the blessing reserved for the elder of the twins, but Isaac saw God's hand in this and refused to revoke his blessing on Jacob through whom the covenant promises made to Abraham would be fulfilled (20; Genesis 27:1–40). Joseph believed God's promise to Abraham that the Israelites would leave Egypt to be given the land of Canaan and left instructions for his bones to be taken there for burial (22; Genesis 50:25).

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 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'.

God the Father seeks true worshippers (John 4:23–24). **Jacob's is a great example to us. He worshipped God in great weakness as he faced death, but do we delight in worshipping our Lord and Saviour?** 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, some Christians wearily drag themselves to worship on the Lord's Day 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)?

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God

We see in these verses how faith in God influenced Moses and his parents in the choices that they made. 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 disobeyed Pharaoh in order to save their baby son and God greatly rewarded them. Moses was given the finest education at the expense of the Egyptian 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). He 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, choosing instead suffering and reproach (24–26). 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). 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 God had an eternal and priceless reward for him (26). God does reward faithful service (1 Corinthians 3:14).

Faith in God often involves making costly choices. **We all have to make choices in life and we often choose the easy way rather than the way which is right in the sight of God.** We may have to choose self-denial and hardship in order to honour God, but isn't this what the Lord Jesus demands of all who would follow him (Matthew 16:24)?

It was *by faith* that Moses persevered (*endured*) in the face of repeated setbacks as he demanded that Pharaoh allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. He did not fear *the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible* and he led the Israelites out of Egypt (27). What was his secret? 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.

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. The Israelites escaped 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 we cannot have eternal life.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea (29). The Israelites were hemmed in and trapped by the Egyptian army. They had very little faith until encouraged by Moses. He told them, *‘Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD ... the LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace’* (Exodus 14:10–15). They had to trust him where they could not possibly see how the Egyptians would be defeated and they were wonderfully delivered. Though the Israelites were surrounded on all sides they had the living God above them. He parted the waters of the Red Sea and the people were able to cross. **However dark our circumstances, however hopeless our situation appears to be, let us always trust in God with whom nothing is impossible. He will never fail us!**

The Egyptians saw this miracle and presumed that they also could cross the Red Sea as they pursued the Israelites. The huge walls of water crashed down on them and they were drowned (29). 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 the harlot Rahab did not perish

Jericho was a strategically situated city, commanding trading routes from north to south and east to west. The city had to be conquered for the future security of the Israelites but it 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 Bible 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). Early Christians scattered by persecution *went everywhere preaching the word*, making known the gospel (Acts 8:4).

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe (31). She had been raised 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!**

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 mentions other great heroes who wrought tremendous exploits through faith in God. They *subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions ...* (33). Great victories were won and kingdoms were conquered. Their battles were not only physical; their enemies were the agents of Satan. They were in both a physical and a spiritual warfare.

How was this relevant to the discouraged Hebrew Christians to whom this letter was written? How is it relevant to us? We are also engaged in warfare with Satan (2 Corinthians 10:3–4; Ephesians 6:12). The Hebrews were aware of this (10:32) 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 think that we are not strong enough to overcome great obstacles but that is not so. Many of the people mentioned in these verses 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 great missionary William Carey achieved much because he was a man of faith. He said, ‘Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.’ Let us be encouraged and challenged!

*Go, labour on, your hands are weak,
Your knees are faint, your soul cast down;
Yet falter not, the prize you seek
Is near — a kingdom and a crown.* (Horatius Bonar)

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, 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).

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 accomplish great things through faith in God. *‘Therefore’* in the light of their example, we are urged to do certain things. The Christian life is described as a *‘race’* (1). The Greek noun translated *‘race’* (*‘agōn’*) was used to refer to the contests in the Greek games. It means *‘a struggle’* and our English *‘agony’* comes from it. *‘Agōn’* 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’* refers to 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 cause us to drop out of the Christian race. 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, the author and finisher (who endured great hardship and suffering to save us (2–3).
- We must *consider him who endured such hostility from sinners, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls* (3). The Christian race is not easy, but here is our great example. 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.***

The joy that was set before him

We have been encouraged by the exploits of the great heroes of faith and have seen that the Christian life is likened to a race which we must strive to complete. 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* (1–2).

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 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 accomplished 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* (Isaiah 53:11) with the salvation of many, whose sins he bore on the cross.

