

## Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews

### Chapter 3: Jesus' Superiority to Moses and the Negative Example of the Exodus Generation

(also available on-line at [ichthys.com](http://ichthys.com))  
by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

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**Introduction:** Chapter three may be divided into three parts: 1) the comparison between Jesus and Moses (vv.1-6); 2) the negative example of the exodus generation (vv.7-14); 3) Paul's application of that negative example to his contemporaries in Jerusalem through his dissecting of the rebellion and apostasy of that infamous, earlier generation (vv.15-19). In terms of this last point, we know that such is the case because of Paul's admonition at the start of the next chapter, "So let us beware lest any of *you* should seem to fall short [on this same score], by casting aside [in a similar way God's] enduring promise to enter into His rest" (Heb.4:1).

The first paragraph (vv.1-6) finds Paul comparing Moses, the "giver" of the Law, and therefore, for those who are legalistically inclined, the most dearly loved figure of Israel's history, to Jesus Christ, but demonstrating in so doing the vast superiority of Jesus Christ. Paul proves logically our Lord's absolute supremacy by means of his "household" analogy wherein the Master and Builder of any house or household is naturally superior to any servant appointed to maintain it. Through this illustration, Paul reminds his readers that dispensations have changed: they were no longer under the Law of Moses but under the Law of the Spirit, and their failure to accept this key truth, clinging to the past instead of adjusting their behavior and applications accordingly, was at the heart of the problem of their spiritual decline.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the Law of sin and death (i.e., the Mosaic Law).  
Romans 8:2

The second paragraph (vv.7-14) finds Paul employing a frequently used device in scripture, namely, a comparison of the present situation to a biblical model of the past in order to draw out the crucial (often negative) aspects of a present situation by analogy to some similar past event.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In prophecy, this technique is often also employed in reverse, that is, explaining a contemporary situation by reference to a future, eschatological event, the "Day of the Lord paradigm" being the most common of these devices. See CT 1, section IV.1, "Hermeneutic Issues".

The comparison used here in Hebrews chapter three, namely, the failure of the generation of the exodus and their frequent rebellion against God and His deputy, Moses, is one of the most frequently employed such analogies in scripture, used when there is a need to find fault with contemporary practices (e.g., Ps.78:8-51; 81:10-12; 95:8-11; 106:6-33; Ezek.20:13-24; Neh.9:16-18; Hos.13:5-6; Amos 5:25-26; Acts 7:39-42).

The third paragraph (vv.15-19) finds Paul drawing out the underlying reasons for the failure of the exodus generation and then applying this example by implication to the Jerusalem believers, though without direct attribution at first (that will come with the first verse of the following chapter ("lest any of *you* should seem to fall short": Heb.4:1), in order to invite his readers to first see that "the shoe fits" (and thus to make the attribution all the more stinging when they do realize that they have fallen into a similar pattern). Thus at the end of this chapter (and continuing into chapter four), Paul invites the Jerusalem congregation to compare their conduct to the rebelliousness of that prior, notorious generation, helping them to see that their *return to the Law* now that such a course of action was entirely inappropriate. was in its own way just as rebellious as that previous generation's *departure from the Law* under Moses' direct leadership and administration of it.

Given that the three paragraphs of this chapter are each respectively predicated upon a prior understanding of three essential biblical doctrines/concepts, it will be helpful to cover these first by way of review before launching into our verse by verse commentary.

**Dispensations:** Paul begins this chapter with a paragraph (vv.1-6) designed to remind the Jerusalem believers of the new age in which they were now living: the Age of Israel was over;<sup>2</sup> the Age of the Church was now the dispensation under whose rules they needed to be living their Christian lives, not those of the prior age.

As we saw in our treatment of chapter one, the word "dispensation" and its biblical meaning is often misapplied in evangelical teachings.<sup>3</sup> The critical point about the doctrine of dispensations has to do *not* with the composition of the people of God within each division (for from Adam and Eve to the last person saved during the Tribulation, we believers are all members of Christ's Bride, His assembly, His Church), but instead it has to do with the *manner* in which God's *truth* is dispensed therein (Heb.1:1-2). *That* is the key element in His superintendence of His people at all times and periods of human history, in every "dispensation". Everything we do as believers is all about *the truth*, which is to say, everything in the life of a believer from Adam and Eve until

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, the Age of Israel is technically in hiatus, still having seven years to run (the Tribulation), Daniel's 70th week (Dan.9:24-27), a period of time shared in common with the last seven years of the Church Age. See SR 5: The Seven Millennial Days of Human History, section II.9.e, "The Tribulational Overlap".

<sup>3</sup> See Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapter 1, section I.e, "Dispensations"; also in SR 5: The Seven Millennial Days of Human History, section II.5, "The Five Dispensational Divisions of Human History"; and in BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section I.B.5.a, "The Dispensation of the Spirit".

the last person saved during Christ's millennial reign is all about Jesus Christ who *is* the truth (Jn.14:6). In order to enter into God's household, we need the truth (the gospel); in order to serve God correctly after we are saved we need to know, to learn and to respond to all of His truth (everything in scripture). The form of presentation of the gospel was different before Christ came in the flesh and suffered in the darkness on the cross, paying for the sins of the world, but the essence of that gospel was always the same: salvation through faith in God's sacrifice. And the provision, form and presentation of the rest of God's truth which believers need to accomplish God's plan for their lives has likewise differed in its provision, form and presentation before our Lord's first advent and, critically for His Church, before the completion of the canon of scripture, the one and only present day source of all of God's truth (outside of the natural revelation which God's creation provides: Ps.19:1-6; Acts 17:24-28; Rom.1:18-20).

(1) God, from antiquity communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) [but now] in these last days He has communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe (i.e., time-space).

Hebrews 1:1-2

Before the cross, God used various and sundry means to "dispense" His necessary truth to His people, most recently before the cross through the Law of Moses with its concomitant writings and rituals (but also through prophets and through prophecy). But after our Lord's great victory on the cross, the foundation of the entire plan of God, believers in this age of the Church have been blessed with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the completed canon of scripture (which at the time of writing of Hebrews was still taking shape), and the spiritual gifts necessary to extract the necessary truth from the Word to feed Christ's Church (with a number of special gifts such as apostleship, prophecy and tongues still being operative in Paul's day with the purpose of bridging the gap until the canon was completed), everything, that is, necessary to receive the entirety of the mysteries now revealed (Matt.10:26; 11:25; Mk.4:11; 4:22; Lk.8:17; 10:21; 12:2; Rom.11:25; 16:25; 1Cor.2:7; 4:5; 15:51; Eph.1:9; 3:2-10; 5:32; 6:19; Col.1:26-27; 2:2-3; 4:3; 1Tim.3:9; 3:16; 2Tim.1:8-10; 1Pet.1:12; Rev.10:7).

(4) So then, my brothers, you also (i.e., like a woman free to remarry on account of her husband's death) have been put to death in respect to the Law through the body of Christ in order to belong to Another, even to One who has been raised from the dead, so that you may bear fruit to God. (5) For when we were in the flesh (i.e., spiritually dead and subject to the sin nature), the passions of those sins [awakened] through the Law were at work in our [bodily] members, so that we were [ever] bearing fruit to death. (6) But now we have been freed from the Law by having died to that ["first husband"] by which we were being constrained, so that we may [now] serve [the Lord] in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written [code] (i.e., the Law).

Romans 7:4-6

(1) So now, there [awaits] no judgment of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the Law of sin and death. (3) For what the Law could not accomplish (i.e., solving the sin problem)

because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [God] rendered summary judgement on [all] sin in [Christ's] flesh, (4) so that the [perfect] righteousness which the Law demands might be fulfilled in us – we who walk not according to the [sinful] flesh, but according to the Spirit (i.e., believers).  
Romans 8:1-4

(16) But I tell you, walk in the Spirit and you will not carry out what the flesh lusts for. (17) For what the flesh lusts for is contrary to the Spirit's will, and the Spirit is opposed to what the flesh lusts for. Since these are diametrically opposed to each other in this way, what you are doing is not what you yourself choose. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.  
Galatians 5:16-18

These and many other similar passages make very clear what even a casual reader of scripture should understand: the victory of Christ and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit (with His concomitant gifts, empowerment, and completion of the canon) has changed absolutely everything in the way believers now learn and are helped to apply God's truth, not by the Law engraved on stone but through the Spirit reminding us of the truth written in our hearts (2Cor.3:2-3; 3:7).<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.  
2nd Corinthians 5:17 NKJV

New wine requires new wine skins lest the power of the new burst the weakness of the old (Matt.9:17; Mk.2:22; Lk.5:37). The reality of the cross and the gift of the Spirit thus of necessity brought about an entirely new way of dispensing God's truth, the new dispensation of the Church Age. Lying behind the English word "dispensation" (Gr. *oikonomia*) is the Greek word *oikos*, meaning "house" or "household". It is important to recognize this connection in order to understand the essence of the biblical concept of dispensations, namely, the provision of all necessary support for a household (cf., "home" *eco*-nomics, also derived from *oikos*).

(42) The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager (lit., "dispenser", fr. *oikonomos*) whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? (43) It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. (44) Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions."  
Luke 12:42-44 NIV

As our Lord's comments above tells us, the steward/stewardship, dispenser/dispensation, manager/management function in every biblical age has had to do with providing *spiritual food* for the household, the family of faith. Moses not only provided spiritual food for the specific

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<sup>4</sup> These issues are covered in detail in BB 5: Pneumatology.

household placed under his care at the time of the exodus and for forty further years, but was also given to write and implement the rules for the entire dispensation thereafter, rules which set out the system for providing spiritual food for God's special nation ever after . . . until the time of the coming of the Messiah.

(1) Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a *slave*, though he is master of all, (2) but is *under guardians and stewards* until the time appointed by the father. (3) Even so we, when we were children, were in *bondage* under the elements of the world (*stoicheia*). (4) **But when the fullness of the time had come**, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born *under the law*, (5) to redeem those who were *under the law*, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (6) And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" (7) Therefore you are no longer a *slave* but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Galatians 4:1-7 NKJV

Christ is superior to Moses in every way, but for our purposes here the important thing to take note of is that Moses was an intermediary and the means of his provision of spiritual food to the household for which he was responsible was temporary, composed of rituals and shadows which looked forward to the time of revelation of all of God's mysteries, that is, the revealing to the world of the One who encapsulates them all: the Son of Man. Through the cross, we have been liberated from the slavery to ritual and shadow inherent in the Mosaic Law and have been appointed sons of God through our faith in His Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Endowed now with the Holy Spirit, we have access to spiritual food about which prior generations under the Law could only dream (1Pet.1:10-12; cf. Lk.10:24; Jn.8:56). Thus, "house/household" in our context refers to the respective dispensations of the Age of Israel (from Moses forward) and the Age of the Church, with the former represented by the one given to be its initial steward or dispenser, and the later represented by the One who is Master over the entire Church from Eden until His return and our resurrection.

(8b) . . . in all wisdom and understanding, (9) [God] has made known to us *the mystery* He has willed according to His own benevolent purpose which He determined in [Christ], (10) for the administration (lit., "dispensing": *oikonomia*) of this [present] *fulfillment* of the epochs (i.e., the Church Age wherein the Church is complete): namely the incorporation of all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth . . .  
Ephesians 1:8b-10a

Making clear to his readers this crucial contrast between Moses and Christ was of particular significance to Paul because through this analogy he hoped to make the Jerusalem believers realize that they were retreating back to a greatly inferior means of provision. Worse to tell, that system of provision was no longer being empowered by God since its time and purpose had passed (Rom.6:14-15; 10:4; Gal.3:10-13; 3:23-25; 4:1-7; 5:1; 5:4; 5:18; Eph.2:15; cf. 1Cor.9:20-21). And worst of all, by engaging with the Law, returning to the status of slaves and renouncing their status of sons won for them at the cross, they were turning their backs on the One who is Master over all.

(19) So then, you are no longer strangers and hangers-on, but you are fellow citizens and fellow members of *the household* of God, (20) established upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself the cornerstone, (21) in whom the entire structure is in the process of being joined together and is growing into *a holy temple* in the Lord, (22) in whom you too are being built up into *a dwelling place of God* by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

The passage directly above, also written by the apostle Paul, was addressed to a gentile audience. Part of the "mystery" revealed only after the cross and the coming of the Spirit is that gentiles are now full and equal functional members of the Church of Jesus Christ. During this "household" period, the Church Age, the plan of God is no longer being administered through one special nation concentrated in a single geographical location but is instead being implemented through the world-wide Church of Jesus Christ with Jews and gentiles coequal partners in the Spirit. Together, we are being "joined together" and "built up" into God's dwelling place through the power of the Holy Spirit, through His distribution of spiritual gifts, and through His empowerment of ministries around the globe where gifted Christians (and all Christians are gifted) are performing the ministries Jesus has assigned whose effects the Father has ordained (1Cor.12:4-6).

(4) [It is Jesus] to whom you have come, a Living Stone, rejected by men, but with God elect and highly honored. (5) And you yourselves are being built up (i.e., by the Holy Spirit) into a *spiritual house* to be a holy priesthood for the offering of spiritual sacrifices well-pleasing to God through Jesus Christ.

