The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 13

We are now in the last chapter of Hebrews and in truth, this is a summation of what has been written, and also, it is a practical application for those who read this or hear this, to be put into practice, all these things the writer has discussed.

We should, by now, have a pretty good picture of the condition of the Jewish Christian fellowship that is existing and the trials and tribulations that these folks are facing. We should also have a pretty good idea of the reasons the writer sees fit to excoriate these people in the light of their longing to return to a life they knew before they came to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Things were getting too hard and dangerous, and frankly when you know that you are going to face a physically painful situation ahead, the inclination is to run, isn’t it? To seek a personal security? flee to mommy and hide in the pleats of her skirt?

The writer then begins a study on why they came to Jesus to begin with, His superiority over the angels, over all the great patriarchs, and that He, Jesus, (understanding that the High Priest was a known job and was in their minds, the intermediary between the people and God,) was the ultimate High Priest that gave them full access to the Father in heaven. He then explains, that because of the sacrifice of Christ, the animal sacrifices are no longer acceptable and that the death burial and resurrection of Jesus was the final sacrifice and once offered, it became enough and at the same time through His resurrection, they attain Eternal life with God the Father.

The writer then goes on to explain the concept of faith and uses the, known to the people, stories of old, how their faith held them strong despite the great odds against them, and that these people should employ that same faith in their lives. With this faith, they should then move forward in their faith, knowing God is with them and not lag back or fall away altogether. They and we should be ever atune to God’s prodding us on our journey, regardless of the dangers, because if we all have this faith, we all should know in our hearts that God stands ever with us, to protect us from the daily perils we will face.

A] Hebrews 13: 1 through 6; (read)

1] “*Let brotherly love continue.”*

Simple enough statement, but loaded with doctrine. (‘He philadelphia meneto’) is the Greek rendering and this is saying, let’s lift each other up in Christian love, being that support each one needs. Times are tough and we all need that pat on the back, a hand to hold, an arm around the shoulders, and a comforting word. Anything that lets the others know we are all in this together. Note, this is ‘brotherly love’, for the brethren, that includes the Gentile believers. It DOES NOT include the non-believers, however, what this ‘phileo’ love does, is show the non-believers the true fellowship of the believers and is a real witness of how God’s love can change their lives.

2] “*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”*

Keeping in context, we have that brotherly love, and because the Jews were an exclusionary people, and that even the new Christian Jews seemed to be of the same exclusionary attitude, that the writer then has to caution them, that there are gentile Christians and there are gentile Christian ministers and evangelists, as well as Jewish Christian ministers and evangelists, with traveling entourages and they should be accepting and hospitable with them. Remember the stories of Abram and Lot, at times, welcomed travelers, and that turned out, in both cases, that the travelers were actually angels. You just never know.

3] “*Remember the prisoners as if chained with them –those who are mistreated –since you yourselves are in the body also.”*

Because the writer is talking about the whole body of believers, including the gentile Christian sojourners and this then, would seem to indicate those bound in chains would be the Christian prisoners, who are bound for the cause of Christ and we all ought to consider being part of their misery. There does come the time that we turn our heads away from the unpleasant so that we are not reminded of the trials we ourselves might face. Seeing those prisoners for Christ and knowing what their fate may be, becomes too uncomfortable for us to face. But we are to pray for them and give as we are able, even to encouragement, because we could be one of them some day.

4] “*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled, but the fornicators and adulterers, God will judge.”*

The writer here seems to switch boats in mid-stream, and begins a different conversation regarding our personal lives. Marriage was and is God’s gift to us as we populate the world, and as His gift, should be held in the highest esteem. But throughout history both men and women have taken advantage of the spurious side of relationships, and have defiled the marriage bed and the male, female relationships.

It is with those who commit adultery or participate in illicit sexual encounters, going against God’s Laws by doing so, they will be judged. What is interesting is, how we, today, try to justify these actions, all the while knowing that God condemned them thousands of years ago.

5] “*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things that you have, for He, Himself, has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you’.”*

There are a variety of translations for this one, but the Greek rendering where some say conversation or conduct actually reads manner. Conduct might be the closer, to the ‘manner of life’ but it is how you comport yourself with family or neighbors and even more important how you behave and conduct your business in public. If I do not desire or covet what another has even if I am in great want, people notice and respect. And the writer adds a quote from Deuteronomy 31:6.

6] “*So we may boldly say, ‘The Lord is my helper I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”*

What we are told is, as we live a life of honor, grace, all those things that we have been admonished to do; for one, what a witness that is, and two, people can see what God means to us. That we live in faith, where we know God supplies all our needs and protects us in time of need. We can face our dangers with a gentle courage assured of God’s promise for us. Thus, whatever our enemies may have planned for us, we can face it because really, they can’t do anything we can’t handle through God’s grace, can they?

B] Hebrews 13: 7 through 17; (read)

1] “*Remembering those who rule over you, who have spoken the Word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”*

The word for ‘rule’ actually renders out, ‘your leaders’ And as most scholars determine, the writer was referring to past Christian leaders who brought the Gospel to them, or ministered to them and either moved on or were martyred, possibly referring to James the brother of John, or James the lesser, Bishop in Jerusalem who were martyred before this letter was written. All of these brothers and leaders were well respected and lived their lives as exemplary illustrations of Godly living and as that witness to others.

