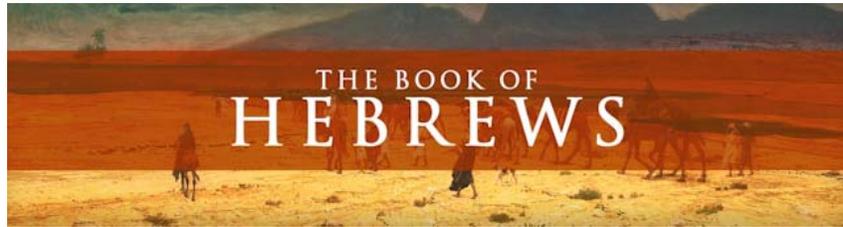


Lessons Learned from the
Book of Hebrews—Book 1
Our So-Great Salvation



Vistoso Community Church



Foreword

Every time I take up the study of a book of the Bible that I might preach it to others, I find myself greatly encouraged and deeply humbled. I am encouraged at the depth, richness, and comprehensive nature of God's revelation to man. And then, I am humbled at all that God has so graciously provided to those who will turn to the Son in faith and believe!



I hope you can find something in the pages to follow that might humble and encourage you as well.

In His grace,

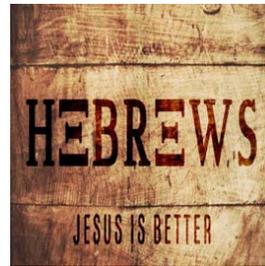
Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Our So-Great Salvation

Hebrews is a book written to an audience with whom we have almost nothing in common. It is filled with terms and practices very obscure to most of us. I am not doing a very good job of *selling* this study am I? How about if I told you that, despite the lack of apparent relevance, this book could hardly be more appropriate for Christians in America today? For this book was written to *wobbly* Christians! These Christians were not grounded in the truths of the faith and at the same time were facing any number of trials from the world around them. They were even thinking about turning from Christianity to something else. Some, no doubt, had already drifted away!

Does that sound like a pretty good description of Christianity in America today? So, how does this letter handle the situation? It begins by making a wonderful case for the preeminence of Christ—making it clear that to turn anywhere else is to turn to something greatly inferior. Then it speaks of our salvation in terms that ensure the careful reader cannot help but be thoroughly encouraged in the so-great salvation that is ours in Christ. Next, it warns us—over and over again—and these warnings are sobering, serious, and lay out the dire consequences for failure. This is just what we need.



Finally, there is no better place to learn about faith than in the Book of Hebrews. In fact, Hebrews is going to teach us how to enter the *rest of faith* no matter what our circumstances. This is most certainly what every wobbly Christian needs to hear, and let me suggest it will be very helpful for you and me as well. So let's get to work with an introduction to this great book.

Introduction to Hebrews

1. Why is it Called *Hebrews*?

Early manuscript copies were all entitled, *To the Hebrews*. This led to the Church historically understanding that this letter was written to an enclave of Jews who had come to faith in Christ. This understanding is further supported by the contents of the letter. First, it assumes familiarity with the Old Testament storyline—for example, Hebrews 11 names Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Samuel as if they were well-known characters. It also assumes intimate knowledge of the inner workings of Judaism including the tabernacle and its furnishings as well as the Aaronic priesthood.

2. How Can It Possibly Apply to Me?

The Jewish audience raises the question, “How can this book possibly apply to me?” One might say, “I am not Jewish and this book speaks about many things of which I have very little knowledge!” On the surface, this argument carries some weight, so let’s consider it further.

To begin, since the Book of Hebrews is in the Canon of Scripture, that means it is meant for us. I find the following scripture helpful in pondering this issue:

**What has been will be again, what has been done
will be done again; there is nothing new under the
sun.** Ecclesiastes 1:9

So, although we may not be Jewish, if we take the challenges faced by this very Jewish first century audience of the Book of Hebrews and compare them with the challenges faced by a 21st century gentile audience, we will find a tremendous amount of overlap. For example, these Jewish believers had the need to walk by faith in a very

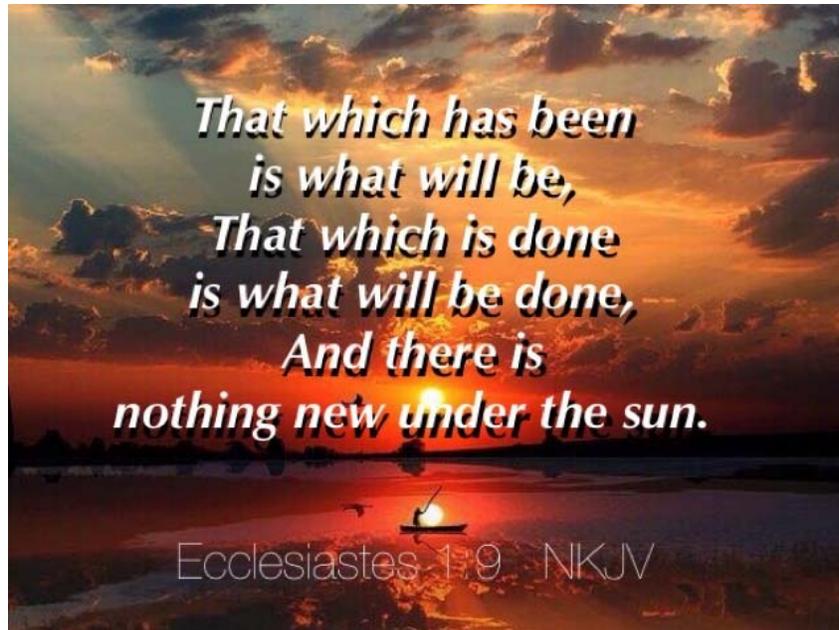
pagan environment. How about us? Does the material prosperity and unbridled sexuality of the western world (paganism) seek to draw us away from spiritual things? Do we not also have the need to trust God rather than turn to the world for solutions? Does the simple phrase we are to learn in Hebrews 11:6 still apply in our day?

. . .without faith it is impossible to please God. . .

Of course it does! That's because the challenges faced by this group of Jewish believers are remarkably similar to those we face. There is both great encouragement and dire warnings in this book, and they are a perfect fit for us today. And, they are something we desperately need.