1st Peter 2:4-5

This truth – of the transfer of responsibility for spiritual growth from the Jewish nation to the entire complement of believers alive on earth – no doubt helps to explain in part the reluctance of many in Jerusalem to accept the new status quo and their willingness instead to return to the now defunct Law (Matt.21:43). For we know for a fact that the tendencies of "this generation" in Israel which opposed the Lord will continue until His return (Matt.24:34; Mk.13:30; Lk.21:32; Rom.11:25; cf. Deut.32:5; 32:20; Ps.12:7-8; 95:10; Prov.30:11-14; Jer.2:31; 7:29), and we also know from numerous examples in scripture that jealousy over the inclusion of the gentiles – which wrongly seems to some to somehow degrade the special relationship Israel has always had with Him – was often at the heart of the hardness and resistance which Jews at the time manifested towards the gospel (e.g., Matt.27:18; Lk.4:23-30; Acts 13:43-45; 17:5; 22:21-22; cf. Rom.10:2; 11:25). What is particularly problematic for these believers in Jerusalem is precisely that while they *were* believers, their present behavior was anything but what was appropriate for believers – and that negative behavior was pushing them away from the Lord.

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.

Romans 10:12 NIV

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for

you are all one in Christ Jesus.  
Galatians 3:28 NIV

These were hard words for anyone brought up with the notion of Jewish exceptionalism to hear, and the idea that the temple and its rites along with the entirety of the Mosaic Law was now no longer valid took even the apostles a long time to digest and accept.<sup>5</sup> So it is understandable that when the pressure of exclusion by their unbelieving neighbors was added to the mix (cf. Jn.9:22; 12:42; 16:2), many Jerusalem believers found it easier – as well as comforting on some level – to return to their prior religious conformity. The Lord, however, was not going to allow this fundamental compromise of faith in Him to stand. Whatever good there is in the Law, the unbelieving religious generation of that day were paying it only lip-service as they engaged in traditional ritual without any actual faith, vainly worshiping Him, teaching as doctrines the commandments of mere men (Matt.15:9).

(37) "And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. (38) No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. (39) And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.' "  
Luke 5:37-39 NIV

Times had changed – dramatically. A new dispensation had dawned. No longer was God's truth to be dispensed through shadows from a single, central location. Truth now was to reside exclusively in the canon of the soon-to-be-completed scriptures. No longer were priests and Levites to be the chosen stewards of God's household. Administering God's multifarious grace now falls to the lot of every believer, since every believer is now indwelt and gifted by the Holy Spirit. This marvelous change should have been a cause of rejoicing, not one of sullen jealousy and retreat into the now outmoded and illegitimate practices of the past which were even so not being properly conducted.

(6) Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (7) Therefore purge out **the old leaven**, that you may be **a new lump**, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. (8) Therefore let us keep the feast, **not with old leaven**, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.  
1st Corinthians 5:6-8 NKJV

(12) Since we have such a confident expectation of success [based on the support from the Spirit's ministry], we speak the truth unreservedly – (13) and not like the previous situation where Moses had to put a veil over his face so that the Israelites could not see that temporary glory fading out; (14) now their hearts became hard, and until today at the reading of the Old Covenant there is still a [similar sort of] veil remaining in place [one which hides the true glory]; and [this "veil" which obscures the truth] is not being taken

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<sup>5</sup> See BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section I.B.5, "The Time of Transition versus the Present Status Quo".

off because only in Christ is it done away with; (15) so until this present day, whenever Moses is read, this veil [of sorts] lies over their hearts, (16) but whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed – (17) for the Lord and the Spirit are one, and wherever the Lord's Spirit is, there is also *freedom*.

2nd Corinthians 3:12-16

Continued neglect of their Christian duty on the part of the believers in the Jerusalem church and failure to repent of their return to what had now been made obsolete was threatening to bring about the same consequences which befell the generation of the exodus.

**The Exodus Generation Paradigm:** In the second paragraph of Hebrews chapter three (vv.7-14), as mentioned above, Paul quotes from Psalm 95 in order to compare the conduct of the present day Jerusalem believers to the generation of the exodus. This, as previously noted, was a common enough device (Ps.78:8-51; 81:10-12; 95:8-11; 106:6-33; Ezek.20:13-24; Neh.9:16-18; Hos.13:5-6; Amos 5:25-26; Acts 7:39-42), since "this generation" was notorious for their stiff-necked backsliding and rebellion against the Lord in spite of all of the many and wondrous miracles and deliverances they had experienced from Him. And Paul had used this argument himself in the past as well:

(1) For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, about the fact that our [spiritual] forefathers (i.e., the exodus generation) were all under the cloud (i.e., protected by the Glory). (2) And all of them were baptized into Moses (i.e., closely identified with him) in both the case of the cloud and of the sea (i.e., received the same protection and deliverance as he did). (3) And all of them ate spiritual food (i.e., divinely provided manna). (4) And all of them drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them and their bones were strewn about in the desert as a result. (6) And in this they have come *to serve as examples for us*, so that we might not lust for wicked things as they lusted for them. (7) So do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play (i.e., feasting followed by indulgence in idolatrous rites)". (8) And let us not commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in a single day 120,000 of them. (9) And let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them tested the Lord and [as a result] were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) All these things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. (13) You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:1-13

As Paul says in verse six of the passage above, the children of Israel during the exodus have "come to serve as examples to us", negative examples, demonstrating what we ought *not* to do, especially considering the strictures scripture places upon "this generation" and upon the results



of their shockingly rebellious conduct against the Lord: "God was not pleased with most of them" and "their bones were strewn about in the desert as a result" (1Cor.10:5). Not only did they not "enter into His rest", that is, make it to the land flowing with milk and honey which He had promised them, but they died an ignominious death after wandering around in a barren desert for forty years instead. This is a cautionary tale indeed, one of the most famous in scripture, well-known to all believers and especially to the believers of Jerusalem who were the descendants of these individuals. In their imagination, no doubt they fancied themselves more akin to the exceptions, doing the Lord's will as Joshua and Caleb did, and in one respect they were correct: unlike the majority of the population of Jerusalem at that time, they had indeed responded to the Lord, accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah rather than rejecting Him as their contemporaries had. But the Christian life is all about where we end our race, not where we start out.

(24) Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. (25) Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

1st Corinthians 9:24-25 NIV

(7) You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? (8) That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. (9) "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."

Galatians 5:7-9 NIV

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with *perseverance* the race marked out for us.

Hebrews 12:1 NIV

The Christian life is not just about starting the race but about finishing it. The recipients of Paul's letter had started well, but they had at this point effectively taken themselves out of the running entirely by their de facto rejection of Christ through their turning away from the pursuit of the truth through the Spirit on the one hand, and through involving themselves anew in the rituals of the Law on the other, rituals which proclaimed a Savior not yet come and salvation not yet won. So while they had not specifically, as in Paul's recounting of the failings of the exodus generation in the quotation of 1st Corinthians 10:1-13 above, "lusted for wicked things" as they did, or "become idolaters" as they did, or "committed fornication" as they did, or "complained" as they did, little could be more blasphemous than for these most privileged believers in the Church of that time, privileged in a comparable way to the generation of the exodus (1Cor.10:1-4), to, by their actions, deface the cross and turn away from the only path to spiritual growth: devotion to the truth through the Spirit of grace, not via the dead letter of the Law. For that was indeed "putting Christ to the test", in a very comparable "as they (the exodus generation) did".

(21) "Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, (22) not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in

the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times – (23) not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it."

Numbers 21:14-23 NIV

**Apostasy and the Sin unto Death:** In the third paragraph of Hebrews chapter three (vv.15-19), as mentioned above, Paul brings together this change-of-dispensation-perspective established in the first paragraph (wherein he demonstrates that Christ's rulership of the Church is superior in every way to Moses' establishment of the Law) with the negative example of the exodus generation in the second paragraph; he does so by drawing out in that third paragraph the underlying reason for the failure of the exodus generation. While the Jerusalem believers, along with the scribes and Pharisees who had rejected Christ, had convinced themselves that they were not "like their fathers", that is, pre-exilic Israel given more to idolatry than to legalism (which was the contemporary failing), the truth was that they had much more in common with those previous generations and with the exodus generation in particular than they cared to bring themselves to acknowledge. Like them both, they were becoming faithless and had begun acting out of lack of trust in the Lord: unbelief.

(29) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, (30) and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' (31) Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves *that you are* sons of those who murdered the prophets. (32) Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt."  
Matthew 23:29-32 NKJV (cf. Lk.11:47-48)

For while the road taken by earlier generations, the exodus generation most notably, led to backsliding, apostasy and the sin unto death by a different road (i.e., idolatry instead of legalism), the ultimate destination reached by legalism is the same. Importantly too, the mechanics of rebellion from the Lord were exactly the same now as then. In the end, it matters not a whit what is substituted for the truth and God's will for us to follow it. Even seemingly sanctified, whitewashed Pharisaical self-righteous legalism which rejects grace – and thereby of necessity rejects Jesus Christ, the Author of grace – can lead to perdition just as quickly if not more so than idolatry. The path of unbelief by whatever name always ends in the same shipwreck of faith (1Tim.1:19).

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."  
Matthew 23:27 NKJV

Legalism, also has the added danger of being a more subtle and deceptive evil than, e.g., idolatry, overlaying godly forms on inner rot.

(11) "How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? – but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (12) Then they understood that

He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Matthew 16:11-12 NKJV

What rebellious generations past and present had in common was their rejecting of the Lord and His truth and their replacing of Him and that truth in their hearts with worthless substitutes. Revering false doctrine is just as bad as worshiping a false God, for in the final analysis such backsliding ends up in the same exact place: apostasy or the sin unto death.

But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

1st Corinthians 10:5 NKJV

There is an evangelical false doctrine related to this issue of rebelling from God which needs to be addressed at this point. Calvinism, reacting to the works-salvation of Roman Catholicism with which it waged a life-and-death struggle in its early days, sought to emphasize God's choice over man's actions. That was certainly appropriate and is fine as far as it goes. But later followers of Calvin took this principle too far in embracing only the God-ward side of salvation to the point of virtually ignoring the critical point that human beings are created by God precisely so that we may choose for Him or against Him, the sacrifice of Jesus making possible the salvation of all even though the majority of humanity has chosen to reject Him.<sup>6</sup> In more recent times, this one false aspect of hyper-Calvinism has been aggressively adopted in evangelical circles as "eternal security", meaning, in the interpretation of that false view, that "once saved", a believer can never lose his/her salvation ("always saved").

"But he who endures *to the end* will be saved."

Matthew 10:22b

(1) Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, (2) by which also you are saved . . . *if* you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.

1st Corinthians 15:1-2 NKJV

(22b) . . . to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight – (23) . . . *if* indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Colossians 1:22b-23 NKJV

(11) This is a faithful saying:

For if we died with Him,

We shall also live with Him.

(12) *If* we endure,

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<sup>6</sup> These matters are discussed in detail in BB 4B: Soteriology.

We shall also reign with Him. *If* we deny Him,  
He also will deny us.  
(13) *If* we are faithless,  
He remains faithful;  
He cannot deny Himself.  
2nd Timothy 2:11-13 NKJV

For we have become partakers of Christ . . . *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence  
steadfast *to the end*.  
Hebrews 3:14 NKJV

Scripture provides countless other passages and examples which make it abundantly clear that the notion that a believer can think and say and do anything he or she pleases with impunity after being saved, including turning completely away from Christ in every discernible way – and still be saved in the end – is ludicrous in the extreme. Why, in such a case, is the New Testament replete with injunctions against dangerous behavior and continual calls to the wayward to repent and to the righteous to persevere? Why, in such a case, would we believers be left here on earth after being saved if it mattered not how we behaved thereafter? And how, in such a case, could the genuineness and resiliency of our faith be tested, if there were no possibility of return to that prior status of unbelief?

(13) These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and salute them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. (14) For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the place they now occupy]. (15) Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, *they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back*. (16) But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them (i.e., the New Jerusalem).  
Hebrews 11:13-16

(20) For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [these weak believers] should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then *they have become worse off than they were before*. (21) For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for faith in Christ which was] committed to them – to turn their backs on it now. (22) And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".  
2nd Peter 2:20-22

Common sense, logic and theology aside, scripture lends no support whatsoever to the notion that believers can never abandon their faith after salvation. This does, in fact, happen, as our

Lord Himself made very clear.

"Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe *for a while*, but in the time of testing *they fall away*."  
Luke 8:13 NIV

In the end, only believers – those who persevere in their faith to the end of their lives – are saved; unbelievers are not saved, even if for a short time like the seed sown on rocky ground above they did shallowly embrace Jesus Christ.

(17) "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (18) He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."  
John 3:17-18 NKJV

While misunderstanding this important truth of perseverance necessary for ultimate salvation may turn out not to have posed fatal consequences for many who refused to accept it in the past (since they did, in fact, persevere even so), that is not necessarily going to be true in the future. During the Tribulation, the pressures to compromise will be immense, and the notion that such compromise will not endanger salvation will prove a terrible temptation to do so. But scripture leaves us in absolutely no doubt about that fact that such compromise means the death of faith and concomitant loss of salvation for quondam believers who make that horrible bargain.

(9) Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, (10) he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."  
Revelation 14:9-11 NKJV

And "once saved, always saved" certainly was not true for the Jerusalem believers of Paul's day either who were on the cusp of facing their own tribulation, analogous in many ways to the one soon to come in our day, with enemy armies surrounding Jerusalem and believers who failed to heed our Lord's words being caught between unbelieving zealots on the inside and intractable pagans on the outside bent on their complete annihilation.

(20) "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. (21) Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. (22) For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. (23) But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. (24) And they will fall by the

edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."  
Luke 21:20-24 NKJV

We have examined the issue of apostasy many times in the past.<sup>7</sup> Suffice it to say here that faith may be compared to a muscle which atrophies if not given proper exercise and nutrition. Comparing it to a plant sprung from the seed of the Word, as our Lord does in the verse quoted previously (Lk.8:13), without proper watering and growth resulting in deep-rooting, the plant of faith the seed of the Word produces will wilt under the heat of opposition, temptation, disappointment or any sort of serious tribulation, and, in the extreme case, die off entirely. So also the faith which said plant represents can die out, and many of us who have been in the faith for a fair amount of time probably know of many examples of believers who were once "red hot" for the Lord (cf. Rev.3:15-16) but who now are indistinguishable from unbelievers. If we believers cannot tell whether a former believer still has a spark of faith left or not, we can at least say with confidence that the spiritual situation of such a person is dangerously bad and perilous in the extreme, with not much additional pressure being necessary to extinguish any spark which may remain. Such was the situation in Jerusalem for many whom Paul had in mind when penning this epistle.

