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# **NO TURNING BACK FROM GOD'S PRIVILEGED CALLING IN CHRIST IN THE LAST DAYS**



## **Reflections on the Book of Hebrews**

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**QUEK KOH CHOON**





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FROM GOD'S PRIVILEGED  
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II





# Reflections on the Book of Hebrews



III







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# NO TURNING BACK FROM GOD'S PRIVILEGED CALLING IN CHRIST IN THE LAST DAYS

## CONTENTS

	Page
<b>Introduction and Overview</b>	1
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
The relevance to believers today	3
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
No turning back from following Jesus: The Primary Exhortation from the Book of Hebrews	7
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
Entering God's Rest	9
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
The better High Priest and a New Covenant	13
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
Why Jesus had to come and why He is the Only Way	17
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
Encouraging one another to press on	21
<b>Chapter 7</b>	
Faith: Some saliant points on Hebrews Chapter 11	23
<b>Chapter 8</b>	
Hebrews 12: Running the Race	25
<b>Chapter 9</b>	
Hebrews 13: Concluding Exhortations	29





IV





## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The book of Hebrews was probably a letter written primarily to Jewish Christians who were undergoing intense persecution and were pondering the possibility of returning to Judaism so that they might escape the sufferings inflicted upon the Christian believers. Under the Roman rule, the Jewish Christians encountered various persecutions. Initially, they lost their properties, were imprisoned and driven away from the city. Subsequently, after being allowed to return, they then faced even greater opposition with the prospect of dying for their faith. Judaism was not treated in the same manner by the Romans and the latter even allowed the Jews to have their own synagogues and high priest. One can understand how the intense persistent persecution could cause many Jewish Christians to consider turning back to Judaism and escape the sufferings and probable martyrdom facing those who claimed to be believers of Jesus Christ.

The writer is not known but he probably was very familiar with Judaism and the gospel, and he wrote in a refined manner in Greek. He was possibly a Hellenistic Jewish Christian. The date was probably before AD 70 as there was no mention of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem which took place in AD 70.

The writer took pains to share that the new covenant was a better covenant; Jesus as the Son of God was greater than the angels; as a Son, He was greater than Moses, greater than Joshua, greater than Aaron the high priest as He was a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

That Melchizedek was a type of the Messiah the Jews themselves admitted; and his priesthood had to do, not primarily with offering sacrifices for sins, but with ministering blessing and succour and sustenance. For the Jews, no further proof was needed than the fact that even Abraham paid him homage, giving him tithes of the spoils of battle.





Jesus was the ultimate Lamb of God, the final and complete sacrifice; He entered not into the holy of holies of the tabernacle but He actually entered into heaven as the high priest and as the final perfect sacrifice, opening the entrance into the presence of God for all true believers. Above all, He emits the radiance of God's glory from within and is the exact representation of God's nature and image; He is the heir of all things and all things will be summed up in Christ who, after making purification of sins, was resurrected and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty, depicting completion of His work, and having a place of the highest honour.

In the past, God spoke through prophets who were given progressive revelation, but now God speaks through and in His Son, the complete and final revelation; He is not only God's messenger and the final prophet, but He is the message, the Word of God. No further revelation is needed; God's plan for salvation and His intent to have a people and nation of His own is now clearly and perfectly revealed in Christ. Jesus is the long awaited Messiah and the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets; with the coming of the Son of God, the shadows and types seen in the Old Testament have blossomed into the substance seen and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the God-man and the ultimate and only mediator between God and man.

The letter also highlighted the warnings not to turn away from the gospel and go back to Judaism. The Jewish Christians could not afford to ignore such a great salvation; they should not be like a land which does not produce fruits but produce weeds instead; they must not ignore the One who spoke from heaven when ignoring the One who spoke from the mountain in the Old Testament already incurred a great judgment!