3. Can We Identify Specific Problems?

To continue the above thought, can we identify with the specific problem(s) addressed by the Book of Hebrews? Yes, we most certainly can! These Jewish converts were



wavering in their commitment to Christianity and were thinking about returning to Judaism. Why would they want to do that? For the same reason the redeemed Israelites thought about going back to Egypt—the land of their slavery—on more than one occasion. When things become difficult, it is human nature to turn back!

That brings us to a *Point of Application*: Those who come to faith in Christ, and seek to follow after Him, will often face a *crisis of faith*. By that I mean Christians can reach a point at which they consider *throwing in the towel* spiritually speaking—a point at which the *figs and pomegranates of Egypt* look pretty good.

Sometimes it is bad theology that leads us to this point. For example, the false teaching of the health, wealth, and happiness Gospel has left many an individual facing the trials of life disenfranchised. At other times, it is just the spiritual challenge of walking uprightly in the devil's world.

The Book of Hebrews is going to tell us precisely how to deal with these crises of faith. It is going to talk about such things as entering the *rest of faith*. (Hebrews 4:11) It is going to teach us how to be *assured of the promises of God* and to confess that we are *strangers and pilgrims on earth*. (Hebrews 11:13) Learning to trust God through thick and thin is such an essential part of the Christian Life, and the Book of Hebrews is going to become an invaluable aid in teaching us to do so.

This reminds me of another point of application, particularly poignant when it comes to the trials and tribulations of this life:

For the child of God, this life is the worst it is ever going to get; for the unbeliever, this life is the best it is ever going to be!

Think this truth through carefully! All the trials that

eventually come into the life of a believer, when contrasted against an eternal home with Jesus, are the worst that can happen to us. For there will be no trial or tribulation in God's eternal heaven!

4. Do the Warnings Apply?

Our discussion to this point allows us to readily predict one thread that is found throughout the Book of Hebrews—one of warning, especially about turning back to that from which we were redeemed and warning about failing to trust our great God! Given the fact that this letter is to those who knew well their Old Testament, guess who might be used as an example. Of



course, it is the Exodus generation of Israelites. They were redeemed by the mighty hand of God and yet turned to golden calf idolatry, a bitter spirit, and on more than one occasion longed for Egypt. What happened to them?

. . .**their bodies fell in the desert.** . . . Hebrews 3:17

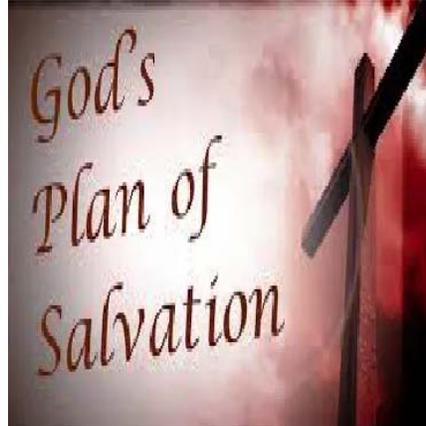
That's a pretty strong message for the audience of the Hebrews letter and for us as well!

5. Is There More than Warnings?

To balance all the warnings, Hebrews provides a strong message regarding the preeminence of Christ! Every Christian needs to be taught, and then become occupied with, the preeminence of Jesus Christ. *Jesus is better than anything!* He is what keeps us from thinking the pasture is greener elsewhere. The better we know Him and His current advocacy on our behalf, the more crystal clear it will be in our thinking that to turn away is to turn to that which is counterfeit and so much inferior in nature.

6. What Can We Learn about God?

The Jewish connection of Hebrews highlights the continuity of the sovereign purposes of God like few other things in Scripture. When I speak of the continuity of God's sovereign purposes, I want to make sure we don't see God as responding to circumstances. Rather, He acts in one coherent progression of redemption. We will learn a bit about such things as we learn about the Holy of Holies, the Tabernacle furniture, and the Ark of the Covenant. You may initially wonder, "What's the point?" If I do it well, you will see that within Old Testament Jewish practices are the very same truths that we, as Church-age believers, hold dear. This, in turn, will show us that God has been working out His gracious purposes throughout history.



As an example, did you know that Jesus has a present ministry on your behalf? Are you moved by it? Do you value it, and does it thrill your soul? After we more fully understand the ministry of a priest under Judaism, we are going to stand in absolute awe at the present High-Priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. By the time we are done, you will never forget the following and you will fully appreciate it because of its Jewish roots!

. . .because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them. Hebrews 7:24-25

7. What is Our Main Lesson?

The Book of Hebrews plays one role in the Canon of Scripture that we are going to spend more time on than any other—the call to be a people of faith! The call for the people of God to be a people of faith is a thread that runs throughout the Scriptures. As one example, consider:

“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright; but the just (righteous) will live by his faith.” Habakkuk 2:4

In the context of Habakkuk, the proud Chaldeans are said to be *puffed up*, trusting in themselves. But God is very clear, His righteous or justified ones shall walk by faith. This passage from Habakkuk is quoted three times in the New Testament, including in the tenth chapter of the Book of Hebrews. That alone should tell us the walk of faith is a very important part of the Christian Life.

Let me show you the progressive development of the believer's walk of faith by walking you through all three New Testament usages of Habakkuk 2:4. This in turn will allow us to understand the Biblical emphasis that will be found throughout the Book of Hebrews.

- **In Romans.** In the Book of Romans, our Habakkuk passage is quoted as part of an emphasis on the imputed righteousness—justification before God—of those who believe.

For in the Gospel a righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” Romans 1:17

And of course as Christians, our righteous standing begins at the point of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

. . . even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.

Romans 3:22



- **In Galatians.** In the Book of Galatians, the emphasis shifts to the quality and means by which one lives:

Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because "The righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

Galatians 3:11-12

- **In Hebrews.** Lastly, in Hebrews, the great emphasis is on what could be called a faith-mindset!

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised. "For in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay." And "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."

Hebrews 10:35-38

So putting it all together, the Christian Life begins and rests upon our justified standing in the Lord Jesus Christ—

His righteous ones (Romans). From that firm foundation we *shall live* a God-pleasing and productive life by means of an ongoing walk of faith and the enablement of the Holy Spirit. And then, we are to labor to enter what the writer of Hebrews calls the *rest of faith*.

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us therefore labor to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Hebrews 4:9-11

Of this you can be certain, if the major thrust of the book is its emphasis on the doctrinal position of faith, then you can count on warnings against falling into unbelief. There are five such warnings in Hebrews and we will discuss one of them from Hebrews 2 in this book. These warnings are really going to challenge us! Now, we will turn to our text.