(23) "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? (24) But if a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked person does, will they live? None of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness they are guilty of and because of the sins they have committed, they will die.  
Ezekiel 18:23-24 NIV

[For I have already decided], in the name of our Lord Jesus, when all of you are gathered together with my spirit by the power of our Lord Jesus, to hand such a one over to Satan for the destruction of his body so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.  
1st Corinthians 5:4-5

(16) If anyone sees his brother engaged in a pattern of sinfulness which does not lead to death (i.e., is a deviation rather than a complete turning away), let him ask [forgiveness on his brother's behalf], and life will be given to him (i.e., forgiveness and deliverance will result), that is, in those cases where those sinning are not [sinning] unto death. There is sin which leads to death – I am not telling you to pray in that case. (17) All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin which does not lead to death (i.e., temporary deviation, confessed and repented does not result in the sin unto death).  
1st John 5:16-17

As in the verses above, the alternative to apostasy is the sin unto death, the punitive death of a

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<sup>7</sup> See especially BB 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.6.1, "Apostasy"; and Peter #27: "Three False Doctrines that Threaten Faith".

believer who refuses to give up his or her faith but who also refuses to repent of rebellion against the Lord. That person does not apostatize, since he/she clings to faith, but since he/she also refuses to respond to the increasing divine discipline which the Father lovingly bestows (Heb.12:3-17), as in the examples quoted above, the Lord does not allow this sort of bad witness to continue forever. No doubt the Jerusalem church was full of both types of individuals, that is, those who were on the cusp of allowing their faith to be quenched by the pressures to conform and by the draw of tradition on the one hand, but also those on the other hand those who on some level recognized their error in returning to the Law but who even so were unwilling to repent of it in spite of the increasing divine discipline they were experiencing. The collective result of this terrible turn on behalf of the majority of the Jerusalem church was the loss of their "savor" when instead they should have been the "salt" which might have preserved their families, their city and their nation (Mk.9:49-50; Lk.14:34-35).

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."  
Matthew 5:13 NIV

(28) Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. (29) For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'  
Luke 23:28-29 NIV

## II. Translation

(1) So, brothers, [being now] sanctified and partakers of the call [come] from heaven, set your hearts on Him whom we profess as the One sent [to save us] and the High Priest [of that salvation], [even] Jesus, (2) who was faithful to the One who appointed Him, just as also Moses was in all of his "household" (i.e., area of responsibility). (3) This One [Jesus Christ] is worthy of greater glory than Moses inasmuch as the One who builds the house has greater honor than the house itself. (4) For every house is built by someone, but God is the One who has built all things (i.e., creation). (5) And while Moses was faithful as a servant in all of his household as a witness to the [truths] that would be spoken [in the future], (6) Christ [was faithful] as a Son over His household – whose household we are, if indeed we hold fast to the hope [in which we] boast, firmly until the end. (7) Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion during the time of trial in the desert (9) where your fathers tried Me and put Me to the test, although they saw my works [on their behalf] (10) for forty years. So I became exasperated with this generation, and I said [to Myself], 'They always wander in their hearts and have not known My ways'. (11) So I swore in my anger, 'They shall not enter into My rest.' " (12) Make sure, brothers, that none of you develop an evil heart of unbelief (i.e., lack of faith) in turning away (lit. "apostatizing") from the living God. (13) Rather, keep encouraging each other every day as long as we still call it "today" (i.e. we still remain in this world), lest any of you be hardened [in heart] by the deception of sin. (14) For we all have a share in Christ, as long as we hang

onto that original confidence [of our faith], firmly until the end. (15) For when it says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion during the time of trial in the desert", (16) who was it that provoked Him, even though they had heard [His words]? Was it not all of those who came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership? (17) And with whom was He enraged for forty years? Was it not the very people who had sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? (18) And to whom did He swear that they would not enter into His [promised place of] rest, but to those who had refused to trust Him? (19) Now we see that they were unable to enter into this [place of rest] because of their unbelief (i.e., their lack of faith).  
Hebrews 3:1-19

### **III. Summary and Paraphrase**

*Jesus is superior to Moses (who mediated the Law containing the sacrifices). The need to avoid the mistakes of the exodus generation who fell into unbelief and rebellion.*

So, you who have been sanctified by the blood of Christ, not animals, you who have become partakers of an election to the heavenly assembly of Christ, His Church, which is far superior to the earthly assembly you now are compromising to remain a part of, consider carefully just who it is upon whom your confidence of eternal life is based, the true High Priest, the One sent by the Father to fulfill and replace the Law, Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus proved Himself absolutely faithful to the Father who sent Him to fulfill the true sacrifice just as Moses did in establishing the "house" which merely symbolizes that sacrifice. Christ's glory in what He did is clearly far superior to that of Moses, just as in the case of someone who furnishes a house being superior to the house itself: Christ's sacrifice fulfills the true divine purpose which the Law of Moses merely symbolized. Moses was merely a servant, so to speak, of that symbolic house, but Christ is the Son who is the Ruler over said house – and we are that very house, the Church He bought with His blood, if we boldly hold onto the confidence of our salvation firmly until the end.

That is where I am concerned about you. You remind me of the exodus generation to whom the Law was first given. Scripture warns against becoming hardhearted against God as they did, testing Him continually for forty years so that the Lord finally swore in His anger that they would never enter into His "rest" (Psalm 95:7-11). Beware, therefore, lest any one of you should likewise by your similar behavior develop an evil heart of unbelief in turning away from the living God. Instead you should be encouraging each other to scrupulously avoid being hardened in this way through sin's deceptiveness, and you should do so "today" as long as it is called "today", that is, as long as we are still here in this world waiting for our Lord's return. For we have become part of His Body and will enjoy all the blessings related thereunto at the resurrection – if we hold fast to that confidence and faith firm until the end.

Now when it says in the Psalm just quoted, not to harden our hearts if we have truly heard His voice and responded to Him (Psalm 95:7-8), who was it then that heard before but



became embittered against Him? Wasn't it the entire generation led out of Egypt by Moses? And with whom was the Lord angry for forty years? Wasn't it those same rebels who sinned against Him whose bones are bleaching in the desert as a result? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His "rest" if not those who disobeyed and disbelieved Him? We see clearly that those ancestors of yours did not enter into the "rest" He promised precisely because of their lack of faith, a lack of faith confirmed by their actions – similar to your present ones.

#### IV. Verse by Verse Commentary

##### Verse One through Two

(1) So, brothers, [being now] sanctified and partakers of the call [come] from heaven, set your hearts on Him whom we profess as the One sent [to save us] and the High Priest [of that salvation], [even] Jesus, (2) who was faithful to the One who appointed Him, just as also Moses was in all of his "household" (i.e., area of dispensation responsibility).  
Hebrews 3:1-2

**Sanctified:** This is a designation typically used by Paul in his salutations (1Cor.1:2; 2Cor.1:1; Eph.1:1; Phil.1:1; Col.1:2; cf. 1Pet.1:2), but employed here, along with the word *adelphoi*, "brothers/brethren", as a means of restarting the discussion and taking it to a new plane on the basis of what has already been said (i.e., "so" or "therefore" [based on what preceded], Greek conjunction *oun*). Paul had already called attention to the fact that the Jerusalem believers are, technically speaking, "saints", set apart by God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit to belong specially to Jesus Christ:

For both the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified belong to One [Father], and for this reason [Christ] is not ashamed to call them His brothers.  
Hebrews 2:11

We are brothers and sisters in Christ through His sanctifying work on the cross, being made holy not through our own efforts or through any external regime of holiness but "through the sanctifying work of the Spirit" (1Pet.1:2), foreordained for this honor through God's foreknowledge of our future faith in Christ (2Thes.2:13; 1Pet.1:2), and then made holy, "sanctified", positionally by the baptism of the Holy Spirit when He entered us into union with Christ at salvation (Rom.1:7; 16:2; 1Cor.1:2; 1:30; 6:11; Eph.3:18). All believers are thus "saints" in God's eyes, that is, holy and set apart because **He** considers us holy as those who belong to Christ and because **He** has set us apart from the rest of the profane world through the baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

For [the Father] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.  
Colossians 1:13 NIV

Whereas legalism seeks to project an image of holiness and ascribe merit thereto, our holiness is

a matter of grace, received in a wholly non-meritorious way when we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior.

"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."  
Matthew 26:28 NKJV

Under the Old Covenant, under the Law, nearly everything was cleansed/purified with literal animal blood (Heb.9:22; cf. Heb.9:7). But we have been cleansed, purified, and sanctified through the blood of Jesus Christ, that is, through His work in dying for our sins on the cross, the foundation of all things in the plan of God to which the animal blood of the sacrifices of the Law merely pointed in foreshadowing that one, true sacrifice.<sup>8</sup>

All believers in Jesus Christ should understand these things, and the Jerusalem church, the individuals to whom the truth of the mystery of Christ first came, should have understood them better than most. There is no enduring sanctification through the sacrifices of the Law.

(3) For what the Law could not accomplish (i.e., solving the sin problem) because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [God] rendered summary judgement on [all] sin in [Christ's] flesh, (4) so that the [perfect] righteousness which the Law demands might be fulfilled in us – we who walk not according to the [sinful] flesh, but according to the Spirit (i.e., believers).  
Romans 8:3-4

And here was the problem in Jerusalem (e.g., Heb.6:4-9; 10:26-31). Although they knew these things, they were acting as if nothing had changed with the advent of our Savior and His death for us on the cross. Yes, these believers were sanctified, saints, holy . . . positionally. But all believers are called to live holy lives after salvation, to pursue that actual holiness of life which corresponds to the perfect holiness we have by virtue of being in Jesus Christ (Heb.12:14).

Now this is God's will, namely, your sanctification.  
1st Thessalonians 4:3a

(14) As obedient children, not conforming to the previous lusts [you conformed to] in your [prior] ignorance [of the truth], (15) but since the One who called you is holy, so you yourselves be holy in your entire manner of life, (16) because it is written: "You shall be holy, because I am holy" (Lev.11:44).  
1st Peter 1:14-16

Without the pursuit of this experiential sanctification, "no one will see the Lord" (Heb.12:14). Pursuit of ritual holiness through following the regulations, rites and sacrifices of the Law was not contributing to the Jerusalem church's actual sanctification. It was in fact preventing it.

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<sup>8</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.4, "The Blood of Christ".

Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. Galatians 2:16 NIV

It is important to observe here as will be the case throughout this series that while we may find ourselves shaking our heads in agreement *with* Paul and in dismay *at* these wayward believers, it does behoove us to consider our own country at this time of impending tribulation and note the numerous similarities. While Paul could dream about a complete revival of the entire Jerusalem church, more realistic was the hope that enough positive believers would answer this call to dispense with compromise and renew their focus on the truth so as to be salt for their nation. In any case, however, for those who *did* respond to this heartfelt labor of love which is the epistle to the Hebrews, they have no regrets now and will have none at the judgment seat of Christ, regardless of how events played out for them personally during the difficult years that followed the reception of this letter. And the same is and will be true for us as well.

**Partakers of the Call [come] from Heaven:** "Partakers" is the Greek word *metochos* which means to have a tangible share in something in common with others; to be an essential member of some concern as one having a share in that concern; to be a partner (Lk.5:7; Heb.1:9). In this very epistle we are said to have a share in Jesus Christ Himself (Heb.3:14); in the Holy Spirit (Heb.6:4); and in the Father's loving discipline (Heb.12:8). In our context, Paul, in this delayed salutation, addresses his recipients as sharers, partners, partakers of *the* call, emphasizing both the importance of our calling and the substantial, tangible nature of it, as well as our hold upon it. This "calling" in scripture refers not, of course, to a worldly vocation but to God's calling us out of the world unto salvation.<sup>9</sup>

"For those called [to salvation] are many, but those chosen [for salvation] are few."  
Matthew 22:14

(28) And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan. (29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined (i.e., foreordained) to share the likeness of His Son, so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. (30) And those whom He predestined (i.e., foreordained), these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also justified (i.e., made righteous through faith in Christ), and those whom He justified, these He also glorified (i.e., our future resurrection and eternal life).  
Romans 8:28-30

As the first passage above makes clear, not everyone who is given to hear the gospel responds to it (and not everyone who does perseveres "firmly to the end": Matt.10:22; Heb.3:6; 3:14). But as the second passage above demonstrates, "calling" is Paul's shorthand for the plan of God *in toto*: we who have been "called according to His plan/purpose" are the beneficiaries of His "working everything together for good" on our behalf, foreknown (known by Him in eternity past),

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<sup>9</sup> See BB 4B: Soteriology, section I.2.b, "Predestination, Calling and Election".

predestined (placed into His perfect plan), called (led to salvation), justified (given God's own righteousness when we believe), and destined to be glorified (resurrected and rewarded when our Savior returns for us). This is the "heavenly calling" which we believers in Jesus Christ all share, and it is incumbent upon us to live our lives in the light of this "end game" of God's plan, looking forward to our resurrection, to our share of the spoils resulting from Christ's victory (Ps.68:18; Is.53:12; Eph.4:7-10), and to sharing in His perfect millennial government for a thousand years (1Cor.4:8; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6). This is "the altar" in whose sacrifices we have a right to share (Heb.13:10; cf. 1Cor.9:13). Accepting worldly substitutes, even the now defunct ones of the Law which were originally ordained by God to teach about our relationship with Christ, is a poor bargain indeed. Rather than yearning for worldly memberships and associations which will not endure (such as the synagogues of Jerusalem), these believers should instead have been focusing on their calling and election into the most elite organization in the history of the universe, the heavenly assembly of Christ, His Body, His Bride, His Church or *ekklesia* (citizen/warrior assembly), which is far superior to the earthly assemblies on behalf of which the Jerusalem believers were compromising to remain part of.