The message to those struggling Hebrew Christians and to ourselves 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 our troubles and disappointments, we must persevere because glory awaits us (Romans 8:18).**

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 noun translated ‘chastening’ has the idea of the training given to children to correct them 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 as an adult. It is important that we realise that God disciplines all true believers. We must not despise such training which is for our own good or lose heart when God deals with us in such a manner. Chastening is an evidence that we belong to God (5–8).

The problem with these Hebrews Christians 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 God’s discipline in our lives 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).

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 feed ourselves on the Word of God and exercise ourselves with godly living, we will be spiritually weak (1 Timothy 4:7–8).
- *Make straight (right) paths for your feet* (13) by living a consistent Christian life. We do this by leading a consistent Christian life which will help keep us from stumbling.
- *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!
- We must be diligent not to despise. Look out diligently lest we become bitter or despise your spiritual birthright and blessings as Esau did (15–17). Stuart Olyott writes concerning Esau, ‘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).

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 Mount Sinai and Mount Zion). The Hebrew Christians were forgetting the great blessings of the new covenant and were in peril of drifting back into Judaism. They are 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 awesome 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 dwells. 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* (22–24). Best of all, we come to God and to the Lord Jesus who gave himself for us. This joyful festal gathering stands in great contrast to the fearful assembly at Sinai.

The first-born of Israel had special privileges as heir (blessings despised by Esau, 16). The first-born was redeemed by blood and consecrated to God (Exodus 13:2,13–15). The church in heaven (*‘the spirits of just men made perfect’*) is also in this great company. Let us rejoice that *our names are written in heaven* (Luke 10:20). 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 ... serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear

Phil Arthur comments on verse 25, ‘The people who closed their ears to God when he spoke from the threatening slopes of Mount Sinai were very foolish. It is even more foolish to close our ears to God when he speaks from the gentle and welcoming slopes of Mount Zion’ (NO TURNING BACK, page 218).

We live in unsettled times with strife and unrest in many parts of the world. The time is coming when God will not only shake the earth but also the heavens (26; cp. Haggai 2:6). Nothing is permanent on earth but through the new covenant *we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken* (28). How wonderful! Satan, demons, and evil men may do everything in their power to shake the kingdom of God, but it is secure. They will fail in their attempts to bring down God’s kingdom (read Psalm 2).

We are greatly privileged to belong to God’s kingdom but great privileges bring great responsibilities. We must not be careless in our attitude to the things of God. *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, 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!

Serving the Lord with a sense of awe and godly fear means that we will give 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 we 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).

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 give hospitality to strangers. Abraham and Sarah once entertained angels when giving hospitality (2; cp. Genesis 18:1–16; 19:1). Christian love is also expressed in remembering Christians who are persecuted or imprisoned, praying for them and where possible sending financial help to 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 are no longer shocked at immorality and unfaithfulness in marriage. Sexual sin is becoming more common among professing Christians. We must not allow ourselves to be drawn into such wickedness.

The ‘consumer society’ exalts material possessions and encourage covetousness with appealing advertisements in magazines and on television. Many people have to have the very latest mobile phone or gadget but these things fail to give lasting satisfaction. 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?**

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 church leaders abuse their authority, untold damage is done and Christians are deeply hurt. On the other hand, if no authority is exercised, there will be anarchy, chaos and insecurity. Elders must serve and not ‘lord it’ over God’s flock (1 Peter 5:2–3). Elders must also lead, 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; better translated ‘leaders’); this refers to past leaders of who have spoken the Word of God (verb is in the past tense), whose godly lives were such a blessing to us. Stuart Olyott comments, ‘They left the world filled with faith and hope ... Their fragrant lives have left on us an indelible impression that makes us want to be like them (I WISH SOMEONE WOULD EXPLAIN HEBREWS TO ME!, page 180). We need to follow their example.

- Obey your present leaders. 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 our souls and they will have to give an account in the day of judgment. We are to *be submissive* (17). Do we welcome their admonition and correction when they lovingly seek to point out things that are wrong or are not helpful in our lives? Some Christians 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. Others are afraid of becoming church members having suffered from an abusive church leadership in the past. They should seek for a church where they will be helped and understood but this is not always easy.

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

Some were telling these Hebrew Christians that if they ate the meat of animals that had been sacrificed in Jewish ritual if they wished to have grace imparted to their souls. This was a profitless practice which denied the grace of God (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.

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). These verses were written to encourage the first readers of this letter who had been cut off from unbelieving Jewish relatives and friends. They, too, had been driven '*outside the camp*'. We no longer belong to this world where we have *no continuing city*, but have our sight on the heavenly city that awaits us.

Are you suffering scorn and reproach because of your Christian testimony? Do you encounter hostility from those with whom you work? 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).