## Chapter One

# THE RELEVANCE TO BELIEVERS TODAY

The book of Hebrews has much relevance for us as believers today. The call is to value the great privilege we have to be called children of God and brethren of Christ; we are to persevere and to walk by faith even in the midst of sufferings and persecutions. We must not turn away from the Lord Jesus and the gospel.

Our scenario in the last days bears similarity with that of the Jewish Christians during the Roman rule. Many believers are undergoing persecution for their faith in these days; the number of martyrs in this century is estimated to be greater than the total number of martyrs in the whole of Church history.

The sufferings we endure may be likened to God's discipline in His love and His testing and purification of our faith which is much more precious than gold. The Lord God disciplines us, corrects us and guides us so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment is sorrowful and painful but the end result God has in mind is our eternal well-being. It will result in joy and glory at the appearance of Christ in His second coming.

Like the saints of old, we must persevere and endure with faith and in obedience to God who has given us His best and His only Son. We need to run the race, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame. Like the Jewish believers of old, we must not fail to persevere, and we cannot turn away from the gospel and the Lord Jesus. We, like them, must appreciate the privileges we have in Christ. We need to





recognise that in Christ we have a better covenant, a better transformation, a better Mediator and the final revelation of God's plan of salvation. In Him, we are called to be His holy nation, a people of God and God's own possession. We shall reign with Him in glory and collectively be His bride and temple in the new heaven and new earth. For the moment, temporarily, we need to endure sufferings as pilgrims on this earth. Our citizenship is in heaven and like the saints of old, we are looking for a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God Almighty.

Recognising this, the way we live our lives will be different from the people of the world. As pilgrims passing through this world, our perspectives, values and priorities should be in line with those who are looking forward to a 'heavenly city'. We are people waiting for the return of our Master, the Lord Jesus. As we wait, we are to watch, we are to pray and we are to work the work of God (Mark 13:33). Hebrews 12 reminds us that we are like those running a race. We cannot run a race with many weights and burdens clinging to us. The sin, the values of the world, the worldly pursuits, materialism, the entanglement of wrong relationships – all these should be removed so that we can run the race well and are not weighed down and end up not finishing the race. We are to look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith and, as we focus on Him, we can run with His enabling and with His encouragement to finish this race God has prepared for us. It is not a short sprint; it is more like a marathon, requiring our perseverance and endurance to finish, together with the rest of the brethren.

The negative example of Esau highlighted in Hebrews has a significant message for Jewish Christians and us. Esau rejected his birth-right to satisfy his desire for food. It is a reminder to all believers to live worthy of our high calling. We are born again to be children of the living God, with Christ as our elder brother. We who were destined for hell and destruction are not only forgiven but given the privilege to be members of God's family with an inheritance and the privilege





to rule with God in glory. As children of the Almighty, we should manifest the behaviour of those belonging to the Holy One. If we live for the moment and seek to satisfy our fleshly appetite, how do we expect to honour the heavenly Father? How can the world at large see us as those belonging to Him and as disciples of the Lord Jesus? In order to satisfy the longing for food, Esau had rejected his birth-right as the elder son of Isaac. He had in fact rejected God and His calling to be in line with the calling of Abraham. His lack of eternal perspective and his failure to value God's high calling caused him to choose the temporal pleasure of satisfying his desire for food at a cost of sacrificing what was truly valuable. Will we, like Esau, turn away from the gospel and the Lord Jesus in preference for temporary relief and momentary pleasure, but losing eternal life and eternal reward?