Hebrews 1:1-4 Jesus is Better than angels!

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets. . .

Hebrews 1:1

Understanding Verse 1

. . .**in time past**. The writer of Hebrews is going to give to us a perspective on history. Man does so by naming the ages: bronze, iron, middle, or dark. God does so from the standpoint of redemption. For Adam and Eve plunged the human race into a state of enmity with God, and our text is going to tell us what God has done about that terrible situation.

God's desire is to communicate with mankind through both His creative handiwork (general revelation) and the living and abiding Word of God (His special revelation). He communicates to us, because He made us for fellowship with Himself.

. . .**to the fathers by the prophets.** This refers to our Old Testament. God spoke then too, and we do well to pay attention and to extract what we can apply to our lives today. For God has been communicating to man for a very long time.

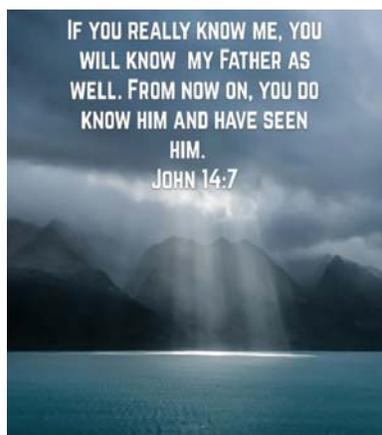
Understanding Verses 2 and 3

. . .has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. . .

Hebrews 1:2-3

. . .**in these last days.** This refers to the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the time that follows. This is specifically the time of the Church, the time in which we live.

God has spoken to us by His Son. The Son of God, took on humanity and came to this earth in order to reveal God the Father to us:



No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known. John 1:18

Who is the Son? Make no mistake, we must be sure we understand Who Jesus is:

- He is the One appointed by the Father to be *"heir of all things."* (Hebrews 1:3)
- He is the Creator of all things. For:
...**without Him nothing was made that has been made.** John 1:3
- He is One who both manifests the *"brightness"* of God's glory, as well as being the *"express image of His person."* (Hebrews 1:2)

The brightness of His glory refers to His exalted status.

...**and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**

John 1:14

Those who saw Him witnessed His omnipotence, omniscience, and sovereignty. Is it any wonder the demons, wind, and waves obeyed Him? And thus Jesus straightforwardly declared:

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father. . ."

John 14:9

- Jesus is the One who upholds all things by the word of His power:
He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Colossians 1:17
- He is the One, who *"Himself purged our sins!"* Note that He needed no help from lost mankind—He did it Himself.
- He is the One seated in the place of greatest honor in the universe—the *"right hand of the majesty on high."* (Hebrews 1:3)

In the above points we have what Jesus did. Now, we need to consider His Name, his essence as the Son of God! The Lord Jesus Christ is most certainly deity by all that He is and all that He has accomplished:

So He became as much superior to the angels as the Name He has inherited is superior to theirs.

Hebrews 1:4

In just these first four verses, we should already have the cares and concerns of this world receding into the background as we fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, the Son of God!

Hebrews 1:5-14 The Preeminence of Jesus

The word preeminence means: having paramount rank, dignity or importance. Webster's 1828 American Dictionary defines it as follows:

Preeminence: priority of place, superiority in rank or dignity. That in all things He (Jesus) might have the Preeminence. (Colossians 1:11)

Can you imagine using a quote from Scripture to help define a word? That's the way Webster did it, and what a marvelous aspect of understanding it brings to the Word.

The writer of Hebrews has been hard at work establishing this truth by declaring Jesus to be "*the brightness of His glory,*" "*the express image*" of God the Father, and the Creator of all things. Now, the writer of Hebrews continues through the use of seven quotes from the Old Testament that make clear that Jesus is:

- The one and only Son of the Father (Psalm 2)
- Worthy of worship (Deuteronomy 32)
- Going to be king of an eternal kingdom reigning with a scepter of perfect righteousness (Psalm 45)

- The Creator of this physical universe who will continue eternally when what He created is destroyed (Psalm 102)

The writer of Hebrews closes with another of the quotes:

To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?"
 Hebrews 1:13

The answer, of course, is to none at all! For this position is reserved for the Son of God and Him alone. The Book of Hebrews has been teaching us that *Jesus is better* and now we can say, "Naturally, Jesus is better for He is preeminent!"



So let me ask, after just these first 14 verses if you were a wavering Jewish believer, does it make sense to turn back to a system of Law that can justify no one? Of course not! It makes no sense to turn back when you have trusted in the One sent by God, the Creator of all things, and the express radiance of the Father's glory. The message is clear! After trusting in the Preeminent One for your salvation from hell to heaven, stick with Him!

How about you or me when we become discouraged, frustrated, or disenfranchised? Where should we turn? Make no mistake about it—given the preeminence of Jesus—there are only lesser options!

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Colossians 2:6-7

We started by placing our faith in Christ. We need to continue in the Christian Life the same way—trusting in Him.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world (these are the lesser options), and not according to Christ (the Preeminent One). For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

Colossians 2:8-10

I am not turning anywhere else, for there is nowhere else to go. If I am complete in Him, to go elsewhere would be to unravel myself. No, what I need to do is to grow into an understanding of what it means to be "*complete in Him.*" I can do that by:

. . .growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II Peter 3:18

Hebrews 2:1-4 Our First Exhortation

Our first exhortation in Hebrews is: Do not neglect your so-great salvation. So far, everything we have covered has been expository in nature, which simply means it is intended to explain various truths to us. Notice the change in these next few verses as they fall into the category of exhortation: emphatically urging someone to do or consider something. Note the change in the text below:

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonder and various miracles, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.

Hebrews 2:1-4

Be Sure of the Audience

The first thing we need to settle is who, specifically, is the audience for this exhortation. Now I have already made the case that the Book of Hebrews is written to a group of Jewish converts to Christianity who are wavering with respect to the faith. But I caution you, that there are always those who will say, "If you drift away, you were never saved! For no *true* Christian can drift away."

I have learned that when someone puts the word *true* in front of Christian, whatever comes next is invariably wrong. For the idea that a Christian cannot drift away from the faith violates the Bible in general and the Book of Hebrews in particular. Let me show you:

- Throughout Chapters 2, 3, and 4, the writer constantly uses the pronoun *we*. See Hebrews 2:1 as the first example. He is including himself with the group to whom he is writing.