(12) . . . giving thanks to the Father who has rendered you sufficient to receive your share in the inheritance of the saints in the light [of eternity], [the very One] (13) who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.  
Colossians 1:12-13

**Set your Hearts on Him:** Keeping our eyes on our beloved Savior is an absolutely critical technique that all believers need to master. The verb is in the imperative mood here, meaning that it is a command.<sup>10</sup> If we really were keeping Jesus Christ in the forefront of our thinking at all times in our daily walk, drawing closer to Him in our hearts with every passing day through learning the truth of the Bible, the written word, which is all about Him the Living Word, even Him who is the very Truth incarnate (Jn.14:6; 1Cor.2:16; Rev.19:13), then we would seldom find ourselves unwittingly being roped into compromises or other spiritual failures which result from a sloppy Christian walk. This "occupation with Christ" is impossible without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, moreover, the One who teaches us the truth when we hear it and reminds us of it and helps us to apply it when we are willing to be guided by Him (Rom.8:12-17; Gal.5:16-25; Eph.5:15-21).

I have kept the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved.  
Psalm 16:8

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.  
Philippians 1:21

For [Moses] grew strong by seeing the One who cannot be seen (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye on the invisible Jesus Christ).  
Hebrews 11:27

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<sup>10</sup> See BB 6A: Peripateology: the Christian Walk, section I.B.6, "Focusing on Christ".

Turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come.

1st Peter 1:8

Instead lift up Christ as Lord in your hearts [above all else].

1st Peter 3:15a

While we cannot see our dear Lord at present physically, in the Spirit we should keep our eyes on Him always.

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:29 NIV

**The One Sent:** The Greek verb, *apostello*, "to send", is the source of the noun "apostle" which means, literally, "one who is sent". In the New Testament, the latter word, while sometimes used for missionaries (in biblical parlance, missionaries are apostles and vice versa: e.g., Rom.16:17)<sup>11</sup>, is mostly employed for "the" apostles, that is, the twelve specially gifted individuals (i.e., the original eleven disciples of our Lord, minus Judas, plus Paul; cf. 1Cor.12:28; Eph.4:11-12; Rev.21:14), who were given special authority for the original organization of the Church during this dispensation of the Spirit, namely, the Church Age.<sup>12</sup>

(19) So then, you are no longer strangers and hangers-on, but you are fellow citizens and fellow members of the household of God (i.e., the Church), (20) established upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself the cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:19-20

A missionary is "sent" and supported to carry the Word of God beyond the confines of any given local church's natural sphere of influence. What the twelve *apostles* of the Lamb (Rev.21:14), charged with organizing the Church in its period of expansion to the gentiles, have in common with lesser missionaries (who are sometimes referred to with these same Greek words) is their role of commissioned service *outside* of a local church. And, in the case of the apostles, that service included authority over the entire Church militant of their day. The twelve, Paul in particular, were commissioned for this special role not by any human group but personally by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

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<sup>11</sup> See BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section II.C.2.3, "Missions and Evangelism".

<sup>12</sup> See BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section II.C.1.a, "Apostles".

"Then He (i.e., the Lord Jesus) said to me, 'Depart, for I will send (fr. *ex-apostello*) you far from here to the Gentiles.' "  
Acts 22:21 NKJV

Our Lord is given that same designation in our context because He is *the* Apostle of all apostles, sent by the Father on the mission of all missions: ransoming sinful mankind from sin, death and condemnation through His precious sacrifice on the cross. This was *the* mission, the embodiment of the plan of God itself carried out by Him who is the Logos, the Word, the very plan of God incarnate, sent into this world by the Father Himself to save us from the grave and from the lake of fire.

"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent (*apostello*) Me."  
Matthew 10:44 NKJV

"For He whom God has sent (*apostello*) speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure."  
John 3:34 NKJV

"As You, [Father], sent (*apostello*) Me into the world, I also have sent (*apostello*) them into the world."  
John 17:18 NKJV

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent (*apostello*) His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.  
1st John 4:10 NKJV

**High Priest:** We have had much to say about the high priesthood of Jesus Christ already,<sup>13</sup> and there is much more to come inasmuch as this is one of the key themes of Hebrews all the way to the end of the epistle (e.g., Heb.4:14-15; 5:1; 5:5-6; 5:10; 6:20; 7:11; 7:15; 7:17; 7:20-21; 7:26; 8:1; 8:3-4; 9:7; 9:11; 9:25; 10:21). For our purposes in context, right at the beginning of this formal commencement of the personal part of the epistle (now that the preliminary matters have been dispensed with in the first two chapters) and in what is in effect the letter's salutation, we note that Paul brings the high priesthood of our Lord in here for a particular reason, namely, to draw the sharpest possible contrast between the Mosaic Law administered by Levitical priests and the New Covenant ratified by the blood of Christ, the everlasting High Priest who effected salvation through His death for our sins (as opposed to merely illustrating that death through rites, rituals and sacrifices). If these believers had understood that – and well should they have understood it – then it begs the question of why, if there is no longer any need to illustrate the reality of the cross with the foreshadowing rituals of the past, they were returning to that prior regime of worship which was now bereft of any spiritual value whatsoever?

Jesus Christ is the ultimate High Priest (1Tim.2:5; Heb.7:24-25; cf. Job 16:20-21; Is.53:12b;

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<sup>13</sup> See especially Hebrews Chapter 2, under "A Merciful and Faithful Priest" in v.17.

Heb.6:19-20; 9:11-12; 9:24), and we who believe in Him are now one with Him (Jn.14:20; 15:1ff.; Rom.16:7; 2Cor.5:17; Eph.2:6; 2:10; Heb.3:14; 4:14-15; 7:24-25; Rev.1:6; 5:9-10; 1Pet.5:14; cf. Matt.28:18-20; Eph.3:6; Heb.3:1; 2Pet.1:4). We no longer have need of any earthly priests since we belong to the heavenly One, nor any need of a physical temple since we ourselves as those "in Christ" are now God's temple on earth wherein the Holy Spirit dwells (1Cor.3:16-17; 6:19; 2Cor.6:16; Eph.2:21; 1Pet.2:4-5).

(9) Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so. (10) We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

Hebrews 13:9-10 NIV

We believers have no need of priests or animal sacrifices or a temple or rites and rituals because we have Jesus Christ, because we belong to Him and are one with Him. Now that He has come, going back to those old things which had as their only purpose to speak of Him before He came is of necessity to turn away from Him.

**Moses:** To compare Moses to Christ is absurd. Jesus Christ is God as well as man (since the incarnation), while Moses is merely a human being, no matter that he is possibly the greatest believer who ever lived. But the Spirit allows Paul to use this rhetorical tactic in order to demonstrate to his readers (and to us) how far from the truth many of these believers had fallen. When hearing of such a comparison, anyone who is walking closely with the Lord ought to object strenuously. Didn't Christ create Moses? Indeed, He created us all. Wasn't Christ the One who talked with Moses throughout his mission to Israel starting at the burning bush? Indeed, and Moses longed to see His glory. Wasn't the Law which Moses received written by Christ as part of the Word which reflects Himself? Indeed, Jesus Christ is the living Word who wrote the Law on Moses' tablets with His own finger (e.g., Ex.31:18). And wasn't the "house" Moses was given to administer part of the Church, the Assembly of Jesus Christ, an essential part of His Bride which He would ransom from death with His own blood? Indeed, all of the sacrifices, rites and rituals of the Law given to Moses by Jesus Christ spoke only of Himself. All these things Moses understood. It is ironic and tragic that many of the recipients of Hebrews had divorced themselves from these truths which Moses understood perfectly in his great humility (Num.12:3), and had done so in order to putatively follow Moses by returning to mere man-made (and largely false) interpretations of the Law of Moses which Christ Himself had given him.

(7) "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: (8) 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. (9) They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' "

Matthew 15:7-9 NIV

Just as the assembled crowd who listened to Stephen's speech (Acts 7), legalists who ostensibly followed the Law but instead were actually following their perverted version of it, paid attention to him for a good long while – until it became apparent that he was using the scripture to demonstrate that, far from following Moses or the prophets in truth they were actually in the

camp of those who opposed them – so also Paul intends to demonstrate by the device of this comparison how wrong his listeners' thinking has become. Anyone who would equate Moses with Christ knows nothing of Jesus Christ – or of Moses.

### **Verse Three through Four**

(3) This One [Jesus Christ] is worthy of greater glory than Moses inasmuch as the One who builds the house has greater honor than the house itself. (4) For every house is built by someone, but God is the One who has built all things (i.e., creation).  
Hebrews 3:3-4

With these two verses, Paul brings forcefully home the real point behind this unequal analogy: Jesus Christ is God. There is no true comparison between Him and Moses at all. Jesus Christ is the Creator or Builder through whom all things have come to have their being and in whom all things subsist (Jn.1:3; 1:10; 1Cor.8:6; Col.1:15-17; Heb.1:2; 1:10); Moses was created by Him as were we all. Jesus Christ is the Heir. Moses is merely a servant of the Heir as we are as well.

(16) "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' (17) Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? (18) And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' (19) Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? (20) Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. (21) He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. (22) And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it."  
Matthew 23:16-22 NKJV

Similar to our Lord's castigation of the scribes and Pharisees, Paul here forces his readers to confront the fact that by returning to a legalistic, warped interpretation of the Law and acting as if Christ never came and died for them, they are saying in effect that the "gold is greater than the temple" and that "the offering is greater than the altar". Beyond all argument, the One who constructed the entire house, the entire plan of God for the ages founded on the bedrock of the cross, is greater than one who merely acted faithfully in the charge given to him to represent these truths on behalf of the One who is the truth, our dear Savior Jesus Christ.

**Glory:** Moses rightly bears his share of glory for carrying out the mission the Lord gave him to lead Israel out of Egypt and to establish the rules for the dispensation ahead, the time between the exodus and the coming of the Messiah, the time of the Law. But God *is* glory. And the glory of Christ's eternal "house", His Church, is far superior to the glory of the Law which merely regulated and guided one part of the Church for one dispensation in the plan of God, a dispensation which, in comparison to the glorious present dispensation of the Spirit given on the basis of Christ's victory, has no glory at all.

(7) Now if the [Law's] ministry of death – engraved with letters written on stone –



imparted *glory* of a type such that the Israelites were not allowed to keep continually beholding Moses' face (because this *glory* of his face was fading), (8) then how could the Spirit's ministry of life not impart greater *glory*? (9) For if the [Law's] ministry of condemnation possessed *glory*, then so much the more should the ministry of justification surpass it in *glory*. (10) In fact, the *glory* of the former seems altogether lacking in *glory* in comparison to the surpassing *glory* of the latter. (11) For if what fades away has *glory*, then so much the more is it true that what abides (i.e. the ministry of the Spirit to believers) is *glorious*.

2nd Corinthians 3:7-11

Similarly, the glory of the Creator who became our Savior is not to be compared with even the most faithful servant of the assembly of believers He came to save.

But we do now see Jesus *crowned with glory and honor* on account of the death He suffered, even Him who became "a little lower than the angels" [for a brief span] so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all.

Hebrews 2:9

The effulgent glory of divine light is an essential trait of our Lord's divinity (Is.40:5; Jn.12:41) and also of His humanity now that this part of His nature too has been glorified (Matt.24:30; 25:31; Mk.8:38; 9:2-8; 13:26; Lk.9:26; 21:27; cf. Jn.7:39b).

(12) So I turned around to see [the source of] the voice that was speaking to me, and when I had turned around, I saw seven golden lampstands. (13) And in the middle of the lampstands was what looked like a man, dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist. (14) And His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow, and His eyes were like a fiery flame, (15) and His feet were like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. (16) And He held seven stars in His right hand, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And His face shone like the sun in its *glory*. (17) And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. Then He put His right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. It is I, the First and the Last, (18) even the Living One. And although I died, behold, I am alive forever and ever! Indeed, I possess the keys to death and Hades."

Revelation 1:12-18

And it is on account of Jesus' glorification that we who belong to Him will enter into that glory "when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe" (2Thes.1:10 NKJV).

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him *in glory*.

Colossians 3:4 NKJV

### **Verse Five through Six**

(5) And while Moses was faithful as a servant in all of his household as a witness to the

[truths] that would be spoken [in the future], (6) Christ [was faithful] as a Son over His household – whose household we are, if indeed we hold fast to the hope [in which we] boast, firmly until the end.

Hebrews 3:5-6

### **A Witness to [the Truths] that Would be Spoken:**

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Romans 15:4 NIV

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

1st Timothy 1:8 NIV

No one disputes the value of the Mosaic Law and of the Old Testament generally. We believers today are very blessed to have them. But as our context verse tells us, not all of God's truth is clearly explained therein, much of the critical doctrine about the Messiah and His Church being veiled and merely foreshadowed until the first advent had been accomplished. The "things" (Greek) destined to be spoken are all of the truths and mysteries at last finally revealed and expressed during the initial generation of the Church Age through the prophets and apostles at first and then given permanent form in the canon of the at-that-time incipient New Testament. For while the Old Testament foreshadowed Jesus Christ and the "so great salvation" He effected for us all (Heb.2:3), the full revelation of all of the mysteries of the plan of God had to wait until the incarnation of the Son, His work on the cross, and His subsequent resurrection, ascension and glorification.