## Chapter Two

# NO TURNING BACK FROM FOLLOWING JESUS: THE PRIMARY EXHORTATION FROM THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

“We are told in the gospel to come to Jesus, to believe on Jesus, to live the life of faith in Jesus. We are encouraged to lean on Him, to cast all our care on Him, to repose all the weight of our souls on Him. We may do so without fear. He can bear all. He is a strong rock. He is almighty. It was a fine saying of an old saint, ‘My faith can sleep sound on no other pillow than Christ’s omnipotence’. He can give life to the dead. He can give power to the weak. He can ‘increase strength to those who have no might’. Let us trust Him, and not be afraid. The world is full of snares. Our hearts are weak. But with Jesus nothing is impossible”. J.C. Ryle (*Day by day with J.C.Ryle*)

This sharing by brother Ryle is so relevant to us as we ponder over the end-times and the persecutions that await many of God’s people. The book of Hebrews reminds us not to turn back but to run the race, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith and to finish the race, with Him and with the urgings of the cloud of witnesses around us.

The following quotation from Robert Anderson’s “Early Christians in Rome” is so very helpful for us to ponder as we may face the same persecutions and sufferings they went through as believers. It crystallises what it means to go through life as true Christians and not merely as those who happen to be in an institution like the visible church.

“The catacombs are full of Christ. It was to Him that the





Christians of the age of persecution ever turned: it was on Him they rested - in gladness and in sorrow; in sickness and in health; in the days of danger - and these were sadly numerous in the first two centuries and a half - and in the hour of death. It was from His words they drew their strength. In the consciousness of His ever-presence in their midst, they gladly suffered for His sake. With His name on their lips they died fearlessly, joyfully passing into the Valley of the veiled Shadow. On the tablet of marble or plaster which closed up the narrow shelf in the catacomb corridor where their poor remains were reverently, lovingly laid, the dear name of Jesus was often painted or carved". (Types in Hebrews by Sir Robert Anderson page 140)

It reminds us that CHRISTIANITY IS CHRIST. If we claim to be Christians, we must learn this well and experience it deeply in our lives. It is this reality that will help us go through this broken world fearlessly, with faith, looking to the pioneer and author of our faith, who not only opens the way for us to know the triune God and salvation but will complete it for us, provided we continue to look unto Him. The book of Hebrews clearly reminds believers, in fact warns believers not to turn their back on Jesus Christ and the gospel, for His supremacy is undisputed; He is greater than Moses, the angels, better than the old covenant, better than the Aaronic high priest; the final and supreme sacrifice, the Son, God Himself who sits next to the majesty on high, who intercedes for us and will come again to bring us into His kingdom, the new heaven and the new earth.

His being, His love, His intercession, His completed work of salvation, His mercy and grace will bring us home (*Refer to Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of Hebrews in particular*).



## Chapter Three

# ENTERING GOD'S REST

Hebrews 4 highlighted God's displeasure with Israel and the latter's not entering the promised land, the place of rest in God, and the death of all those who disobeyed God with unbelief in the wilderness.

The promised land is a type of the ultimate rest in God in the new heaven and new earth, the rest promised to all those who believe in Jesus and continue to trust and obey Him until they enter into this wonderful hope of eternal rest in the Lord. This is the rest similar to that which God instituted after creating the world and resting on the seventh day. It depicts a state, a relationship and a fellowship with God which He intended for man. Unfortunately, this rest was disrupted by man's rebellion and sin against Him. Yet God is still working towards re-establishing this rest for man, a rest which is even more beautiful and wonderful, in the eternal heaven and earth to come.

We who believe in Jesus have this hope and rest to look forward to, even in the midst of living in a broken world with broken relationships. To realise this ultimate rest, we must not regress to unbelief and disobedience. *"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts"* (Hebrews 3:15). We must continue to trust Him and continue to love Him by keeping His commandments.

But, even in the present context, we can already enter into this rest; it is provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ invites us to come to Him. To those of us who are weary and heavy-laden, He will give rest. He shared in John 16:33 that in Him we might have peace (a picture of rest) even though in this world, there is tribulation. He urges us to take courage for He has overcome the world.



We need not struggle to achieve our rest; we need only to come to Jesus, share His yoke, and find that His burden is not heavy (Matt 11:28). This rest in Him will continue to carry us through our pilgrimage on earth until we enter the ultimate rest in God.