- Then consider Hebrews 3:1:

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling. . .

Does that sound like the way you would address a group of lost or partially-lost individuals? Of course not!

- Finally, consider the Scripture message itself. What kinds of things does the Bible tell us that Jesus said to lost people?

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects. . ." John 3:36

"If you do not believe I am the One I claim to be you will die in your sin. . ." John 8:24

"What is the work of God. . .to believe in the One whom He has sent. . ." John 6:28-29

Reviewing the Language

Does Hebrews 2:1-4 sound anything even remotely like a call to salvation? On the contrary, it sounds exactly like the kind of thing that the Bible says over and over again to saved people: Stand firm in your faith, just as you started in faith so continue on, redeem the time the Lord has given you, walk by faith, don't drift away! Do you see it? This is a group of believers who are being warned not to drift away from the One who saved them. They are being admonished to not let trial and tribulation turn them from their devotion to Christ!

Verse 1. The Greek word translated *drift* is very nautical in nature. When a merchant ship drifts away from its anchorage or dock, it can cause great damage to the vessel and in some cases even loss of valuable cargo. What causes a ship to drift away—wind and current! It is now quite easy to apply this physical example to our spiritual lives. For the winds of rejection, persecution, and ridicule will seek to move us from our calling to keep our eyes



fixed upon Jesus. The currents of worldly success, fleshly lusts, and the concerns of the here and now will seek to shipwreck our Christian Life. Do you remember when Peter was walking on the water? The minute he started to get concerned with the strength of the wind and the size of the waves, he started to sink! (Matthew 14:22-33) What we need to do is to:

. . . fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. I Timothy 4:16

These are just two passages out of many, many possibilities, because these two are so important in doing just what the passage says: *“pay more careful attention”* or *“give the more earnest heed.”* First, we keep our focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ, while at the same time watching what we do and what we believe very closely. For the world is constantly seeking to co-opt our thinking. We must be ever so careful to:

. . .take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. II Corinthians 10:5

Verse 2. You may wonder about the reference to *“the message spoken by angels?”* This is likely a reference to the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mt. Sinai. You can see the binding nature of this message in the following:

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life. . .”
Deuteronomy 30:19

As you can see, life or death were at stake. And, it should be easy to see in the last chapters of Deuteronomy that physical life and material prosperity are in view. Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews is making an argument from the lesser to the greater. If this was at stake with respect to the Mosaic Law, then how much more is at stake with respect to the Christian Life? In terms of the quality of our spiritual lives, make no mistake about it, there is much hanging in the balance with respect to whether we hold firm or drift away. And, the issue is not salvation from hell to heaven for that is already a settled matter for this group of believers. Rather, as we will see, the issue is the quality of their spiritual lives in time.

In Summary

As summary for these first four verses in Hebrews, we will answer three questions.

1. What can cause us to *drift away*?

There are any number of things that can cause us to drive away: persecution, the discouragement associated with failure, or simply the daily challenges of living the Christian Life. There is another one to which I would really like to draw your attention—the lack of spiritual nourishment. In the day in which we live there are so many *shiny objects* to draw our attention, it is ever so easy to forsake that which causes our spiritual growth!

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not ready for the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature. . .

Hebrews 5:11-14

After warning them for the first time in Chapter 2, just a few short chapters later we see the writer of Hebrews still challenging his audience. First, an exhortation to keep from drifting away; and then in Chapter 5, scolding this very same group for needing to be taught elementary truths all over again when, in fact, they should be long past that by now. For they should be teaching the Word instead of having to re-learn the basics!

2. How then do we safeguard ourselves?

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

I Peter 2:2-3

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another. . . Colossians 3:16

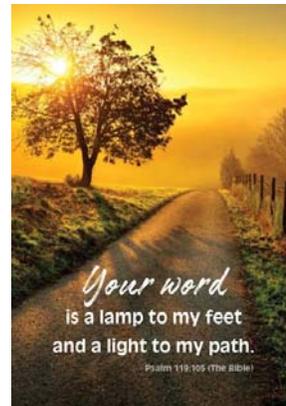
We protect ourselves from drifting away by craving the pure spiritual milk of the Word. We protect ourselves by allowing the Word of Christ to dwell richly within. The world will always seek to draw us away and offer us many a deceitful promise or temporary pleasure for doing so. But to succumb is to drift away from the so-great salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ, and there is no blessing and no rest to be found anywhere else for the child of God but that which is centered in knowing and growing in our marvelous Savior!

3. Is the Word really all that important?

The Word is important in so many ways. Let me name a few.

- The Word is our medium of relationship. Apart from the Word of God, we cannot know our Savior, nor can we really know that we are sharing His thoughts, affections, and purposes.

“These are the Scriptures that testify about me. . .” John 5:39



- The Word is our medium of perspective. It is that which is to inform our thinking on every matter and thereby change us in the process.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Romans 12:2

- The Word is our medium of life.

“The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life.” John 6:63

- The Word is our medium of sanctification. It is not ritual, religious practice, feelings, or sincerity that sets us apart unto God above, it is the Word of God!

“Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth.”

John 17:17

Before moving on with our text, let's just pause for a moment and connect several of the truths we have covered. For the writer of Hebrews is laying a very careful series of arguments. Jesus is so much better than angels—in fact He is the one true God. And so, naturally, He is preeminent. That is why:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

With this kind of Savior, why would we ever turn anywhere else? Why would we let the winds and currents of trial or worldliness cause us to drift away from that which is preeminent, that which is irreplaceable, He who is the author and perfecter of our so-great salvation? So let us hold fast as we push onward in this blessed and challenging text of Scripture!



Hebrews 2:9-10 But We See Jesus!

The writer of Hebrews continues to develop his theme. For in his mind the very best way to strengthen the faltering faith of his audience, any audience for that matter, is to get them to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. We have already seen the divinity and preeminence of our precious Savior, but there is more!

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels. . . Hebrews 2:9

Understanding Hebrews 2:9

Although this phrase may sound somewhat strange to our ears, it is simply a reference to the fact that the eternally existent second person of the Trinity, at the point of time of His first Advent, took on humanity—two natures, inseparably united, in one person.

Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Philippians 2:6-7

But the humility of His first advent didn't last. Once He completed the work of salvation in keeping with the Father's plan of redemption, He is, "*now crowned with glory and honor. . .*" Do you want to know more about the Son's glory and honor?