2] “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.”*

All of the scholars seem to like to take this time to explain the name and title of Jesus. Jesus is His name which is taken from the Greek ‘Iesous’ which was rendered from the Hebrew ‘Yeshua’ which means ‘God Saves. Christ taken from the Greek ‘Christos’ which was rendered from the Hebrew ‘Mashiarch’ (which we get the English word ‘Messiah’) and this means ‘Anointed one’. (Frankly I have been all over the place with this one, over the years, but this is the closest I can get)

All the writer is doing here is introducing the next set of verses, by making the statement that Jesus is unchangeable as is God’s Word.

3] “*Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by Grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.”*

This had little to do with foods, ie: foods of idols, but with strange doctrine or doctrine that had nothing to do with Grace. If we remember when we studied 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Paul spoke of whether or not it was ok to eat meats sacrificed to idols. But here the reference was in part to the various additions made to the Mosaic Law, and laws and doctrines of heathen religions. WE have the same problem today as many ‘religions’ that profess Christ actually have a doctrine that is foreign to Christianity but sounds good and righteous. Too many people are taken in by this false doctrine and will face their doom eventually.

5] “*We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.”*

This goes back to the understanding that the meat and grain sacrifices brought to the altar in the temple are also food for the Levites, or in this case the writer refers to the priesthood, but because the sacrifice of Jesus was not food for the priests but His Word IS food for the believer. The priests can never partake of this sacrifice unless he becomes, himself a true believer.

6] “*For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high Priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”*

We’ll clear this up. General offerings brought to the Tabernacle and later the Temple, are accepted and burned and used as food for the whole of the Levitical people including priests, because they had no land of their own with which to grow food or raise animals for food. This was inclusive of the three harvest festivals that the men journeyed to Jerusalem to bring their harvests.

Animal sacrifices brought as sin offerings will be completely consumed by fire down to ash. Now in the Tabernacle as in the temple, the killing and burning took place actually in the outer court, and only the blood shed through these sacrifices was taken into the inner court. On the day of atonement, the sin sacrifice was, during the days of the Tabernacle, done outside the camp and in the Temple era, was done outside the city walls. The writer equates this as Jesus being sacrificed outside the walls of Jerusalem. The animal sanctification was for the Jews and Jesus sanctification was for the Christian.

7] “*Therefore, let us go forth to Him outside the camp bearing His reproach, for here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”*

One thing to note, Jesus was taken outside the city walls, was crucified, and through all of this, was rejected by the Jews. Therefore, we go outside the city walls also, because we no longer belong to this city, but we await the new and greater Jerusalem. The writer is saying, the people, believers in Jesus, no longer are a part of the Jewish people, we go and become a part of Who He is, taking on the people’s rejection of Jesus, and we are now in the family of God.

8] “*Therefore by Him, let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”*

Friends, this is what we should be doing, forever praising God with our lips, and what goes past the lips comes from the heart. That IS our sacrifice of praise.

9] “*But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”*

Even as we now praise God and rejoice always in His largess to us, yet we must be about serving as Jesus did, sharing what we have with those who do not have as Jesus Himself taught and did. Giving of ourselves when there is a need. How many, and let’s be real now, would go to a homeless person, or a person with Alzheimer's, and be able to take them by the land and lead them to where they need to be? So often people, in general, shrink away from those who are different, and opine to themselves, “somebody ought to do something with them.”

10] *“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy, and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”*

The key words here, are, ‘They watch out for your souls’ This then takes the passage to mean, the religious leaders, the ministers, of your congregation. Christian leadership, anyone who places themselves in an administrative role, or pastor role, or teacher role has taken on, for themselves, extra responsibility, and they are judged by God on that responsibility, and how they handle it. But our responsibility is to be obedient to them and support them in their capacity. When there is peace in the Church, there is joy and there is learning.

C] Hebrews 13: 18 and 19; (read)

1] “*Pray for us; for we are confident that we have good conscience in all things, desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.”*

This must have a back story to the passage, because the writer seems a bit defensive, which tells me that he has his detractors in Rome, where this may be coming from, and he may be in prison, but from the way it is written, he may be a Jewish evangelist in Rome working with Paul, but not Paul himself, free and able to get around as he could be serving Paul in whatever capacity that is needed. He needs prayer because, as we have studied earlier in the Book of Romans, there was conflict between the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians there also. However, the writer is looking to get back to wherever these people are.

D] Hebrews 13: 20 through 25; (read)

1] “*Now may the God of Peace who brought our Lord Jesus from the dead. That great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work, to do His will working in you what is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

The ‘benediction’ which means here is a ‘good word’. That good word is that God, who is the God of peace, and who raised Jesus from the dead. And this next refers to Psalm 23, the great Shepherd, and the writer then calls on the blood of the covenant, the blood that Jesus shed for this covenant, all of this is put on all who hear, that the listener is strengthened in this promise. We are made to do good works, and to do all that is pleasing to God in whatever capacity he places us. In other words, God has the confidence that we who hear the word are eager to do what it says, and this is the encouragement to do so.

2] “*And I appeal to you brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you, if he comes shortly.”*

This kind of tells me that if this were Paul, Timothy would be going with him, but the way this reads this fellow more or less goes along with Timothy, and Paul would have been in jail, anyway. Now he speaks of having the recipients accept this exhortation in the manner it was given. A little humor has it, that the writer says ‘in few words.’ Cute!

3] “*Greet all those who rule over you and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all. Amen.*

Well now it is certain, this letter and the writer was living in Rome when he wrote it, and there was a large Gentile Christian Church there as well as a large Jewish Christian Church there. We know this because the Apostle Paul wrote them a letter from Corinth years earlier. This postlude has greetings all around to local leaders and to other believers in neighboring areas.