## MAKE EVERY EFFORT

Hebrews 4:11 has the phrase “making every effort”; and this is followed by “to enter that rest”. The NASB puts it in the following way, “let us be diligent to enter that rest”.

Some of us may feel it odd that scriptures encourage us to make every effort and be diligent to enter God’s rest. Is not rest opposite to effort and diligence? Is it correct to say that “God helps those who help themselves”? Is it not true that transformation unto godliness is solely the work of God and it does not require our effort or contribution to realise it?

Yet, in the Scriptures, this concept of making effort and being diligent appears again and again in different parts of the Bible. The apostle Peter, for instance, wrote in 2 Peter: *“Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence in your faith, supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love”* (2 Peter 1:5-7).

In 2 Peter 1:10 the apostle Peter again reiterated, *“Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you, for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you”* (NASB).



The apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:28-29, refers to his ministry as labouring, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in him. He urged the Ephesian Christians in Ephesians 4 to “*put off your old self...put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*” (Ephesians 4:25).

It seems pretty obvious that making effort and diligence are involved in the pursuit of holiness and godliness. It is not just “letting go and letting God”. It requires our effort, choices and cooperation, albeit in dependence on God entirely through the enabling of His Holy Spirit, to make this pursuit and longing a reality. It is definitely required to enter into God’s rest.

The Lord God moulds us into the image of the Lord Jesus through basically three means. He uses godly brethren to teach us and influence us. He makes use of circumstances (which include suffering) to transform us. Finally, He gives us the ‘disciplines of grace’ to enable us to grow unto holiness and godliness. The ‘disciplines’ include reading and studying the Bible, the fellowship of the brethren, the worship service, the communion service, the baptism service and fasting and meditations on His Word. All these require our godly choices and cooperation and they need our diligence and moral effort to observe them regularly.

If we neglect the ‘disciplines of grace’ and we are complacent and indifferent, do not expect to grow in holiness and godliness. But let us be careful not to end up being legalistic and conclude that it is our effort that makes the difference. It is only God who blesses our efforts made to grow to be like Him. Only God effects transformation in our lives and all glory and honour belong to Him when we do make progress in our spiritual lives.





## Chapter Four

# THE BETTER HIGH PRIEST AND A NEW COVENANT

The focus in Chapters 5 - 8 is now on the Lord Jesus as the high priest after the order of Melchizedek. We see how He acted as the ultimate mediator, bringing us into reconciliation with God, with the ultimate sacrifice of Himself, opening access into the presence of God for all believers. His sacrifice is once and for all, complete; the curtain separating the holy of holies from the holy place is once and for all torn down. Jesus entered into heaven itself. He died, was buried but rose again and ascended unto the right hand of God the Father and sat down, waiting for all enemies to be subdued under His feet. His sitting down indicated that He has accomplished His mission; yet He still acts as our intercessor and advocate at God the Father's right hand. He and the Father sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us as our teacher, comforter and guide. What is more, the Spirit effected the writing of the Law on our hearts and minds.

## THE NEW COVENANT

The eternal high priest instituted the new covenant. No longer is the Law written on stones; it is written on our hearts and minds. It is not something external; it is wrought internally and through the Spirit. The Spirit enables us to obey God and the Law; He inculcates the love and positive desires in us internally so that we obey, not out of duty or by rote but we obey because we love the Lord God and His ways. The new covenant brings about a knowledge of God for all His children and this knowledge is no longer exclusive to teachers of the Law. We become God's eternal possession, His family, and He no longer holds our sins against us.







The Law and the Levitical system are but a copy and shadow of the substance, fulfilled in Christ. The Law is good but is not able to help us ultimately to be right with God. It shows us the holiness of God and the ugliness of sin but open access to the holy God is still impossible without the sacrifice of the ultimate Lamb of God. The Law is like a school teacher who leads us to Christ; it is as if we have to go through pre-school, primary school, secondary school before we can finally enrol into university. The moral Law is still relevant and expresses God's desire for His people.