It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for *dispensing* [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*), that is, [to make known] *the mystery hidden* from ages and from generations [past], but *now revealed* to His holy ones (i.e., believers). To all such God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – is in you.

Colossians 1:25-27

(10) Even as they foretold this salvation that was to come to you, the prophets of old diligently investigated and inquired about this [gift] of grace, (11) being eager to discover the precise time the Spirit of Christ within them was signifying as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories [of salvation, among other things,] that would follow [the cross]. (12) For it was revealed to them that in prophesying these things, they were not so much serving themselves as they were you – and these same things have now been proclaimed to you through those who gave you the gospel through the Holy Spirit, sent from heaven – even angels want to look into these things.

1st Peter 1:10-12

As the verses above affirm, prophets of the past understood that they were giving a partial message that was, for divine purposes, cloaked in mystery to a great degree at the time, only foreshadowing the brilliant revelation of truth that would occur once Christ came into the world in the flesh. So the *true* value of the Law and Moses' faithfulness in writing it and instituting it is to be found in the witness he bore to the truth which would only be fully revealed in latter time. But the Jerusalem believers of Paul's day have turned things upside down by preferring what was said in the past – actually a false interpretation of it – to the fully revealed truth that was now available through prophecy, apostleship and the growing canon of the New Testament.

**Faithfulness:** Was Moses faithful? Scripture affirms this, but as a human being he was not perfect. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, had to live an absolutely perfect life in order to be fit to bear the sins of the world. Upon His faithfulness – in becoming a human being though as God He had no necessity to do so (Phil.2:5-8), in living a perfect life in spite of opposition the likes of which the rest of us cannot even imagine, in ministering the perfect ministry, in suffering the trials leading up to and concluding with the crucifixion which no other human being could have endured . . . and in dying in the darkness for the sins of the entire world, poured out upon Him and cleansed with His blood – the entire plan of God and our salvation depends. For the Jerusalem believers to have slipped back into their horrifically wrong previous legalistic attitude so as to be able to, in effect, consider Moses superior to Christ – that was the logic of their return to the rituals of the now defunct Law – was unthinkable. It was, essentially, trampling Christ and His sacrifice for us underfoot.

(28) Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (29) Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? Hebrews 10:28-29 NKJV (cf. Heb.6:6)

### **The Household (Greek: *oikos*):**

(42) The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager (lit., "dispenser", fr. *oikonomos*) whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? (43) It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. (44) Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions."  
Luke 12:42-44 NIV

As explained in the introduction under "Dispensations", the "house" (Greek: *oikos*) refers to the area of responsibility for which God's stewards, such as Moses, are responsible, and thus, specifically, to the householders whom that steward must provide with their spiritual needs, dispensing them in accordance with the parameters that God has ordained for the specific time of their stewardship (Eph.2:19-22; 4:11-16; 1Pet.2:5). Each dispensation in the plan of God for human history has had different divinely specified methods for providing the spiritual "food" needed by the people of God to grow and thrive, "at many times and in many ways" as Paul puts it in the first verse of this epistle. But as the verse from Luke quoted above makes clear, the men

responsible for that provision have always been expected to do their jobs well, that is, to be "faithful and wise stewards/managers".

(1) Let [every] man evaluate us this way, namely, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (2) Now what you are looking for in stewards, moreover, is that one be found who is *faithful* [to the Lord] (i.e., and therefore worthy of one's trust).  
1st Corinthians 4:1-2

We are not surprised in our context to find that Jesus was "faithful to the One who appointed Him".<sup>14</sup> But we are surprised that Paul feels the need to say this at all. Moses' faithfulness in carrying out the charges given to him for the sake of God's people was extraordinary, but as a human being he was not perfect (e.g., Ex.4:10-17; Num.20:8-13), *and* that faithfulness was *to* Jesus Christ who met with him and spoke with him and directed him.<sup>15</sup>

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered *the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ* greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was looking to his reward.  
Hebrews 11:24-26

**If We Hold Fast:** As explained in the introduction, salvation is not conditional upon anything we believers do to earn it – except that it *does* depend upon our continued and continuing faith and faithfulness to Jesus Christ. If we abandon our faith, then we are no longer believers, and only believers are saved.<sup>16</sup>

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."  
John 3:18 NKJV

The Bible is replete with impassioned pleas and warnings about the dangers of being unfaithful and of giving in to a life of sinfulness, most of which are very difficult to explain away by those who subscribe to the false doctrine of "absolute eternal security", failing to understand that sin undermines and erodes faith, and that for those who drift far enough away from the Lord, loss of faith, apostasy, is a very real proposition if such drifting is allowed to proceed to its natural

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<sup>14</sup> The Greek verb *poieo* here, commonly meaning "make" or "do", sometimes has the technical meaning of "appoint" as it does here and also at Acts 2:36.

<sup>15</sup> I.e., all of Moses' contacts with God were with the revealed member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, by way of what in theology is called "Christophany", that is to say, a pre-incarnate appearance of our Lord Jesus. See BB 1: Theology, section II.C.3, "Appearances of Christ in the Old Testament".

<sup>16</sup> See Peter #27: "Three False Doctrines which Threaten Faith".

conclusion.<sup>17</sup>

For the wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Romans 6:23 NIV

I give you this command, Timothy my child, in accordance with the prophecies that were made long ago about you, that you conduct a good campaign, one that is in keeping with [those predictions], holding onto your faith and to a clean conscience (cf. 1Tim.1:5-6) – which [conscience] some have rejected (lit., "pushed away") and [have thus] **suffered the shipwreck of their faith**.

1st Timothy 1:18-19

(1) For this reason, it is all the more necessary for us to pay attention to the [teachings] we have heard, **lest we drift away** [off course]. (2) For if the Word spoken through angels (i.e., the Law) became valid, and every transgression and violation received a just recompense, (3a) how shall we escape if we shall have forsaken such a great salvation [from the Word of Life Himself]?

Hebrews 2:1-3a

(14) Everyone is tempted by his own lust, being dragged away [by it] and enticed [by it]. Then, should lust conceive (i.e., should the person give in to it), it gives birth to sin. (15) And sin, should it be fully carried out to the end (i.e., should the person give in to a life of sin), **produces death** (i.e., spiritual death, the death of faith).

James 1:14-15

We have already cited a number of other passages of the same tenor when discussing this issue in the introduction (i.e., 1Cor.15:1-2; Col.1:22b-23; 2Tim.2:11-13; Heb.3:14). Let it suffice to quote a few more pertinent passage here to remind us all that holding onto our faith is the most important thing that believers do after salvation – because on that our eternal life depends.

(5) "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. (6) **If anyone does not remain in Me**, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."

John 15:5-6

(22) Consider then both the mercy and the severity of God. For He is severe towards those who have fallen away, but merciful towards you – if, that is, you continue in that mercy. But **if you do not**, you too **will be cut off**. (23) And if they do not continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted back in.

Romans 11:22-23

(9) Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be

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<sup>17</sup> See BB 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.6, "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death".

deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor practitioners of homosexuality (10) nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

1st Corinthians 6:9-10

Examine yourselves *to see whether you still stand steady in the faith*. Put your qualifications [as Christians] to the test. Or didn't you know this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is at home in you – if He is not, then you are already disqualified.

2nd Corinthians 13:5

(19) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20) idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; (21) drunkenness, orgies – and whatever is similar to all these things. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this *will not inherit the kingdom of heaven*.

Galatians 5:19-21

(3) But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. (4) Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse jesting – things that have no place [among you]. Thanksgiving [is what ought to be heard coming from you] instead. (5) For of this you can be sure: no immoral, impure, or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – *has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*. (6) Don't let anyone deceive you about this with empty words, for it is because of just such things that God's wrath comes upon those who refuse to obey and believe. (7) So don't enter into partnership with them.

Ephesians 5:3-7

Those who want to get rich fall into temptations, traps, and many senseless and harmful lusts – the kind which swamp men[']s hearts] to their destruction and damnation.

1st Timothy 6:9

(8) Watch out for yourselves, lest you lose what you have worked so hard for, but may instead receive a full reward. (9) No one who goes wandering off, that is, anyone who does not keep to the teachings about Jesus Christ, has [even] a share in God.

2nd John 1:8-9

We who believe in Jesus Christ are assured of our salvation. We share in Jesus' heirship, sonship and rulership, being part of His Body, His Bride, His Church, with a glorious future of resurrection and reward ahead of us . . . *if* we stay faithful to Him in this life, persevering and preserving our faith in Him come what may – the very thing which the Jerusalem believers were risking by returning to the rituals which proclaimed a Messiah not yet come into the world and undermining their own faith in Him thereby.

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection

from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being **kept safe** by God's power **and our faith** in Him to an ultimate deliverance (i.e., salvation) ready to be unveiled at the end of time. (6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance (i.e., salvation) of your lives – **which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.**

1st Peter 1:3-9

### **Verse Seven through Ten (part one)**

(7) Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion during the time of trial in the desert (9) where your fathers tried Me and put Me to the test, although they saw my works [on their behalf] (10a) for forty years.

Hebrews 3:7-10a

**As the Holy Spirit says:** Paul's invoking of the Spirit here serves several purposes, first, to remind his readers that everything he is telling them is scriptural, of God, inspired by the Spirit, both his quotations and the actual epistle itself in which they occur:

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

1st Thessalonians 2:13 NIV

Secondly, since the Spirit's injunction quoted here is directed toward the behavior of the exodus generation as an example – and applied both by the Psalmist to his contemporaries and by Paul here to present day believers in Jerusalem – mention of the Spirit serves also to remind his readers that it is the Spirit to whom they **too** should be listening and not the wilfully misinterpreted letter of the now defunct Law.

Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

Galatians 3:3 NIV

"Finishing in the flesh" was indeed the "glide path" upon which these compromising readers were presently embarked, ignoring the Spirit, quenching the Spirit, grieving the Spirit, by turning

away from the truth (Rom.8:6; 1Cor.3:1; Gal.5:16; Eph.4:30; 1Thes.5:19), just as the exodus generation had done to their complete ruination.

But they (i.e., the exodus generation) rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit.  
Isaiah 63:10a NKJV (cf. Ps.78:17; 78:40)

### **Put Me to the Test:**

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.  
Deuteronomy 6:16 ESV

As mentioned earlier, Paul is using the exodus generation, notorious for their unfaithfulness to the Lord, as an uncomfortable point of comparison for his readers in Jerusalem. The exodus generation had repeatedly tried the Lord's patience and were proverbial for their rebelliousness as well as constituting the ultimate cautionary tale of the consequences for believers who repeatedly turn away from the Lord.

"Not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and *tested me ten times* – not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it."  
Numbers 14:22-23 NIV

This was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself speaking, rebuking and passing sentence on that rebellious generation. Comparing his readers to these paradigms of vice was sure to rankle, but Paul, faithful servant of the Lord that he was, was ever more concerned with the spiritual welfare of his charges than with their feeling about him (cf. 2Cor.7:8-12; 2Tim.1:4).

And Jesus answered [Satan], "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Luke 4:12 ESV

Our Lord Jesus Christ *is* God. His none too subtle rejoinder here to the devil was a reminder to Satan that he had reversed things entirely: God tests us; we do not test God. When we do take it upon ourselves to put God to the test, we are doing as the devil did. And indeed, the devil has been testing God from the beginning, starting with his rebellion against Him and trying to thwart His plan ever since. And how does that work out, in the end? It ends, of course, in the lake of fire.

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.  
Revelation 20:10 NIV

In their own rebellious way, the exodus generation, the very ones who had seen the miracles of God's great judgments against the Egyptians, who had been led safely out of that country having



"plundered" their enemies (Ex.12:36), and who had been miraculously led through the Red Sea while their pursuers were drowned, those very same individuals had soon turned away from faithfully following the Lord and had incurred His wrath as a result: "not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors" (Num.14:23).

But the ones who in our context verse put Him to the test at Meribah (Ps.95:8), were not only that generation (Ex.17:7) but also their *children* many years later (Num.20:8-13; 20:23-24). This at least in part explains Moses' uncontrollable anger on that later occasion – a rage which cost him his own entrance into the land of promise at that time. Bad enough that their parents, a "stiff-necked and rebellious" generation from the beginning (Deut.31:27), had continually put the Lord to the test (Num.14:22). But now their children, who had grown up under the Law, had from their youth seen their parents rebellions from the Covenant and the consequences thereof, were now following in their evil footsteps, testing the Lord's patience instead of waiting patiently on His deliverance.

And now likewise the Jerusalem believers, instead of waiting patiently on the Lord to deliver them from the pressures and persecutions that had come their way through following Christ instead of the now defunct Law were putting God to the test in a nearly identical way by returning to the latter and forsaking the former. They too were trying His patience just like the earlier generation of the exodus and their children had done, failing to realize that *they* were actually the ones under trial and being tested, failing to grasp that the end result of that self-generated evaluation would be too terrible to contemplate, absent a complete reviving of their previous walk with Jesus Christ.

**Harden the Heart:** When we are born again, God gives us a "new start for our heart". All of the previous "scar tissue", so to speak, which has built up in our hearts and minds over our unbelieving years, stubborn allegiance to lies and patterns of rejecting the truth, was loosened up and ejected as we responded to the Holy Spirit's witness after salvation and took in the whole realm of God's truth, until our heart became completely pure and free of all previous kinks, accepting and rejoicing instead in the entirety of the wealth of the truth of the Word of God.