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, be a praying and thankful Christian, but never be a complaining Christian.

The sacrifice of Christian benevolence is also necessary. Fellowship means sharing what we have with needy fellow Christian (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 do so 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, particularly that he would soon be restored to them (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, concerned hearts to pray for each other and open hands to show Christian love and benevolence.**

*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)

The God of peace

The wonderful benediction in verses 20 and 21 is a great encouragement to us all. We may be tormented by doubts and fears, we may feel so discouraged that we wonder just how we can 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*.

- 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 apostle again writes of his desire to see them and that Timothy will be with him (23). He sends greetings from the Christians with him in Italy (24). **The God of peace and 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).

Those who know your name will put their trust in you

The significance of the heading of this psalm ‘Muth-labben’ (AV and ESV) is uncertain. Some Bible commentators suggest that it is the name of a tune to which the psalm was sung. The New King James Version has ‘To the tune of “Death of the Son’.

David opens Psalm 9 with enthusiastic and joyful praise to God: *I will praise you, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all your marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High* (1–2). Let us also be whole-hearted in our praise to God because he is glorious and good.

God’s name speaks of his holy character (cp. Exodus 3:13-15). What is God like? He is marvellous in his works (1; eg. works of creation, of providence and redemption). He is the righteous Judge and the eternal King (4–8). How can we know more of God’s name, of his glorious character? We need to read his precious Word, the Bible, which teaches us about him. We also learn more of him through his dealings with us, finding him to be *a refuge in times of trouble* (9). This was David’s experience and he praised God for deliverance from his enemies (3–6).

Those who know your name will put their trust in you; for you, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you (10). The psalms speak much of trusting in God (eg. Psalms 5:11; 7:1). To trust in God is to depend on him at all times, even in the most difficult and baffling circumstances, being convinced that he is in absolute control and that he is wisely working out his purposes for his own glory and for our good (Romans 8:28). **To trust God is to rely on him, to commit ourselves with confidence into his loving care.** * He will never leave us nor forsake us (10; cp. Hebrews 13:5–6). Let us *sing praises to the LORD*’ (11).

* I heartily commend Jerry Bridges’ book, ‘Trusting in God even when life hurts’, published by Nav Press.

... that the nations may know themselves to be but men

David has rejoiced and praised God for past deliverances (3–6) but he finds himself in more trouble. He prays, ‘*Have mercy on me, O LORD! Consider my trouble from those who hate me*’ (13). The godly person will face trouble and trials throughout his life because he is hated by the devil and those who are wicked (2 Timothy 3:12). David encourages himself from past experience of God’s help and he is confident that God will hear him (14).

*His love in time past
Forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last
In trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer
I have in review
Confirms his good pleasure
To help me quite through*

(John Newton)

God will surely punish our enemies and all the wicked; they have no hope for the future unless they turn to him and repent of their sin (15–17). The nations are mentioned five times in this psalm (verses 5,15,17,19 and 20). *The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God* (17). Those who forget God have no desire to please him. They shut God out of their thoughts and despise his holy laws. They do not praise God and are not grateful for his goodness to them. David closes by calling on God to judge the nations (19): ‘*Put them in fear, O LORD, that the nations may know themselves to be but men*’ (20). The great nations with all their displays of power are just men. They will perish but God’s kingdom is everlasting.

We should ponder carefully the words of Scripture and meditate on them. The word ‘*Selah*’ (16, 20) is found frequently in the Psalms; it means ‘pause’. We do need to read the Word of God slowly and thoughtfully and to hide it in our hearts. **We need to meditate on the things that we read, letting Scripture lead us into worship, praise and prayer. Do you have a ‘quiet time’ or a ‘rush time’?**

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

Psalm 9 contains expressions of praise to God and confidence in his care for the believer (9:1–4, 9–12,18). The psalmist in Psalm 10 feels overwhelmed by the terrible actions of wicked people around him and is grieved by their arrogant boasting. One of the most difficult things in a believer's experience is the apparent silence and remoteness of God when trouble is all around him. This psalm begins by asking God the question, '*Why do you stand afar off, O LORD? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*' (1).

The wicked person proudly rejects the Lord and *God is in none of his thoughts* (3–4). This could be translated, *All his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'* In his prosperity, he says in his heart that he will never be in trouble. His mouth is vile, being full of *cursing and deceit and oppression* (5–7). He lurks like a lion to oppress the poor and the helpless, being convinced that God does not see him (8–11). The psalmist calls on God to punish the wicked (2,15). He prays, '*Arise, O LORD! O God lift up your hand! Do not forget the humble*' (12). It sometimes takes oppression and trouble to drive us to prayer.