. . . God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11

“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” John 5:22-23

The more we learn about Jesus, the more we see that He has priority of place, superiority of rank, and unsurpassed majesty—

. . .so that in all things He might have the preeminence. Colossians 1:18

So when things are not working out the way we think they should, when we get thrown by a trial, unexpected circumstance, or doubts, where should we turn? Why, Jesus should be front and center in our thinking! For there is no one else like our Savior! This is a fact that will become even clearer when I show you what is next!

. . .so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2:9

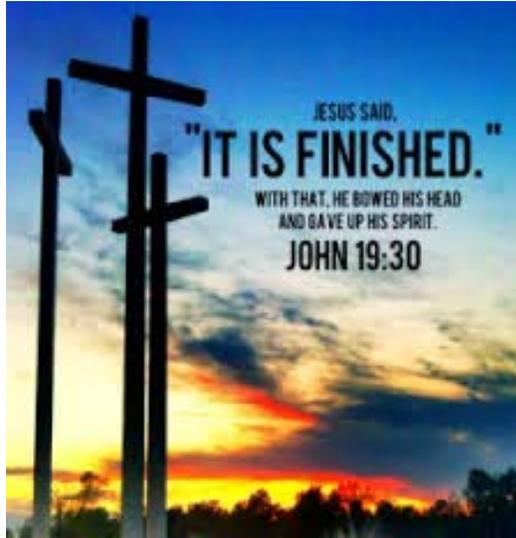
This is one of many clear statements in Scripture regarding the substitutionary nature of Christ's death on the cross: He tasted death so that you and I wouldn't have to. This needs to be absolutely clear in our thinking. So, look closely for how the language of each of the following identifies Christ as having taken our place—received our punishment!

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree. . . I Peter 2:24

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. . . II Corinthians 5:21

But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:5

At this point you should be wanting very much to know what was accomplished by Christ dying for us. It is a tremendous act of love on His part. But why? What did His death accomplish? A detailed answer is coming in just



a few verses, but for now, let me point you to something Jesus said during His final moments on the cross:

"It is finished!"

John 19:30

These words could just as easily have been translated: Paid in full! This payment for our sin is a necessary part

of our reconciliation to our heavenly Father and our salvation from an eternity in hell to one in heaven!

Notice that we didn't ask for Jesus to *taste death* for us, nor did we make any kind of payment in order for Him to do so. Rather, God saw the need, acted on our behalf, and freely offers the result to anyone willing to respond by faith. That's why Scripture says "*by the grace of God!*" That's what grace is—God meeting our needs at a sacrifice to Himself and at no cost to us. This is a fundamental part of our so-great salvation, and this is the point that the writer of Hebrews is trying to drive home with his audience—and, by virtue of its place in Scripture, for us! Will the world taste death so you don't have to? Will the government, the latest technology, elected politicians? You and I will never be able to find anyone like our Savior. We need to hold fast to Him!

Understanding Hebrews 2:10

As we move on to Verse 10, let's first consider it as a whole and then go on to break it down into parts.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Hebrews 2:10

An understanding of this verse is really going to enhance our understanding of the Gospel, which in turn should help us present it to others such that the Holy Spirit can convict them of their need. You see the fact that Jesus tasted death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9) is the reason God "*gave His Son.*" This was necessary so that:

. . .whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16

The absolute necessity of this life-death connection is very poorly understood as the result of far too much teaching on the love of God at the exclusion of the rest of His character. Let me correct any errors in your thinking on this matter as part of making sense out of Verse 10.

1. God is holy! Holiness includes the perfect righteousness of God and His perfect justice. It is so intrinsic to who He is, that we are told it is the foundation of His throne!

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; love and faithfulness go before You. Psalm 89:14

Is it any wonder then that God calls us to come out of the world and separate ourselves unto Him?

Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." II Corinthians 6:17

2. Now what if we ignore the holiness of God and just focus upon His love?

- If we do, we get an unBiblical picture of God that is one-dimensional in nature. God is not one dimension, but infinite in depth of character and perfectly balanced in His attributes.

- By trying to align everything with the love of God, we seek to trap Him to do our bidding and make Him impotent to address evil. For example, there are those who hold to a theology that claims, "A loving God would never send anyone to hell." Yet the Bible is quite clear, Jesus Christ is going to "*rule with an iron scepter*"—that's not a scepter of love, but of righteousness and justice. He is going to "*strike down the nations*" that are aligned against Him at His coming with a sharp sword. He is finally going to cast those who have rejected Him into the Lake of Fire for all eternity! (Revelation 19-20)



- On the positive side, the love of God should be precious to us because it is *backed* by His perfect character. Note again that in Psalm 89:14: "*love and faithfulness go before. . .*" That's because His throne is founded upon His perfect righteousness

and justice. A declaration of love carries no more weight than the character of the one who proclaims it. The love of God for His children “*surpasses knowledge,*” and there is no other love so “*wide, long, deep, and high*” as His (Ephesians 3:16-19). You can count upon the certainty of God’s love for the simple reason that it rests upon the remainder of His character.

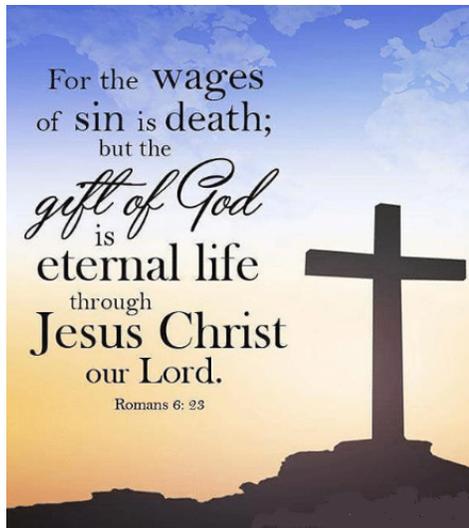
3. God has made a decree—there is no negotiation possible—the very fabric of God’s sovereignty rests upon it:

The wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23

There is no letting the guilty off, no friendship discount, no glossing over this simple truth. Where there is sin, there is going to be death.

So it was fitting (necessary) that

there would be an accounting for sin by one as holy as is God the Father! We are back to our text of Hebrews 2:10—given the holiness of God, it was *necessary* for someone to die for sin!



