

Having concluded the comprehensive yet meticulous introduction of the new order replacing the Law, the author gives (verse 19) some practical instructions and exhortations based upon the blessings just revealed. Then he leads their hearts to remember the earlier days of their profession of Christ. Days of afflictions and reproaches at the hands of their countrymen for their faith in the newfound Messiah, Jesus Christ. A costly but rewarding faith. And when, if not suffering directly for their faith, they suffered for their association (companionship) with those around them who were being so misused for their faith. And the author refers to his own bonds.

The loss of earthly belongings and sustenance was countered by the very real knowledge there is a better and enduring substance in heaven. Still is. What a transformation has occurred. These Hebrew believers, whose whole religious and cultural outlook once was earthly, are now more interested in their heavenly inheritance than their earthly resources. Yet there was a need for reassurance, for this new attitude would continue to be severely tested. Cast not away your confidence! It has great recompense of reward! The Christians walk is one characterized by postponed gratification just as Christ's is. He is still awaiting His Bride. We need endurance for the days ahead as well. Whether a loss is due to persecution, war, "misfortune," or bad economic times our affections and hope are above, "where Christ sits on the right hand of God," Colossians 3:1. There were some in bonds for their faith. Prisoners whom the Hebrews compassionately, freely fellowshiped with despite the personal risk involved. Though impoverished themselves they deprived themselves of goods in order to minister to the needs of others. These encouraging words are particularly poignant if the author of Hebrews is indeed the apostle Paul. Before he was saved he was Saul the persecutor who looted and imprisoned the saints, Acts 7:58; 9:1,13,21; 22:4; 26:10-11; 1Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6; 1Timothy 1:13. But He had witnessed firsthand their Christlike response, Matthew 25: 31- 46, James 1:27. He later responded to their need, see 1Corinthians 16, 2Corinthians 8 & 9, Romans 1, 15 and 16. The circle of fellowship among the believers still transcends national boundaries and racial and cultural distinctions among the nations. And it transcends the strong distinctions between Gentiles and Jews that still exists today, Colossians 3:11; Galatians 3:28, 1Corinthians 12:13. Scripture expects a highly practical unity between assemblies.

Yet there were signs of their endurance flagging as the hardship persisted. They needed bucking up, reminders of the heavenly hope that was theirs and the joy that lay before them. (He addresses this further in chapter 12.) The promise remains clear and sure.

For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

He will come, first for us, then with us. Sometimes we

hear one say we plan to do thus and so if the Lord tarry. But He will not tarry. Tarrying implies He is less than enthusiastic about coming. Better translations state "will not delay." Peter tells us the reason that He has not come yet after almost 2000 years is because of God's longsuffering, not any reluctance or loss of interest. We may lose interest and enthusiasm. He hasn't. He will come, first for us then with us to judge the world that rejected Him and is still persecuting His own.

The persecution served another function. It separated the true believers from the false. Some among them were drawing back. Forsaking the path of suffering that accompanied a declaration of faith. This epistle has a number of such remarks directed at separating the just from the unjust in the mixed multitude that apparently comprised the Christian congregations in Judea for years after Pentecost. The Lord had given the twelve disciples the authority to discern and to bind and loose sins. Incidents of the exercise of this are recorded in Acts and in some epistles. He also directed this authority and responsibility to the various local assemblies, Matthew 18:15-21. While apostles have passed off the scene the assemblies are still blessed with this sanctifying provision. Those that draw back to perdition are excluded from the congregation of those who believe to the saving of the soul. Usually those that draw back will exclude themselves, a sorrowful but cleansing event for those the Spirit has gathered unto the Lord's name. If they remain inside unexposed they will quench the work of the Spirit in the midst and bring harm to the saints and dishonor to Christ's name.

The just shall live by faith. True believers have been justified by faith. Trusting in the blood of Christ shed for our sins we are considered just in God's sight. We live.

Romans 1:17 for righteousness of God is revealed therein, on the principle of faith, to faith: according as it is written, But the just shall live by faith. (DBY)

5:1 Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ; (DBY)

We are justified, righteous, guiltless by the blood of Christ. Our lives after becoming justified are to be lived by faith, the same faith by which we were saved. The quote here in Hebrews is a more complete quote from the original in the Old Testament, Habakkuk, though it is in reverse order.

Habakkuk 2:2 And Jehovah answered me and said, Write the vision, and engrave it upon tablets, that he may run that readeth it. 3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but it hasteth to the end, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; for it will surely come, it will not delay. 4 Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him: but the just shall live by his faith. (DBY)

How then does one live by faith? We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, those who have gone before us on the path of faith. They are examples for us. Now we run the race, as they did, Hebrews 11 and 12.

By Ron Canner, April 8, 2009