At least that is how it is supposed to work. Sadly, however, even for believers who at salvation are positive to the truth and the leading of the Spirit for the moment, regression into old habits and thought patterns is certainly possible. Indeed, that is inevitable in the absence of consistently filling one's heart with the truth. The human heart abhors a vacuum, and if it is not regularly nurtured on God's truth, it will begin to take in the devil's lies instead – which will eventually lead to undermining and replacing what truth is present therein with said lies (Rom.1:21; Eph.4:18).<sup>18</sup> That is in outline form the process of hardening the heart.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of Satan's system of lies, see SR 4: Satan's World System, section IV, "Satan's Tactical Doctrine"; and Peter #39, section 2, "False Teaching".

<sup>19</sup> See BB 4B: Soteriology, section II.2.d, "Phase One Hardening of the Heart: Darkening of the Truth".

(19) [False teachers] promise [weak believers] freedom [from a disciplined life], though they themselves are truly slaves of corruption. For by what[ever] one is mastered, to this is he enslaved. (20) For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [these weak believers] should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. (21) For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for faith in Christ which was] committed to them – to turn their backs on it now. (22) And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".  
2nd Peter 2:19-22

Unbelievers harden their hearts as well and make a habit of it inasmuch as it is difficult to remain in this world facing the prospect of death and condemnation before a righteous God – which inevitable developments His pattern of creation has made known to all (Rom.1:18-32) – without being able to ignore those very uncomfortable truths (Rom.11:7; 2Cor.3:14).

For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." (18)  
Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.  
Romans 9:17-18 NKJV

The Pharaoh of the exodus was given a special ability to blot out truth and reality to an unprecedented degree so as to be able to persevere in the otherwise clearly insane course of opposing the Lord even to the destruction of his people, his army and himself.<sup>20</sup> But all human beings have the ability to blind themselves to the truth and accept an alternative reality, an alternative truth – which is to say, lies in place of truth. This dubious ability is a function of possessing the image of God whereby we as those with God's image can do as God does and proclaim anything we please truth or untrue. The immeasurable difference is that only God has the truth and so we can only know the actual truth through Him and through His Spirit. Anything a creature proclaims as true which is not in fact true is a lie, so that following this path is to follow directly in the devil's footsteps.

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."  
John 8:44 NKJV

Turning away from truth, any principle of truth, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem, can begin the process of hardening the heart. For rejecting the truth is quenching, grieving, opposing the Holy Spirit who is the One who teaches us the truth – and the truth cannot be known and understood by any human being apart from the Holy Spirit (Is.63:10; Eph.4:30;

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<sup>20</sup> See the series at Ichthys: Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart.

1Thes.5:19).<sup>21</sup>

(9) But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him". (10) And God has revealed [these very things] to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches out everything, even the deep things of God. (11) For who knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way too no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) And we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. (13) And these are the very things we are speaking about, not in words taught by human wisdom, but with words of the Spirit, communicating spiritual information to spiritual people (i.e., believers indwelt by the Spirit). (14) Now the unspiritual man does not receive the [deeper] things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him and he is not able to understand them because they are appreciated [only] through spiritual means. (15) But the spiritual man (i.e., believers indwelt by the Spirit) does appreciate them all, though he himself is not appreciated [in this regard] by anyone. (16) For [as it says] "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who will instruct Him?" But we do have the very thinking (lit., "mind") of Christ (i.e., His truth from the Spirit).

1st Corinthians 2:9-16

Rejecting the cross of Christ by their actions in returning to the practices of unbelievers in following dead tradition was no subtle violation of the truth, and the Jerusalem believers' hearts were of necessity following after their actions. Spiritual regression, apostasy and the sin unto death always lie at the end of the road of hardening one's heart against the truth, so that in the end, the state of believers who succumb to lies is no different from that of unbelievers who never accepted the truth in the first place.<sup>22</sup>

Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later.

1st Timothy 5:24 NKJV

### **Verse Ten (part two) through Eleven**

(10b) So I became exasperated with this generation, and I said [to Myself], 'They always wander in their hearts and have not known My ways'. (11) So I swore in my anger, 'They shall not enter into My rest.' "

Hebrews 3:10b-11

**I Swore in my Anger:** It should come as no surprise to readers of this ministry that God does not actually "get angry". God has ordained all that happens and nothing could happen without

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<sup>21</sup> BB 4B: Soteriology, section II.6.e, "Faith Epistemology".

<sup>22</sup> See BB 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.6, "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death".

that foreordination accomplished in complete foreknowledge: God cannot possibly be surprised.

Anger is a human emotion wherein we react to things that happen to us, often in an irrational way. For while there is such a thing as "righteous indignation" (such as Moses being outraged at the golden calf and breaking the tablets of the Law as a result), much more often anger is very subjective and sinful (such as Moses being outraged at the new generation complaining as their parents had done and striking rather than speaking to the Rock as a result, thus losing his chance to enter the land of promise).

It is not for no reason that in English and in Greek both, the word mad/angry can be used for pathological insanity as well as for momentary rage. That is because when we succumb to the influence of this emotion, we are likely to do all manner of "crazy things" which we would never do, were we in complete control of ourselves and our faculties (e.g., "road rage"). Clearly, God, being perfect, could never engage in this sinful sort of anger. Any anger God expresses would instead have to be of the "righteous indignation" type. But even here, however, this "exasperation" and "anger" are not at all what we human beings are familiar with. Clearly, this attribution of emotion is meant to express God's great displeasure with this sort of conduct, but it is well to consider that God, being God, could not possibly *not* have known ahead of time what the Israelites were going to do: He knows everything; nothing can even happen without having been decreed in eternity past as part of the divine decrees, the perfect and immutable plan of God.

(9) "Remember the former things of old,  
For I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is none like Me,  
(10) Declaring the end from the beginning,  
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,  
Saying, 'My counsel shall stand,  
And I will do all My pleasure.' "  
Isaiah 46:9-10 NKJV

These pronouncements by God about Himself are for our benefit. On the one hand, He wishes only our very best, and, emotional human beings that we are, it is difficult to do what is right in regard to any authority figure (our earthly parents when we were young, for example), unless we have a sense of the consequences of angering them by violating their just rules. On the other hand, we would also have a difficult time understanding how to function as children of God if we did not have this sort of human parallel with which to relate. God is eternal spirit, but we are flesh and blood. In fact, God has provided human parents and the model of the family for us in large part in order to give us precisely this sort of analogy in order to be able to understand His love and concern and care for us: we can grasp what a truly perfect Father must be like in great measure because of the unavoidable comparison we all make to earthly fathers, good or bad, absent or present. In theology, this attribution of human emotions to God for our benefit is called "anthropopathism".

(8) The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. (9) He will

not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; (10) he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. (11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; (12) as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (13) As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.  
Psalm 103:8-13 NIV

Importantly, however, just because our God is exceedingly merciful, kind and forgiving, and just because He does not actually get angry in the same way as we do, that is *no* reason to respect or revere Him less (His mercy is meant to lead us to repentance, not to embolden us to sin and rebellion: Rom.2:4; 2Pet.3:15). Indeed, it is reason to fear Him with a godly, reverent fear *all that much more* (as these believers in Jerusalem were failing to do).

"And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, And to depart from evil is understanding.' "  
Job 28:28 NKJV

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.  
Psalm 19:9 NIV

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life,  
To turn one away from the snares of death.  
Proverbs 14:27 NKJV

(13) Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. (14) For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.  
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 NIV

God knows everything and is absolute righteous in His meting out of justice and discipline where needed. In short, our heavenly Father, perfect Father that He is, knows how to discipline us in just the right way, the way that will hurt enough to get our attention no matter how far and how badly we have strayed without at the same time destroying us or disheartening us beyond measure (cf. Eph.6:4; Col.3:21). And for those who refuse to respond to this loving discipline, who push past the point of no return in abandoning their faith or in embracing what is wrong to the point of completely compromising their witness, there is nothing left but apostasy or the sin unto death – both of which ought to be feared with ultimate fear.

(25) See to it that you do not ignore the One who is speaking [to you]. For if those [of the Exodus generation] did not escape when they ignored the one who was giving them warning from the earth (i.e., Moses), how much more shall we [not escape, if we] turn away from the One [giving us warning] from heaven? (26) His voice shook the earth at that time [at Mount Sinai], but now He has made [us] this promise, saying, "Yet once more shall I shake not only the earth, but also heaven" (Hag.2:6; cf. Hag.2:21). (27) And this "once more" clearly indicates the [coming] transformation of things which may be

shaken as things which have been made [by Him], so that the [coming] things which cannot be shaken may abide forever. (28) Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with *reverence and fear*. (29) *For our God is a consuming fire*.  
Hebrews 12:25-29

**This Generation:** As mentioned above, Meribah, meaning "place of contention", is the name applied to places where the older exodus generation and their children some forty years later put the Lord to the test. "This generation" thus characterizes the inveterate hardness of heart on the part of the elders and also demonstrates that the same tendencies were to be found in their children (Num.21:4-8; 25:1-9; cf. Deut.9:4-29). In other words, "this generation" is referring not to one single age group within a limited time span, but to the character of an entire group of people, a "type" which spans numerous physical generations. Our Lord, in citing this parallel, also used the same phrase to describe His contemporaries and with the same expansive application, which is to say, "this generation" from the time of the first advent onwards represents the hardness of heart among all those of Israel who were intent on rejecting Him (Matt.11:16; 12:41-42; 23:36; Mk.8:12; Lk.7:31; 11:30-31; 11:50-51).

"Truly I tell you, *this generation* will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

Matthew 24:34 NIV (cf. Mk.13:30; Lk.21:32)

(24) For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. (25) But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by *this generation*.

Luke 17:24-25 NIV

And this prophecy has been fulfilled so far, inasmuch as the majority of Israel according to the flesh has up until this very day refused to accept their Messiah.

Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God] (i.e., when the Church is completed at the 2nd Advent).

Romans 11:25

"This generation" in Moses' day means those who were stiff-necked in walking in their own ways (parents and children alike), and it meant the same thing in our Lord's day, referring to those who refused to accept Him so as to be saved – and to their offspring who would continue in their parents' footsteps. It meant the same thing in Paul's day as well, and he employed that parallel in order to alert his readers that they were in danger of slipping back into the same patterns of both of those earlier groups of unbelievers, by turning away from the truth they had once embraced so as to wed themselves anew to the current crop of "this generation" who were either following gnostic myths (analogous to the paganism of the Israelites of Moses' day; cf. Num.25:1-9), or following the traditions of the Pharisees which made them blind to the truth even when He who

is the very truth had witnessed to them personally (cf. 2Cor.3:14).

Jesus said, "I have come into this world for judgment, so that those who don't see might see, and so that those who see might become blind." Some of the Pharisees heard this and said to Him, "We're not blind too, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were [physically] blind, you wouldn't be committing sin [by saying this]. But, as it is, because you say 'We can see!', your sin continues."

John 9:39-41

**Wander in their Hearts:** Wandering can be literal or metaphorical. The Greek verb used here, *planao*, also provides the root behind the English word "planet", i.e., "wanderers", so called because while the stars "move" in simple and relatively easily recognizable patterns, it takes a sophisticated knowledge of celestial mechanics to be able to predict the movements of the former which otherwise appear erratic.

They are wild waves of the sea, belching forth their own shame. They are stars which refuse to follow any fixed course (*planao*) for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved forever.

Jude 1:13

To wander is to move about aimlessly without any discernible pattern, the very opposite of how someone with a definite purpose would act. God has a plan for our lives. Believers should embrace that plan and move forward purposefully in this life towards our collective goal, our blessed hope (Tit.2:13), the return of our Savior and our resurrection so as to be with Him forever, anticipating a good report from Him for doing what He wanted us to do in this life (Matt.25:21-23; Lk.19:17).

(45) "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? (46) It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. (47) Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions."

Matthew 24:25-27 NIV

Fulfilling our Lord's purpose for us in His Church is impossible if we are not dedicated to spiritual growth, progress and production. The less the dedication, the less the effort, the less of a straight line we will be walking on our way towards eternity. But God's accusation against "this generation" is not just that they are failing to move forward spiritually but are instead all over the map, so to speak, wandering without any embracing of His purpose for them whatsoever, choosing their own ways instead of following His Way (Jn.14:6), regressing instead of advancing.

They have chosen their own ways, and they delight in their abominations.

Isaiah 66:3c NIV

"I am *the Way*: the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me."

John 14:6

The precise type of wandering is also specified in our passage: they were (and the guilty parties in Jerusalem are) wandering "in their hearts". In their thinking, in their hearts, they have entirely turned aside from revering or following the Lord and have done so consistently ("always") to the point of exasperating and angering our Lord – human emotions, to be sure, but given here for our benefit to indicate the extremely dangerous nature of the consequences for following this sort of perilous course.

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving (*planao*) and being deceived (*planao*).

2nd Timothy 3:13 NKJV

As arrogant as the behavior of the exodus generation and all later iterations of "this generation" was and is in turning away from the truth, abandoning the Lord to chase after the myth-happiness of this world instead, embracing the lie instead is, as the passage above affirms, not only deceptive but self-deceptive ("causing others to wander from the truth and being led into the same wandering oneself"). Deceivers have first deceived themselves. This sort of hardening of the heart is a necessary step before anyone can engage in conduct which will result in the most horrible of ends, apostasy or the sin unto death, and follows the pattern of the original deceiver, Satan.<sup>23</sup>

(13) "You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. (14) I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' (15) But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit."

Isaiah 14:13-15 NIV

(17) "Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. (18) By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. (19) All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more."

Ezekiel 28:17-19 NIV

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

John 8:44 NKJV

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<sup>23</sup> See BB 4B: Soteriology, section II.2.d, "Phase One Hardening of the Heart: Darkening of the Truth".



**Not Known My Ways:** It is not as if either generation guided by Moses or the contemporary population of Jerusalem and their forbearers had not been told of the ways of the Lord. Far from it.