4. But what about the idea of “*perfection?*” How could the preeminent Son of God be made perfect? The Greek word translated perfect means to bring something to its intended purpose, to completion, or to consecrate. This brings us to the following expanded translation of Verse 10 using what we have discovered above.

In keeping with the holiness of God:

For it was fitting (it was necessary) **for Him** (the Savior of mankind), **for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect** (that is, to bring to fruition God's redemptive purposes) **through sufferings** (someone had to die, for the wages of sin is death).
Hebrews 2:10

Hebrews 2:10, rightly understood, should give us spiritual backbone, for we have just had a glimpse of Jesus as our incomparable Savior. You see in the Father's plan, it was necessary for the wages of sin to be paid—and that means death! This required One without sin—that would be Jesus—Who could then bring the Father's plan to fruition through His crucifixion and resurrection.



Here we are, on the receiving end of persecution or undergoing a trial and starting to look frantically for greener pastures. Listen, once you have turned to Jesus, there is nowhere else to go. There is no one who will save you like He will! There is no one with the necessary perfection, who will receive unto Himself the death that was by rights ours!

In summary, the better we know the Captain of our salvation, the more we will stand firm in the faith and not drift off course. Redemptive history is the history that matters! When doubts assail, turn to Christ by means of His Word. When circumstances take a turn for the worse—health, political machinations, world-wide pandemics—turn to Christ. What God has done, is doing, and will do through His Son is what matters! Everything else is so much noise!

Hebrews 2:11-15 Jesus Calls Us *Brethren!*

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one. . . Hebrews 2:11

We had better refresh our memory on the topic of sanctification before we discuss this passage.

To Be Sanctified

Within our text, He who sanctifies is the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who are being sanctified are those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ unto eternal life or, as referred to in our text, those sons with a destiny in glory!

1. **Definition.** First, let's recall the meaning of sanctification and our working definition:
 - The words translated sanctify, holy, holiness, sanctification, saint, and consecrate typically have a very similar root meaning. They mean to *set apart for special purpose or function*.
 - A study of the Biblical usage leads me to define sanctification as follows:

To sanctify is to set apart unto God in terms of purity, in terms of priority, and in terms of exclusivity; saints by virtue of position and experience!
2. **Two kinds.** Since it is going to play such an important role later in the Book of Hebrews, let me remind you of the distinction between positional and experiential sanctification. Every child of God is positionally set apart in Christ at the moment of salvation, and from that moment forward is called to become progressively set apart in experience.

We find an example of both kinds of sanctification in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. What makes this

noteworthy is that Paul labels them as sanctified right from the start, although the content of his letter is all about dealing with carnality in the Corinthian church:

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy. 1 Corinthians 1:2

As mentioned above, the words sanctified and holy are very similar—consider them synonyms. So then, Paul is commenting on their positional holiness, while reminding them of the requirement to become ever more holy in practice!

The Book of Hebrews also proclaims our perfectly sanctified position coupled with its progressive intent:

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:14

Returning now to our text:

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one. . . Hebrews 2:11

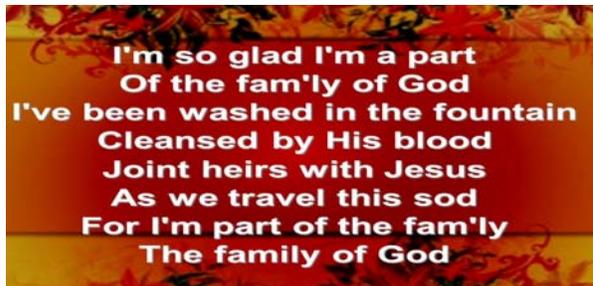
As you read Verse 11, did you ask, “All of one what?” The answer is all of one family! Look at the rest of the verse:

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren. . . Hebrews 2:11

And then again in Verse 12, Jesus says:

“I will declare your name to My brethren. . .”

Is this text implying that Jesus and those who are saved through faith are of the same family? Absolutely!



Jesus and His Brethren!

Let's explore our family relationship further:

1. This family relationship of the believer to Jesus is not an isolated or obscure reference, but a great truth!

Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. . . . John 1:12

For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brothers.

Romans 8:29

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! I John 3:1

2. If you are a wobbly Christian, beginning to look elsewhere for relief from persecution, the enormity of what it means to be related as family to the Lord Jesus Christ should be of tremendous encouragement. Is there anywhere else you can turn and find something of equal value?

3. This family relationship is a great change in God's dealings with mankind, and a dramatic truth that can only be understood in the context of the Church. Recall how the Church began on the day of Pentecost with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon those who placed their faith in Jesus as Son of God and Messiah.



It is at this point that every saved person also becomes a *child of God*. (John 1:12) There is nothing like this in any other religion—even in Judaism.

4. And don't miss these subtleties:
 - Jesus *is not ashamed* to call us brothers and sisters. We do things to dishonor Him, but He remains true. We may have doubts, but when we turn back to Him as we should, we can take comfort in the permanency of familial relationships.
 - Jesus has shared the Father with us, and the Father accepts those who are in His Son. The Son is the One mediator between God and man—representing us both! What a Captain of Salvation we have in Jesus Christ. This is someone you want to follow—not turn from! You will never find another One like Him. Jesus is better!

The Humanity of Jesus

There is another item to note in Verses 14-15:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same. . . Hebrews 2:14

1. Start with the exalted and divine Son of Hebrews Chapter 1. He is the One who created this material universe, is worthy of worship, and is going to reign forever.
2. This Divine Son, at the time of the First Advent, took on a share in humanity.

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. John 1:14

No one has ever seen God, but God, the one and only who is at the Father's side, has made Him known. John 1:18

3. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that at the First Advent, Jesus took on a *share* of that which is common to all mankind. We have repetition in the text to make sure we don't miss the point: Jesus has *partaken* of flesh and blood. This means that He has something in common with mankind and He has *shared* in our condition—experienced in large part what we have.
4. Jesus had a *share in humanity* in that at His First Coming, He became fully human. However, there is much He does not have in common with mankind:

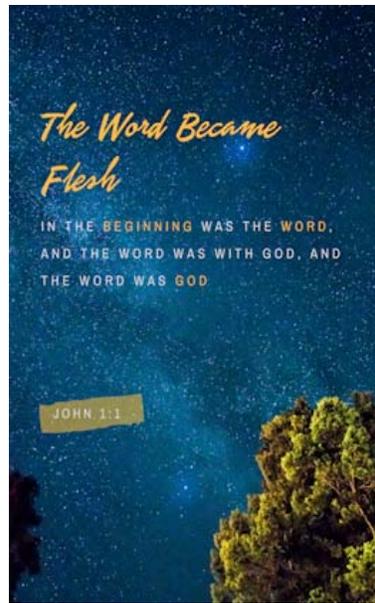
- Jesus did not *begin* at His First Coming! He has always existed as the divine and eternal Second Person of the Trinity:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1

- Jesus is the man from heaven, born via a virgin birth by the Holy Spirit.
- As a result, He does not have Adam's sin, a nature to sin, nor was any sin ever attributed to Him.