Do you ever feel like the psalmist and ask God why doesn't he do something about the wickedness around us? Does God appear to be remote and heaven shut to your prayers? Are you tempted to stop praying? Persevere in prayer because God does hear you. The Lord is the helper of the humble and the weak (12–14).

The unbeliever hates the truth that God will judge us all but the Lord does hold us to account for the things that we do (13; cp. Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10–11). He may scoff at the teaching of the Bible concerning judgment, but that will do nothing to prevent God from judging him. *The LORD is King forever and ever* (16). The psalmist prays the he will bring justice for the oppressed (17–18). **Let us never confuse his apparent silence with a lack of concern for us. In times of trouble always remember that God is sovereign and that he will never leave us nor forsake us!**

The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven

David was in great danger and it appears that well-meaning friends advise him to flee but he affirms his trust in God. He writes, ‘*In the LORD I put my trust; how can you say to my soul, “Flee as a bird to your mountain”*’? (1–2). His despairing friends ask, ‘*If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do*’? (3) but he looks beyond the trouble and chaos around him to God who is sovereign: ‘*The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven*’ (4). The man of faith should not sink into despair in times of trouble (cp. 2 Corinthians 4:8).

The last book of the Bible was written to Christians in troubled times when many of them were being imprisoned or martyred for their faith. The apostle John himself was in exile because of this persecution. The Lord gave his servant a vision in which he saw *a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne* (Revelation 4:2). Satan and his helpers **seem** to be victorious over Christ and his church, but things are not what they **seem**. Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings and he will overcome all his (and our) enemies (17:14; 19:11–21; see William Hendriksen’s commentary on Revelation, MORE THAN CONQUERORS, pages 8–9; IVP edition).

The Lord tests the righteous, but he hates the wicked (4–5; see notes on Psalm 5). The wicked may prepare themselves to attack the righteous (2), but the sovereign Lord will rain judgment upon them (5–6). The fact that God will surely judge those who persecute and oppress us is a source of great comfort to persecuted Christians (cp. 2 Thessalonians 1:4–10; 2 Peter 2:9; Jude verses 14–15).

In dark, perplexing days, we must not sink in despair but put our trust in the Lord who loves righteousness (7). **He will never fail us and he will always be with us on our pilgrimage to heaven!** The Hebrew of the end of verse 7 can be translated, ‘*The upright shall behold his face*’ (as in ESV). The righteous person trusts in the Lord and loves him. We shall see him and worship him with great joy and gratitude when we go to be with him in glory (1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:4). Hallelujah!

The words of the LORD are pure words

Dale Ralph Davis observes, ‘The pattern in this psalm is easy to trace: where we are (vv 1–4; what we hear (vv 5–6); and, how we get on (vv 7–8)’ – (THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE MUCK OF LIFE, page 137). We live in a world full of lying and deceit and we should not be surprised; it all began in Eden when the devil who is a liar (John 8:44) deceived Eve (Genesis 3:4–5,13). Deceit is a way of life in politics, business, advertising and even in religion (I have in mind false religions and the wild claims of extreme charismatic preachers and so-called healings). The corruption around us should drive us to prayer. David prayed, ‘*Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!*’ (1). Who could he trust? Godly men were hard to find and many around him spoke ‘*idly*’ (lies) and used flattery. Many were arrogant in their rebellion against God’s law, insisting that they would not be silenced (1–4). The proud words of such people will turn to cries of anguish at the coming of the day of judgment (Matthew 13:49–50; Revelation 6:15–17).

The words of God are contrasted with those of the ungodly:

- *The words of the LORD are pure words* (6). They are words that keep us from sinning (Psalm 119:11). They are words that exalt God and encourage us to obey him. As we absorb God’s Word into our hearts, it will fashion our thinking and strengthen us in the Christian life. We must make the Bible a priority in our reading! God’s Word is also pure because it is free from error. There aren’t any mistakes in the Bible! You can rely on its teaching because it was written by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). *Your word is very pure, therefore your servant loves it* (Psalm 119:140).
- The words of the Lord are precious. There is no dross in them. They are like refined silver (6). There are many precious promises in the Bible for the believer and they are all true (2 Peter 1:4). These promises bring us encouragement and comfort in times of trial.
- The Lord preserves his Word and he will preserve us from prowling wicked people who seek to destroy us (7–8). **Let us thank God for giving us his Word which is pure and true.** –