(18) But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (19) Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." (20) And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." (21) But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."  
Romans 10:18-21 NIV

"Have [not] known" in the Greek text of our context verse (Heb.3:10) is the aorist of the verb *gignosko*, a verb which can mean "to know", but which in the aorist tense not infrequently also means "to decide" as it does here (as also at Acts 1:7). "This generation" did not know the ways of the Lord **not** because Moses and those faithful to the Lord had not assiduously sought to teach them the Law and its meaning in the exodus parallel, and, in the application, to believers in Jerusalem, **not** because the apostles had failed to make clear the entire realm of mystery doctrine revealed after the first advent, after the cross, after the resurrection of our Lord. No. They "did not know" because they had **decided** to be deliberately ignorant, to reject the truth they clearly despised and to substitute the devil's lies in its place. Whenever the truth is rejected, the vacuum this creates in the human heart always draws in some set of lies to take its place.

They knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness.  
Romans 1:21

(17) So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you no longer live as the gentiles do in futility of mind, (18) darkened in thought and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their hearts. (19) Having lost all sensitivity [to God's truth], they have given themselves over to sensuality to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.  
Ephesians 4:17-19

**They Shall not Enter into My Rest:** The rest mentioned here is not the Sabbath day of rest enjoined by the Law of Moses but a specific *place* of rest. In the reference at Psalm 95:11, the passage quoted by Paul in our context, the place of rest meant is the land of Canaan, the promised land which the older generation in their complete lack of faith had refused to enter (rejecting the positive report of Caleb and Joshua in preference for the negative one brought back by the other ten spies) and had been kept from entering ever after as a result.

(34) "And the Lord heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying, (35) 'Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see **that good land**

of which I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he wholly followed the Lord'."

Deuteronomy 1:34-36 NKJV

For every following generation, however, the place of rest is not a physical one but a spiritual one. Just as the exodus generation should have trusted the Lord and entered with confidence into the geographical place of rest He was providing, so all believers ever since need to take pains to enter the Lord's place of spiritual rest, trusting Him to deliver us from whatever troubles may surround us, embracing His peace in that place of rest as we wait patiently for His deliverance.

You will keep him in perfect (lit. "double") peace,  
Whose mind is stayed on You,  
Because he trusts in You.

Isaiah 26:3 NKJV

This the present recipients of Paul's letter were by and large not doing. Instead of trusting the Lord to provide for them in the persecutions they were suffering, entering into His place of rest in spite of external opposition, they were accommodating with the unbelievers and returning to Egypt in their hearts in the very same manner of the exodus generation, becoming thereby part of "this generation" in so doing.

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

Hebrews 4:1 NKJV

## Verse Twelve

Make sure, brothers, that none of you develop an evil heart of unbelief (i.e., lack of faith) in turning away (lit. "apostatizing") from the living God.

Hebrews 3:12

This verse makes the nature of the problem and of the danger facing the believers in Jerusalem crystal clear. Unbelief, lack of faith, failing to trust the Lord for their protection, turning away from learning and believing and applying the truth – turning away from spiritual growth and turning **back** to the false ways of legalism (or Gnosticism) from which they had been rescued through the gospel in years past – is a deadly dangerous game. Faith can be degraded. Faith can be eroded. Faith can be, if a Christian goes down the dark road of spiritual regression long and far enough, entirely destroyed. There are those who once believed who now no longer do.

"Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. **They believe for a while**, but in the time of testing they fall away (lit., "apostatize" – lose faith)."

Luke 8:13 NIV

The recipients of this letter were believers. But by their turning back to the dead letter of the

Law now fulfilled by Jesus Christ and being falsely interpreted by unbelievers, they were in danger of regressing into a state of unbelief themselves. Why would they do as they were doing if they really did believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn.20:31)? The Law merely foreshadowed our Lord, His incarnation, and His great sacrifice for us on the cross. Now that His blessed victory was a reality, going back to the shadows, administered and wrongly interpreted by unbelievers, was, essentially, spiritual treason. Regardless of whatever mental reservations these believers thought to maintain while they participated in rites which proclaimed a Messiah not yet come conducted by unbelievers who had rejected the One true Messiah, was, at the very least, going to be grinding down their consciences.

I give you this command, Timothy my child, in accordance with the prophecies that were made long ago about you, that you conduct a good campaign, one that is in keeping with [those predictions], holding onto your faith and to a clean *conscience* (cf. 1Tim.1:5-6) – which [*conscience*] some have rejected (lit., "pushed away") and [have thus] suffered the shipwreck of their faith.

1st Timothy 1:18-19

(1) The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines. (2) With their own *consciences* seared away and speaking with the hypocrisy of men [who peddle] lies.

1st Timothy 4:1-2

All things are pure for those who are pure [themselves], but for those who have defiled themselves and do not believe, nothing is pure. Indeed, both their mind and their *conscience* has been befouled.

Titus 1:15

Believers cannot continue doing things they know are terribly wrong without suffering the degradation of their consciences and the erosion of their faith. If this terrible process continues without repentance, the heart becomes hardened against any resistance to doing things which a Christian previously would never had thought to do. Moreover, since the behavior in this instance was sinning directly in the face of the One who bought them, sooner or later their faith in Him was sure to evaporate entirely in the heat of such internal pressure. In turning back to dead rituals for the sake of physical safety, sooner or later "an evil heart of unbelief (i.e., lack of faith)" was sure to develop; sooner or later they would find themselves entirely "turning away (lit. "apostatizing") from the living God".

And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".

2nd Peter 2:22

### **Verse Thirteen**

Rather, keep encouraging each other every day as long as we still call it "today" (i.e. we still remain in this world), lest any of you be hardened [in heart] by the deception of sin.

## Hebrews 3:13

**Encouragement:** Mutual encouragement is one of the main functions of the Body of Christ. But mutual encouragement in the Lord is only possible if believers are communicating with one another, in person or otherwise, in a venue which is not compromised by being controlled by unbelievers who have no truck with Christians and their beliefs. Participating in animal sacrifices at the temple – sacrifices which were in effect "crucifying the Son of God afresh" and "exposing Him to open shame" (Heb.6:6) – was certainly *not* the place for believers to encourage one another in a positive way, a situation where even admitting that they were Christians would have brought on the consequences they feared which had pressured them into resuming legalistic Judaistic practices in the first place. Worse to tell, many of these believers were "forsaking assembly" altogether out of fear of being identified as Christians. A few furtive interactions among individuals who had for most part abandoned assembling for the purpose of listening to the Word of God and encouraging one another through the individual application of their several spiritual gifts were insufficient for maintaining any serious level of spiritual growth – and if a Christian is not growing, decline is inevitable, especially if said believer is, as many of the Jerusalem believers were, hypocritically joining in with the false worship of unbelievers instead.

(24) And let us give careful attention to one another[*'s ministries*] as motivation for [our own] love and good works, (25) not abandoning your mutual assembling as some have made it their practice to do [and which makes this impossible], but rather *encouraging each other* [to persevere in this work of the Lord], and doing so to an ever greater degree to the extent that you see the day [of the Lord] drawing [ever] closer.  
Hebrews 10:24-25

## Every Day as Long as We still Call it "Today":

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and *today* and forever.  
Hebrews 13:8 NIV

This life is all about Jesus Christ. He was our Lord and Savior yesterday, He is so today, and He will be for all eternity. The past cannot be changed, and our eternal future is set and secure "as long as we hang onto that original confidence [of our faith], firmly until the end" (Heb.3:14; cf. Heb.3:6; 6:11). We are told to forget the past (Phil.3:13). We are told not to worry about tomorrow (Matt.6:34). While we are in this world, we are only given one day at a time: today.

(9) "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, (10) your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (11) Give us *today* our daily bread. (12) And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (13) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' "  
Matthew 6:9-13 NIV

Every day we pray this prayer (or certainly should), asking the Father to provide for us physically and spiritually for the day ahead. We have no purchase on any other day except "today" since every day is a gift from God, every day an opportunity to learn about our Lord Jesus Christ, to walk with Him through this dark world, and to help others do the same through the ministries He

gives us. Tomorrow He may call us home; yesterday has already been unchangeably recorded in the plan of God completed; but **today** we are here in this world, using the God-given free-will-faith, the image of God which has been graciously bestowed on each of us to live for Jesus Christ . . . or not. And the most foolish thing that any of us could possibly do is to compromise "today" out of guilt or grief about yesterday or out of fear or anticipation about tomorrow – because yesterday cannot be altered and tomorrow may not come. And even if it does, it is very likely to turn out differently than we may anticipate.

(13) Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." (14) Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (15) Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (16) As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. (7) If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

James 4:13-17 NIV

James' point in the passage above is precisely the same as the one Paul is implying in our context: we believers are responsible for letting go of the troubles of yesterday, leaving tomorrow to the Lord, and focusing instead on what we are supposed to be doing **today**. This does not mean that there is no such thing as legitimate planning. That is not what James or Paul is saying. It does mean that as believers we understand that our times are entirely in the Lord's hands (Ps.31:15); that it is His will which will be done, not ours (Lk.22:42); that the plan of God is perfect but our understanding of it is imperfect, especially in regard to forecasting what might or might not happen tomorrow.

(6) When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken." (7) Lord, when you favored me, you made my royal mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.

Psalm 30:6-7 NIV

True humility understands that the Lord is in charge completely and that we believers need to be doing our best to follow Him closely **today**, without excessive regard for what happened yesterday or what might happen tomorrow, for that is the only safe way forward in the Christian life.

(1) A psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. (2) He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. (3) He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 23:1-4 NKJV

This is the correct procedure, namely, to follow our Lord closely like "the sheep of His hand" that we are – as the Psalm quoted in our context in Hebrews proclaims (Ps.95:7). When instead of taking things one day at a time, however, we allow ourselves to be pressured into an attitude of over-anticipation (as in the example given by James above) or unwise trepidation about what

might happen, we are running the serious risk of turning our entire spiritual perspective upside down. David, who wrote the beautiful psalm above mostly followed that one-day-at-a-time policy. And when he did not, it cost him dearly. When Saul almost caught up with him and his men after the Ziphites had betrayed his location, at the "Rock of parting" David narrowly escaped Saul and not for the first time – "only" because the Lord caused Saul to receive a message about a Philistine attack so as to break off his pursuit at the last moment (1Sam.19:23-29). This close call was followed by several others (detailed in 1Sam. chapters 20-26), and even though the Lord had faithfully delivered David from them all, eventually he allowed himself to become spiritually tired and to give way to fears about tomorrow instead of allowing the Lord to shepherd him "today".

David said to himself, "***One of these days*** I'll be swept away by Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape immediately to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me everywhere in Israel, and I'll escape from him."

1st Samuel 27:1 CSB

Although David had Abiathar the priest with him and an ephod, and even though he had sought God's direct advice on matters such as these before (1Sam.23:6-12), he did not do so when he decided on his own, in fear of Saul's continuing pursuits (from all of which the Lord had so far faithfully delivered him), to go with his men to the Philistine city of Gath (even though that had only placed him in danger when he had done it before: 1Sam.21:10-15). The upshot of this poor decision to committing himself into the hands and power of unbelievers was to put himself in a position of having to be continually deceitful thereafter (1Sam.27:9-12), and to come very near to having to engage in combat with his own people (1Sam.28:1-2; 29:1-11). The Lord graciously bailed David out of this dilemma as well, but did allow his town of Ziklag to be sacked, an eventuality which brought David perilously close to being stoned by his own men (1Sam.30:6). Great man of God that he was, David of course recovered spiritually (on this occasion he *did* consult the Lord: 1Sam.30:7-8), and the Lord brought about for him a complete victory including the full recovery of all that had been lost with much more booty captured besides (1Sam.30:16-20). But it is well to consider that neither of these near disasters needed to have happened if only David had trusted the Lord to keep Him safe in the wilderness in the first place. We are always better off leaving matters in His hands, not ruining "today" for the sake of a tomorrow we cannot actually see. In the perfect plan of God, there is no "one of these days". There is only "today". Our job as believers in Christ is to make the most of that day, one day at a time, until we reach that blessed eternal day when we will see our dear Savior face to face forever.

. . . redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:16 NKJV

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.

Colossians 4:5 NKJV

#### **Verse Fourteen**

For we all have a share in Christ, as long as we hang onto that original confidence [of our faith], firmly until the end.

## Hebrews 3:14

**A Share in Christ:** This "share" is the same word used in verse one of our chapter where Paul began the epistle anew with his delayed salutation, addressing his readers as "partakers ["sharers"] of the call [come] from heaven", short-hand for believers whose salvation was written into the plan of God in eternity past. Here, Paul emphasizes that this "sharing" of which all believers have a part is in our special relationship with Jesus Christ. We all belong to Him and He belongs to us all. As Paul had also said in the previous chapter . . .

(10) For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory, [our Lord Jesus Christ]. (11) For both the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified belong to One [Father], and for this reason [Christ] is not ashamed to call them His brothers, (12) as He says: "I will proclaim Your name to My brothers. In the midst of the assembly I shall praise you" (Ps.22:22). (13) and elsewhere, "I [too] shall put My confidence in Him, [the Father]" (Is.8:17). and elsewhere, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me" (Is.8:18). (14) Therefore since "these children" (i.e., believers given to Christ by the Father: v.13) are flesh and blood, [Christ] took on the same [flesh and blood] in a very similar fashion (i.e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might reconcile [to God] those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long by their fear of death.

Hebrews 2:1-15

We believers are all members of the elect and elite assembly of Jesus Christ, His Church, His Bride, His very Body. And as we specially belong to Him so He belongs to us, just as husband and wife are absolutely bound one to the other.