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Matthew 1:23

"Which of you can prove me guilty of sin?"
John 8:46



5. Jesus truly is the unique persona and the one great celebrity of all time! Two natures—human and divine—inseparably united in one person.

The combined humanity and divinity of Jesus is something that is hard to grasp and raises many questions. At the forefront, why was this necessary and what did it accomplish? Continuing on in our text reveals the answers:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same. . .that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Hebrews 2:14-15

Destroying him who had the power of death. . .releasing captives. Do these seem like important things? Of course! This is the reason behind the unique person and coming of Jesus Christ.

Four Questions

Let's make sure we understand this more thoroughly by answering the following four questions:

1. **How did Satan get the power of death?**
 - The first thing to understand is that death refers to separation. For example, physical death is the separation of the soul from body, while spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God.
 - When Satan convinced Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they died spiritually. That is, at that moment, their fellowship with God was broken. (Genesis 3:8-9) At the same time, the rulership of the earth, that had been theirs, defaulted to Satan. (I John 5:19)

- All subsequent humans have been born spiritually dead. (Ephesians 2:1-2) And those born in such a condition, separated from God, are Satan's subjects. They make up his kingdom. (Colossians 1:13)

2. How did Jesus destroy Satan's death grip?

He did it through His own death! We have already studied this back in Verse 10. I trust you will begin to see the depth of what it took to save lost mankind!

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Hebrews 2:10

In keeping with the holiness of God, it was necessary for the Savior of mankind to suffer (someone had to die) in the place of fallen mankind in order to bring to fruition God's redemptive purposes! And now pay very close attention to what happens when a lost person comes to God through faith in Christ:

For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:13-14

These truths should grip our souls. For there is no way out of being Satan's subject for all eternity other than the one way provided in Jesus Christ. God's way required the death of His Son, but praise God that, as a result:

. . . death has been swallowed up in victory. . . thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 15:54, 57

3. Who are those who have spent a lifetime in bondage to fear?

Those are everyone born on the *Broad Road* headed

to destruction, those in Satan's kingdom, those born in the slave market of sin, and those dead in trespasses and sin! In short, every member of the human race prior to faith in Christ fits into this category. We are all born in *the slave market of sin!* Many do not like this dogmatic position, but the Scriptures are very clear.

As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. . . .

Romans 3:10



4. Do you see the message of Verses 14 and 15?

Verse 15 is plainly about mankind's great need for redemption and Verse 14 focuses upon our glorious Redeemer. First you have those who *all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death*—that's lost mankind. Then you have He that through death *might destroy him who had the power of death*—freeing those held captive! Who else could redeem lost mankind but the Lord Jesus, for He is the only one who could pay the redemption price!

. . . **knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold. . . but with the precious blood of Christ. . .** I Peter 1:18-19

In Summary

As we close our consideration of this portion of Scripture, just two simple questions remain:

1. **Who will rescue you?** If you reject Jesus, where are you going to turn for redemption? Who is going to rescue you from Satan's grip? Can you free yourself? Jesus is willing to redeem all who turn to Him in faith. But if you reject Him, there is no one to rescue you.

2. **Is there any reason a believer should reject the Christian Life?** For those who are redeemed, is there any conceivable set of circumstances which would make it reasonable to voluntarily return to the *slave market of sin*? Of course not!

He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32

The more we study and learn, the more we keep arriving at the same conclusion: Jesus really is better!

Hebrews 2:17-18 Jesus Our Propitiation!

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. Hebrews 2:17-18



The first part of Verse 17 repeats things we have already learned in order to place emphasis upon them:

- Jesus took on humanity that He might represent us, to God, as a great and perfect High Priest
- As our representative, Jesus is two things I rejoice to know: He is merciful and He is faithful!

And then what comes next is something that only one High Priest who ever lived could accomplish—Jesus made

"*propitiation for the sins of the people.*" This is an essential part of our salvation and of extraordinary importance! The word *propitiation* is certainly not part of our everyday vocabulary; and, to make it even more challenging to understand, it has a range of meanings that seem to have no relationship to one another.

Understanding Propitiation

Given the importance of this theological concept, let's work our way through a definition of it.

1. The basic meaning of the Greek word translated *propitiation* is to appease or satisfy. This concept is readily recognizable in pagan religious practice any time a worshipper takes some action to *satisfy* the god(s). The big difference with respect to Christianity is this: God has never asked for the work of a spiritually lost individual to *satisfy* or propitiate Him!
2. In contrast to pagan practice, the only thing ever identified as satisfying the Father when it comes to the sin of mankind was Christ's substitutionary death on the cross.
3. Now Christ didn't die in our place to satisfy a capricious, arbitrary, or vindictive God, but rather in order to allow God's love and mercy to flow to those otherwise an object of His wrath. Now, we need to consider God's holiness carefully. It is helpful to think of His holiness as His righteousness and justice. They are such an essential part of His nature that they are said to be the foundation of His throne. It is only from this foundation that His mercy and faithfulness can go forth to man. Let me show you this from Psalm 89:

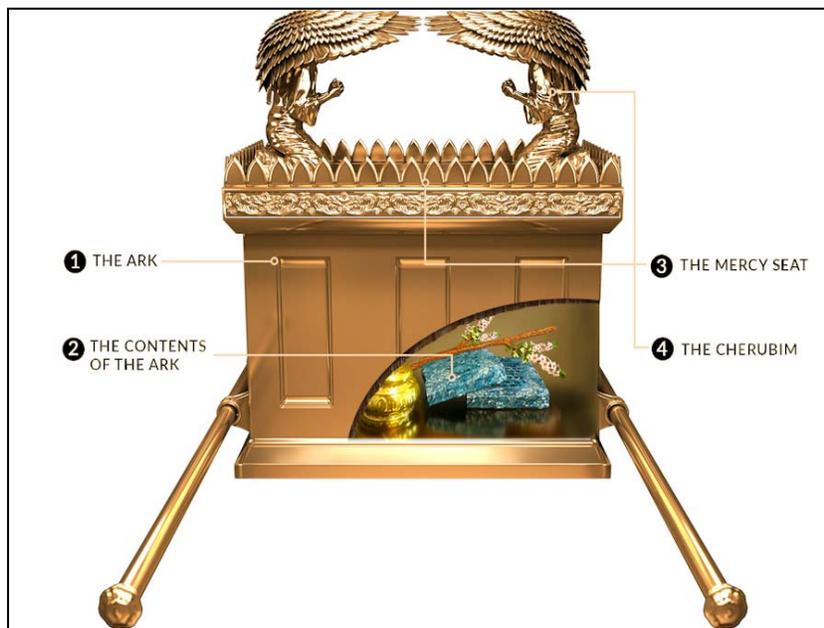
**Righteousness and justice are the foundation of
Your throne; love (mercy) and faithfulness go
before You.** Psalm 89:14

Thus, it is no wonder that the four living creatures in heaven never stop declaring:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” Revelation 4:8

So, in short, it is not possible for God to be consistent with who He is and ignore the sinfulness of mankind. His righteousness and justice must be satisfied in order for His love to go forth! His very throne is pictured as resting upon this inviolate principle, because it is related to the very essence of His perfect nature!

4. God prepared us for the idea of Jesus as the One who would propitiate the Father through the annual Jewish feast of the Day of Atonement. On this one day of the year, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies—the place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Now inside the Ark were three things that spoke of the sins of the people: Aaron's rod that budded, a pot of manna, and the tablets of the Law.



God dwelt above the Ark with the two angels representing the righteousness and justice of God. Now the lid of the Ark had a very interesting name—it was called the *mercy seat* and the word mercy has exactly the same root as the word for propitiation. Perhaps you are wondering, “How can that be, the two ideas seem to have no relationship to one another?” On the contrary! On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would sprinkle the blood of an animal sacrifice upon the mercy seat. The blood of the innocent sacrifice would *cover* that which represented the sins of the people, and the righteousness and justice of God would be satisfied for the coming year. Do you see it? The blood on the Mercy Seat (cover of the Ark) satisfied the holiness of God. All of this pointed ahead to the time when Jesus Himself would be the perfect and innocent sacrifice, who through the offering of Himself would satisfy the justice and righteousness of God for the sins of the entire human race—not for one year but for all time!

5. It is essential that you see how appeasement (propitiation) and mercy are connected together in the same word. For the salvation of lost mankind—they have to go together! Jesus propitiated the Father through His death on the cross; and in doing so satisfied the demands of God’s justice and righteousness (His throne is secure). Because of this, the way is now open for the Father’s mercy and faithfulness to flow to those who believe, and it does so by providing redemption from the slave market of sin and reconciliation to our heavenly Father. So now we can define propitiation in this way, which should produce a great sense of wonder and appreciation on our part!

Propitiation is the satisfaction of God's holiness leading to the availability of His mercy.

Let's pull it all together. What did it take for God to be satisfied—for the floodgates of mercy to open? It took:

- Someone qualified and preeminent—that would be Jesus.
- Someone who shared in humanity and could represent man to God—and that would be Jesus!
- Someone who could satisfy the perfect holiness of God by Himself being holy, while at the same time receiving unto Himself the judgment that was due mankind—and that again would be Jesus!

Could you or I do this? Not a chance! Could any person ever hope to have even the slightest chance of propitiating our Holy God by works of righteousness that they might do? Of course not! I don't know about you but, after our study in the Book of Hebrews thus far, my appreciation for Jesus and the salvation that He has provided has grown exponentially! There is no sense looking anywhere else, for nothing else will ever compare!

Final Thoughts

Let me close this section by bringing to your attention something that is very hurtful to those who appreciate the so-great salvation that is available in Jesus Christ. I refer to the fact that, in our day, there are many who reject the concept of the Son tasting death in our place and thereby propitiating the Father. They find a perfect substitute who dies unpalatable. They say we need to turn from the Old Testament ideas of atonement and the mercy seat, and just concentrate on the love of God—it will cover all. Thus, love has been used to excuse all manner of license—we have love without sanctification and love without obedience. Fear not the spirit of our age! For upon the authority of God's Word:

- Jesus, the eternally existent Second Person of the Trinity took on humanity.

- As one of us, He took our place, receiving the punishment that was our due by dying in our stead.
- His death on our behalf perfectly satisfied the justice and righteousness of the Father—something no one else could do
- Once the Father was satisfied, Jesus redeemed us from the slave market of sin, setting us free from our fear of eternal death.

And so, there is nothing for us to do but lift our hands high in praise to Jesus our exalted Savior! There is no one like Him!

There will always be those who attack our Savior and His work, and when they discourage you, read Revelation Chapter 5 and rejoice that a hundred million angels are still singing:

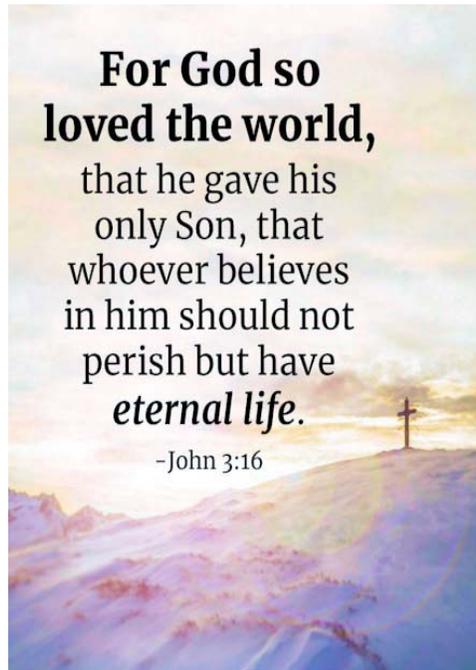
“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!”

There is no fear in heaven over the heresy of man, nor have the angels paused in their praise, nor have their voices faltered in doubt. For Jesus is the Pre-eminent One! And:

. . .whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life!

John 3:16

And all God’s people said, “Amen!”



VISTOSO

Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit... *John 15:5*

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