Now with the new covenant, we are able to fulfil the Law with the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Admittedly, we are still not perfect. Yet the positive direction towards holiness and perfection has begun with the Law written on our hearts and minds. By the Spirit, we can put to death the deeds of the flesh. We are enabled to put off the old self and to put on the new self. This is a continual battle to attain holiness but the power to attain it is now made available. Christ's death on the cross has paid the penalty of sin, dealt with the power of sin and will dispel the presence of sin when He comes again.

In the meantime, with the new covenant, the believer is able to renew his mind and be transformed through the Spirit and the application of God's Word which is sharper than any two edged sword. The heart can be nurtured to love God and the things God loves and to hate what God hates. Walking in the Spirit is now possible and the believer is able to avoid walking in the flesh. Dying to self, denying self-life and carrying the cross become a reality. Producing the fruit of the Spirit comes about invariably when we obey God and the promptings and teachings of the Holy Spirit.

The battles are not over; we have a formidable enemy. Furthermore, the world is constantly seeking to turn us away from our Lord and master. Lastly, the self easily gives way to pride, envy, jealousy, fleshly desires and the like.





But thanks be to God! The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death. The requirements of the Law might now be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Roman8:2). The new covenant instituted by God through Christ Jesus and made possible by the Holy Spirit has now set us free from the law of sin and death. We need not sin because we are no longer under its bondage. We will live and not die because the Lord Jesus is alive. This Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, and He sits at the right hand of the Father.





## Chapter Five

# WHY JESUS HAD TO COME AND WHY HE IS THE ONLY WAY

Hebrews 9:1 to 10:18 focuses on the difference between the Old Testament Levitical system and the priesthood and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Here the author of Hebrews sought to help the Jewish Christians not only to see the difference, but to see the supreme priesthood and sacrifice of the Messiah, and realise the important implications.

The sacrifice of the lamb before the Exodus and the offerings from the sacrifice of animals in the tabernacle are types pointing to the ultimate lamb and sacrifice. The ultimate reality, the antitype, is seen in the “lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”, as declared by John the Baptist as he pointed to Jesus, saying, “Behold the lamb of God”.

The Levitical sacrificial system was in fact a manifestation of God’s grace towards Israel as He chose to dwell among the Israelites. As God is infinitely and perfectly holy, God instituted a system to enable Him, a holy God, to be able to continue to dwell in the midst of the tribes of Israel without them dying in His presence. So the elaborate set-up of the tabernacle was given to Moses to implement. The Israelites could only approach God after they had sacrificed animals, which took their place in death so that they could be ceremonially clean and able to worship God. The high priest could only enter the holy of holies once a year on the Day of Atonement, by first offering blood for the forgiveness of his own sin and then offering blood for the forgiveness of God’s people in general.

Jesus, the high priest after the order of Melchizedek, offering





His own life and blood, entered into heaven in the presence of God the Father and sat down at His right hand. His sacrifice occurred once and was complete. It was fully accepted by God the Father. And his blood atones for the sins of the world (i.e. all those who believe in Him by faith).

God, because of His holiness and because of who He is, is not accessible to human beings. Hence the elaborate system and the tabernacle were needed. When Jesus offered Himself, once for all, He made God accessible to all those who come to Him through the blood of the Lamb of God.

The Israelites in the Old Testament who obeyed God by faith, experienced salvation by looking forward to the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus, while the believers in the New Testament are saved by looking back at the cross of Jesus. In both instances, the basis of salvation is faith and belief in Jesus Christ and in His offer of salvation.

In the Old Testament context, although the people were forgiven when they offered to God the animal sacrifices and became ceremonially clean, they were not freed from the guilt and defilement of sin in their lives. However, for those who believe in Jesus, they are freed from the penalty of sin, the power of sin and ultimately the presence of sin. In that sense, they are freed from the guilt and defilement of sin. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed, the new has come" (2 Corinthian 5:17). It is what the Lord Jesus explained to Nicodemus about being born again, being a new creature no longer dead in sin and under the bondage of sin.