(23) For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. (24) Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (26) to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, (27) and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (28) In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (29) After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church – (30) for we are members of his body. (31) "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." (32) This is a profound mystery – ***but I am talking about Christ and the church.***

Ephesians 5:23-32 NIV

**Firmly until the End:** The special relationship we have with Jesus Christ is an eternal one – *if* we "hang onto that original confidence [of our faith], firmly until the end". Divorces for unfaithfulness do occur. Although our Savior is merciful and longsuffering to an extraordinary

degree (e.g., Ps.103:1-13), no husband can be expected to enjoy being cheated on – which is essentially what many of the Jerusalem congregation were doing by returning to the Law – and there does come a point where reconciliation is no longer possible. In the analogy, that point for believers is the point at which faith dies off entirely. At that point, the believer reverts to becoming an unbeliever and is lost to Jesus Christ.

(1) "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. (2) Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. (3) Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, (4) but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. (5) But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. (6) And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' (7) Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. (8) And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' (9) But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' (10) And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. (11) Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' (12) But he answered and said, '**Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.**' (13) Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour[fn] in which the Son of Man is coming."

Matthew 25:1-13 NKJV

(24) "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. (25) Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' But he will answer, '**I don't know you or where you come from.**' "

Luke 13:24-25 NIV

Rejection by our Lord is a frightening prospect and there is in fact none more terrifying for a believer – at least that is how all believers should see this matter of infidelity to our Lord. Sinning is one thing. "Crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace" (Heb.6:6 NIV) quite another. For who but an unbeliever would engage in such behavior? And if a believer could or would do so, how could he or she fail to understand the perilous nature of their reversion to the world except that their faith had been dulled to the point of nearly being extinguished entirely?

(28) Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (29) Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?  
Hebrews 10:28-29 NKJV

This point, namely, of the need for perseverance of faith, is a frequent one in scripture (see our discussion of "apostasy and the sin unto death" in the introduction above), as well as one made repeatedly by Paul throughout this epistle (e.g., Heb.3:6; 4:14; 6:11; 6:18; 10:23), precisely because failure of perseverance, lapsing back into unbelief on account of the degradation of faith



which visibly rejecting Christ was occasioning, was the danger facing the Jerusalem believers: if they did not change their approach, abandon the now defunct Law and Gnosticism, and come back to spiritual growth instead, only the sin unto death or even apostasy (if they allowed their faith to die out completely) awaited them.

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) *If we persevere*, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.  
2nd Timothy 2:11-13

### Verse Fifteen through Sixteen

(15) For when it says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion during the time of trial in the desert", (16) who was it that provoked Him, even though they had heard [His words]? Was it not all of those who came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership?  
Hebrews 3:15-16

In the cautionary tale to which the quotation of Psalm 95 in our context alludes, the exodus generation did not, in fact, respond to the Lord's many gracious efforts on their behalf. And as Paul stresses here, the fact that they were Israelites, the offspring of Abraham, the special people of God whom He had delivered out of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptians in awe-inspiring and miraculous ways, did not prevent the Lord from rejecting them after long and unrepentant provocation. For though they had put the sign of the cross in blood on their doors and so avoided the angel of death (Ex. 12:13), and though they crossed the parted Red Sea "by faith" (Heb. 11:29), despite their initial belief, and despite all the many wondrous miracles they witnessed and participated in, this faith of theirs did not last. They put God (and Moses) to the test continually in their wanderings through the wilderness with the result that God ultimately destroyed the majority of them (Jude 1:5).

(1) For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, about the fact that our [spiritual] forefathers (i.e., the Exodus generation) were all under the cloud (i.e., protected by the Glory). (2) And all of them were baptized into Moses (i.e., closely identified with him) in both the case of the cloud and of the sea (i.e., received the same protection and deliverance as he did). (3) And all of them ate spiritual food (i.e., divinely provided manna). (4) And all of them drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them and their bones were strewn about in the desert as a result. (6) And in this they have come *to serve as examples for us*, so that we might not lust for wicked things as they lusted for them. (7) So do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play (i.e., feasting followed by indulgence in idolatrous rites)". (8) And let us not commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in a single day 120,000 of them. (9) And let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them tested the Lord and [as a result] were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) All these

things happened to them *as an example* to us, and were written *to warn* us – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. (13) You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:1-13

The exodus generation was "baptized into Moses", i.e., closely identified with him (for that is the essence of what the word means in Greek, i.e., "dip" one thing into another so as to associate them closely), and to some extent they were blessed and benefitted entirely on the basis of being protected by this great man of God, as when he implored the Lord not to destroy them (on more than one occasion: cf. Num.14:11-23).

(7) Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. (8) They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' " (9) "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. (10) Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." (11) But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord", he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? (12) Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. (13) Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' " (14) Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. Exodus 30:7-14 NIV

But despite this wonderful blessing by association with Moses, the exodus generation never appreciated what Moses had done on their behalf and still less what the Lord had done for them – else they would have repented and turned to Him instead of "returning to Egypt in their hearts" (Acts 7:39; cf. Num.14:3-4; Amos 5:25-27). Physical genealogy, being the offspring of Abraham, does offer advantages (Rom.3:1-2; Rom.11:28); but while man may look at such outward signs, God always looks at the heart (1Sam.16:7). Just as being closely associated with Moses did not provide deliverance for the exodus generation in the absence of any change of heart on their part (cf. Ezek.14:14-18; 1Cor.7:14), neither would their heritage save the believers of Jerusalem if they persisted in their reckless course.

"And do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."

Matthew 3:9 NKJV

### **Verses Seventeen through Nineteen**

(17) And with whom was He enraged for forty years? Was it not the very people who had sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? (18) And to whom did He swear that they would not enter into His [promised place of] rest, but to those who had refused to trust Him? (19) Now we see that they were unable to enter into this [place of rest] because of their unbelief (i.e., their lack of faith).  
Hebrew 3:17-19

**The Very People:** Paul drives home his main point here by forcing his readers to accept, point by painful point, that those of them who were returning to the Law (or engaging with Gnosticism) were following the same pattern of the exodus generation. Clearly, God was "enraged" at "this generation" who tested Him and rebelled against Him and disobeyed Him in major ways "ten times" (Num.14:22). Clearly, the recompense for this rebellious generation was to be prevented from entering into the land of promise and to die in the desert instead – and how justly so since they had "refused to trust Him"! Trusting Him *is* resting in Him. Failing to trust Him is attributing to Him impotence or injustice, or taking Him into no account whatsoever in a disrespectful lack of reverence and awe. Believers believe. Unbelievers do not. Believers trust the Lord for salvation, putting their faith in Christ (and in the many promises of the Christ to come for those under the Law previously), then continue in this world as long as the Lord ordains by living lives of faith, growing in their faith as they embrace and accept the Word of truth by that same faith. That is how our eternal salvation, not complete until we see the Lord, is maintained.

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being ***kept safe*** by God's power ***and by our faith in Him*** to an ***ultimate deliverance*** [lit., "salvation"] ready to be unveiled ***at the end of time***. (6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance ["salvation"], your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials (7) ***to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine***. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, ***when proven genuine*** in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] ***deliverance*** [lit., "salvation"] of your lives – ***which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours***.

1st Peter 1:3-9

As Peter affirms above, we are left in this life after salvation in order for our faith to grow, to be tested, to be refined, to be proven genuine in the crucible of life. We have the dubious "opportunity" after salvation to turn back, to return to Egypt in our hearts, so to speak, to demonstrate that like the seed sown on the rocky ground which withers in the heat of the day, we were really only fair-weather believers and not willing to trust the Lord when times got tough, to

do, that is, what the exodus generation did instead of what the Lord desires.

(13) These [famous believers listed in chapter eleven] all died [while still walking] *in faith*, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and salute them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. (14) For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the place they now occupy]. (15) Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, *they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back*. (16) But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them (i.e., the New Jerusalem).  
Hebrews 11:13-16

Many believers in Jerusalem were on the verge of making their Lord "ashamed of them" (daring Him to level upon them the sin unto death), and in some cases eternally so (rejecting Him completely in apostasy), by turning back to the Law which proclaimed Him not yet come in spite of His ultimate sacrifice for them which took place in that very city not so many years before.

(17) "When [the prodigal son] came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! (18) I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' (20) So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (21) "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' (22) "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (23) Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. (24) For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."  
Luke 15:17-24 NIV

Just like the prodigal son, some believers who take the wrong road in this life *do* repent of their folly and come back to the Lord before it is too late. It is with this objective at heart, namely, of turning around all such prodigal sons and daughters in Jerusalem, that Paul makes his impassioned plea for them to likewise turn back from perdition . . . while there was still the time and opportunity to do so.

**Because of their Unbelief:** Just as the exodus generation was unable to enter the land of promise, the "place of rest" in our context, "because of their unbelief", that is, because of their lack of faith and trust in the Lord, giving way to their fear when the ten spies told them of the dangerous people living in Canaan (and thereafter consistently doubted and tested the Lord throughout their lives), so the contemporary believers in Jerusalem were turning back to the Law in great part out of fear of ostracism from the unbelieving majority. Any time we do things out of fear, out of doubt, out of guilt, out of concern for this world and our lives in this world, how

are we trusting God? The very fact that we are fearful and upset is an indication that we are not resting in Him. He is our mighty fortress (Ps.46:1). He is our ark of deliverance (2Pet.3:20-21). He is our strength and our shield (Ps.28:7). But if instead of looking to the Lord for help and waiting on Him to deliver us, we instead compromise the truth in order to placate the world, then we are doing precisely the sort of things that the exodus generation did, the very same thing that the backsliding Jerusalem believers were doing.

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. ***Do not be unbelieving, but believing.***"  
John 20:27 NKJV

None of us is perfect, and no believer develops a Daniel-like faith, a Paul-like faith, an Elijah-like faith overnight. So the pressures and the troubles we face in this life are for our benefit, refining our faith, demonstrating to us where the cracks and fault lines are and giving us the opportunity to heal and anneal them, strengthening that faith and making it more resilient and thus able to bear greater and greater testing and stress. Everyone of us has failed such tests in part or in whole, but those who persevere and learn from their mistakes grow in their faith and eventually come to the place of being able to stand strong for the Lord in the spiritual battle-line of the invisible conflict in which we serve Him, come what may.

(10) So come what may, draw strength from the Lord and be strengthened through His powerful might. (11) Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the tricks of the devil. (12) For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against [angelic] princes, against [angelic] authorities, against the cosmic powers of this [present] darkness, against evil spirits in the heavenly realms. (13) Keeping that in mind, put on God's complete set of armor so that you may be able to resist attack on the day evil surrounds you, and stand your ground – once you have done all that it is your responsibility to do (i.e., prior spiritual growth and present spiritual application). (14) So stand your ground, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, (15) and having dressed your feet in preparation for [sharing] the gospel of peace (i.e., reconciliation with God as the result of faith in Christ). (16) And at all times take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery missiles of the evil one. (17) And [in this spiritual warfare] put on the helmet of salvation and gird on the sword of the Spirit – which is the Word of truth.  
Ephesians 6:10-17

This is the sort of resilient, battle-hardened faith which the Jerusalem believers would need very shortly when the Lord would execute an annihilating judgment upon Judea a few years hence, removing the temple and its now obsolete rites along with the unbelievers who were blasphemously continuing them even after the Messiah had come and had fulfilled their symbolism. This is also the sort of resilient, battle-hardened faith which will be necessary to endure the Tribulation and not succumb to the extraordinary pressures of that terrible time. But to return to Egypt in their hearts (as most of the exodus generation did), to compromise with unbelievers and return to the defunct rites of the Law in rejection of Christ (as some of Paul's contemporaries were doing), or to take the mark of the beast in order to avoid persecution (as one third of the present day church is prophesied to do during the Great Tribulation), is to deny the

Lord in an irretrievable and ultimate way.

(4) "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. (5) But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."  
Luke 12:4-5 NIV

As our Lord in this above passage avers, our lives are not about our present bodies. Our lives are not about our necessary possessions or provisions (Matt.6:25-34; Lk.12:15). God takes care of us – if we are willing to trust Him to do so. As long as we revere Him and fear Him with a godly reverent fear, then we have nothing whatsoever to fear from this world.

(5) Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me – (6) those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? (7) No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them – (8) the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough – (9) so that they should live on forever and not see decay. (10) For all can see that the wise die, that the foolish and the senseless also perish, leaving their wealth to others. (11) Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves. (12) People, despite their wealth, do not endure; they are like the beasts that perish. (13) This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. (14) They are like sheep and are destined to die; death will be their shepherd (but the upright will prevail over them in the morning). Their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. (15) ***But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself.***  
Psalm 49:5-15 NIV

As believers who are committed to faithfully following Jesus Christ, our kingdom is not of this world (Jn.18:36); our portion is not in this life (Ps.17:14); these bodies are not our eternal houses, rather, we are looking forward to a resurrected body like unto our Lord's (2Cor.5:1-10); this world is not our home forever, rather, we are looking forward to a city whose architect and builder is God (Heb.11:10); we are looking forward to a blessed eternity in New Jerusalem, as members of the perfect Bride of Christ, face to face with the dear Savior who bought us (Rev.21:9-10).

(14) "I have given them Your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (15) I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. (16) For they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (17) So make them holy (i.e., "sanctified") by means of Your truth – Your word is truth. (18) And just as you sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (19) I am consecrating Myself for their sake, so that they too may be made holy (i.e., "be sanctified") through truth."  
John 17:14-19

But if we are so foolish as to allow the pressures and the fears and the discomforts of this temporary world to induce us to go back to those foul things we had previously vomited out, then

the end will be worse than the beginning (2Pet.2:20-22). It is to save those he loved from just such an unimaginable fate that Paul wrote this powerful and heartfelt letter.

(32) Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. (33) For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. (34) You suffered from my chains, and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you possessed a more valuable estate, and a more lasting one. (35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how short [the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one by faith live because of his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, ***but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.***

Hebrews 10:32-39