Recognising this, can we claim the following is inadequate for salvation: just receiving Christ and believing in Him? Do we need something extra like the tradition of the Church or the addition of our own merits? No. This is gospel-plus and the apostle Paul pronounced 'eternal damnation' on all those who preach such a gospel. Jesus'





sacrifice is once, complete and His sitting down at the right hand of the Father means His mission is completed and He need not stand like the priests in the Levitical system, offering sacrifices again and again.

Jesus is our advocate at the right hand of God and He intercedes for us from that position eternally. We can be assured that His ministry will enable us to complete our pilgrimage on earth. He and the Father sent us the Holy Spirit to guide us, to comfort us, and to teach us in our journey on earth.

No wonder Jesus has to come and no wonder He is the only way. Only a sinless God-man can be the final and complete sacrifice. Only one who lives forever with the authority and exaltation of the Father can ensure that we finish the race and be forgiven and accepted when He comes again to judge the world. All glory and honour to the triune God!





## Chapter Six

# ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER TO PRESS ON

### HEBREWS 10:19-39

Hebrews 10:19-39 brings out rather important exhortations for us as believers.

It is a call to hold fast our conviction of faith and to hold on to our certain hope in the faithfulness and promises of God in Christ Jesus. This is especially so as we recognise what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus has opened up the entrance into the holy of holies. God is now accessible to His people: not just once a year through the Day of Atonement but always by the blood of the Lamb of God. Also, Jesus has gone ahead of us as the first fruit; He is alive and He sits at the right of God the Father, interceding for us, advocating for us. He and His Father sent the Holy Spirit as our teacher, comforter and guide. Because He lives, we shall live. Because He overcomes, we shall overcome.

We are to run the race together; we are to build up the body of Christ in unity; we are to establish the temple of God; and we are to prepare ourselves as a bride of Christ. Notice that it is a collective calling; there is no such thing as an individualistic Christian. Jesus is the head of the body; He is the forerunner and leader of a new people of God to which we belong. If we belong to Him as His people, we are to encourage one another. We must stimulate one another to good works and love, and to finish the race together. The weak need to be supported; the strong must not ignore the weaker brethren. We do this by meeting together in fellowship, worship and studying the Word of God. We are





to pray for one another and bear one another's burdens in practical ways.

There is no place for turning back. If we deliberately turn back from God and become His enemy, we are in fact trampling down the Son of God and insulting the Holy Spirit of God; a fiery judgement then awaits us before the judgement seat of God. It is a terrifying prospect to face the fiery judgment of God. If the Old Testament saints faced a terrible judgement when they rebel against God, what more those who have been given the privilege to become members of the family of God in Christ Jesus.

We must endure, persevere and not shrink back. Our faith and hope in Christ must be the anchor that holds us in the storms of life and in the midst of persecutions and attacks of the evil one. The One who promises us is perfectly faithful and reliable. Let us press on together to the ultimate rest in Christ Jesus.



## Chapter Seven

# FAITH: SOME SALIENT POINTS ON HEBREWS CHAPTER 11

Hebrews 11 is a well known chapter displaying the gallery of men and women of faith in the Old Testament context and there is much that can be gleaned from the 40 verses in this chapter.

In this sharing, we focus on some salient points related to the subject of faith for God's people. The object of faith is God and His promises; faith is expressed confidence in the promises of God and a certainty of the future and eternal blessings He assured us. It rests on the utter and perfect reliability of God and it causes us to cling to the hope that the future realities He promises will come to pass.

Faith is closely tied up with a pilgrim spirit. The saints of old were looking for a heavenly city. Although they were approved by God, they did not yet receive the promise. To them, life on earth was a pilgrimage; the ultimate goal is the new heaven and the new earth. As such, they did not despair when they died in faith, without receiving the promises, although they saw them from afar (11:10, 16 and 39).

Faith is accompanied by an eternal perspective. The apparent setbacks, the sufferings and difficulties do not ultimately matter in the light of eternity. What matters is pleasing God, finishing the spiritual race and reaching the shores of heaven and receiving the approval of God almighty.

Faith is therefore characterised by faithfulness to God, endurance and perseverance in running the race God has assigned to





us and finishing it well. In that light, no obstacles, no impediment can discourage the men and women of faith. The difficulties are in fact met with a renewed resolve to persevere and not to turn back.

The saints in the Old Testament demonstrated such a resolve and endurance despite the limited revelation they received, without the privilege and understanding we have in believing and knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. They are our witnesses. If they could do so well for God with their limited revelation and understanding, what about us with the privilege and understanding we have as believers in Christ?

Our supreme example of faith and perseverance is the Lord Jesus who endured the cross for the joy set before Him. He is the ultimate witness and champion of faith. His faith and obedience to God demonstrated the fact that God honours faithfulness when He is exalted on high and seated at the right hand of God the Father. He is our forerunner. In focusing on Him and following Him, we too will enjoy the pleasure of God and receive His approval. Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

The men and women of faith in God move forward courageously and boldly into an unseen future based on the Word of God and the perfect faithfulness of the almighty, and the gallery of faith and the supreme example and witness of our Lord Jesus assure us that they and we will not be disappointed. The harsh circumstances, the sufferings, the persecutions and the mockings will not deter such ones; they look to the pioneer and perfecter of their faith, the Lord Jesus, who has gone before them and awaits their arrival at the pearly gate of heaven.



## Chapter Eight

# HEBREWS 12: RUNNING THE RACE

After the famous chapter 11 on faith, the writer likened the Christian pilgrimage to a race. It is a race that requires endurance, perseverance and is probably a long distance race like a marathon.

One cannot run a race with ease if one is weighed down with hindrances and burdens that prevent the runner from moving freely and with less effort. Similarly, the Christian needs to deal with the spiritual hindrances and sin that entangle him and impede him from running the race and finishing it well. The hindrances may take the form of legitimate issues of life like career, relationships and family; these legitimate issues may take the place of God and the gospel in our lives and they become real hindrances and even sin that clings closely to us. It is no wonder that Jesus raised such areas for believers to consider when they sought to be his disciples. Such areas can hold believers back from embarking on the narrow road of discipleship. It is helpful to note that the Christian race is a collective race; we help one another to finish the race and it is not an individualistic race when one seeks to win at the expense of others.

We need to keep our eyes on Jesus as we run the race. He is our forerunner; He is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He not only begins with us; He runs alongside us, encouraging us, enabling us, and He waits at the finishing line to welcome us.

## DISCIPLINE FROM GOD

The focus changes to examining the place of discipline in this





Christian race. Discipline, in this context, is tantamount to training and correction. The earthly father disciplines us for our good; the heavenly Father disciplines us so that we can share His holiness. The rebellious child needs to be reprimanded; the struggling one requires training to be strengthened and to be more conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus; the one who is making progress requires discipline to become more matured and more able to bear more responsibilities and ministry. All discipline is unpleasant but the end-result is the fruit of righteousness. Even bad intentions from wicked individuals and spiritual pressure can be sovereignly used by God in such training. We recall how God used a messenger of Satan to keep the Apostle Paul humble in the light of the great revelation he received when he entered the third heaven.

We need to be careful not to allow the root of bitterness to grow in our lives when we encounter discipline God allows in our lives. The negative example of Esau is highlighted to remind us that we should not reject what is important and crucial from God by choosing what fulfils our fleshly appetite instead. Esau rejected his birth-right for food and in effect rejected God and God's plan for salvation along the line of Abraham. Being the firstborn, he would have been intimately involved in the line of Abraham and David, playing a significant part in God's salvation plan for the world. Similarly, if the Jewish Christians turned their back on Jesus and went back to Judaism, they would have rejected God's salvation plan in His Son Jesus for the immediate escape from persecution and pain. Believers must not choose what satisfies our momentary appetites at the expense of rejecting Jesus and our eternal well-being.

## THE TWO MOUNTAINS

The writer then turned to the comparison of two mountains, depicting two different covenants: mount Sinai and mount Zion. The Lord Jesus, in His sacrifice, opens up access to God, giving





believers the right to enter the presence of God through His blood and body. Believers can look forward to being welcomed by angels in the new heaven and new earth into the very presence of God almighty. Mount Sinai speaks of terror, fire, earthquake as Israel approached the awesome holy God. Even the high priest can only enter the holies of holy once a year on the Day of Atonement. If he entered not according God's instructions, he may be struck dead. What we have in Jesus and the new covenant is of such great privilege that we can freely enter into God's presence without fear, being accepted by Him. It is foolishness to abandon Mount Zion and return to Mount Sinai.

The chapter ended with a sober warning not to reject Him who spoke from heaven when rejecting Him who spoke on earth already entails a fearsome judgment. God is still the same holy, awesome God, a consuming fire. If we reject what He offers in Christ and turn away from His kingdom, choosing the earthly kingdom instead, we will have nothing. For the earthly kingdom will not stand when God finally shakes the created things. Only what cannot be shaken will remain. This is the kingdom of God. Those who choose the earthly kingdom, the kingdom of the evil one, will not remain.







## Chapter Nine

# HEBREWS 13: CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS

In this concluding chapter, we need to still remember the context the believers were in. They were undergoing persecution. Besides having their properties seized and being imprisoned, they were facing the real probability of losing their lives for the sake of the gospel.

The previous chapter highlighted the discipline of the loving heavenly Father who was preparing the believers to share His holiness and to enter into the heavenly city they were looking for. In that light, they were exhorted to have a pilgrim spirit and not to be too disturbed with what was passing away but to focus on what is eternal and privileged.

With this background, the believers were reminded to continue to love the brethren. With various ones losing their homes and being imprisoned, love must take on a practical role. It would mean being hospitable to those who need shelter, food and encouragement; it would involve empathy and unselfish kindness to the brethren who were suffering for their faith. Remember, we are running the race together. As one body in Christ, we are to carry one another's burdens and to support those who are weak, needy and discouraged.

In line with the pilgrim spirit, believers were urged to be holy and to maintain purity in marriage and sexual relationship. Also, pilgrims travel light. As such, they should not allow greed for money and material things to hamper them in their pilgrimage. Instead, they were to be contented with what God had provided. God is backing the believers with His unconditional promise not to forsake them or







abandon them. He will always be their helper. The unchanging character and faithfulness of Christ Jesus is the guarantee for all believers in the Lord. Therefore, they need not fear but can be bold and courageous.

The believers were exhorted to remember the faithful leaders who had gone before them and to imitate their faith. There should be no entertaining of strange and false teachings designed to lead them astray and to turn back from the Lord. They were also urged to remember their present leaders and to submit to them so that they could fulfil their responsibilities with joy, for they had to give an account to God for their roles.

As pilgrims, they must be prepared to suffer with the Lord Jesus who had suffered for them at the cross, “outside the camp”, to go through these trials joyfully with hearts of thanksgiving and worship. Jesus, the great shepherd would lead them and equip them to do His will, to do good works and to finally bring them to the lasting heavenly city.



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# **NO TURNING BACK FROM GOD'S PRIVILEGED CALLING IN CHRIST IN THE LAST DAYS**

## **Reflections on the Book of Hebrews**

**“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as  
you did in the rebellion”.**

Hebrews 3:15

This book will be available on the website  
<http://www.livinginthelastdays.com>

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