

Hebrews

Chapters 10 - 11

If I had to choose a title for our study of this part of the Book of Hebrews today, I would call it *The Contrast* or *The Great Disparity*. There is such a difference between the Kingdom of God and that of this world, yet both are in the same place.

This is perhaps where much of our greatest struggles lie. We often fail to consider this *difference*, and how it causes a great pull, a constant drag of the powers of this world; so we try to find the most comfortable spot and we settle somewhere in between. But that is not enough, says **Hebrews**; there are too many things at stake and why miss out on great blessings?

As we are approaching the end of the Book of Hebrews, the author does not spare his words to lay out the contrast. On the one hand, he uses the most encouraging expressions to describe the Kingdom of God, but he uses some very strong eschatological terms and illustrations for the other, so that we see this great gap. For instance, in the section beginning in **Hebrews 10:19**, where he begins to ask us what we are going to do with all that we have learnt so far, we read of words like *confidence, a new and living way*; we read of a *sincere heart in full assurance of faith*, one that is *sprinkled clean*; we read of *pure water* and of *hope* and *faith*. Then, beginning in **Verse 27**, it radically changes; there we read of words like *a terrifying expectation of judgment, of the fury of fire*. Here, the writer turns to those he accuses of *trampling underfoot the Son of God*, of those who *insult the Spirit of Grace*. But who are these people?

Then we see God's response to these things, with words like *Vengeance is Mine, I will repay*. Then we have these powerful words in **Verse 31**: *It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God*.

We all know that there is a difference, but it is really two worlds going in diametrically opposing directions.

Right after laying the contrast, the writer tenderly turns to his flock and tells them how to successfully live in this world. Beginning in **chapter 11**, he expounds the words of the prophet Habakkuk, through whom God said that the believer will *live by faith*. There, we find the key to successful living in such an odd world. Example after example is given of men and women who did live by faith and highly succeeded. This is where I would like to put the emphasis, and focus on the most positive part. In fact, we should give this section another more appropriate title, one like *How to live the richest life ever* or *How to be the happiest person on earth*. Ultimately this is what the Book of Hebrews is about.

It follows the same direction as that of the books of the prophets who, after speaking of judgments, never ever fail to show us the bright side of things. So as we are beginning to cover the end of the book, the best is yet to come. In the end, the Bible is a very positive book, with a beautiful ending, for those of course who are with God.

Again, our section of the Book Hebrews today, cannot leave anyone indifferent; it begs for a decision between the two kingdoms. It is my prayer that many will be touched by its words and will begin to change in the direction of God and be richly blessed.

Let us begin with the tougher section, where we will find some of the strongest words in this book.
Hebrews 10:26-31

*For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,
but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.
Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.
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?
For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD
will judge His people."
It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

This is the fourth of the five warnings in **Hebrews**, and the most severe. This section begins with the words "for if we sin willfully...there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins".

What is willful sin?

It is a sin that is done deliberately, willingly, without fear of God. For this type of sin, the Mosaic Law was unforgiving. In the Mosaic Law, there was no sacrifice for willful sin and that is the point of the argument.

The writer was speaking of those who were on their way back to the old ways, to the Temple and to the Law and the sacrifices. They had failed to realize the great severity of the Law. Out of the dozens and dozens of sacrifices, none of them were for a sin which one committed willfully.

For grave offenses, the Mosaic Law prescribed the death penalty. Death penalty for adultery (**Deuteronomy 22: 21-24**); for idolatry (**Deuteronomy 17: 2-5**); for violation of the Sabbath (**Numbers 15: 32-36**); for false prophets (**Deuteronomy 13:10**); and for blasphemy (**Leviticus 24: 15-16, 23**). There was no jail system in the Mosaic Law.

You may ask: how did they get forgiven, since all humans are guilty of such sins?

They were never forgiven and that is the very point here; they could not ever be forgiven, and this is where Yeshua rises for them. The offender was purposely trapped so that he was forced to look on God, who sent His Son for the very purpose of saving him from death. This is the very purpose of the Law. The Law, as we have seen before, was designed to force the individual to look unto our Messiah. This is what **Romans 3:20** also teaches.

by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin

But many did not understand this and were going back to the Temple. One example is the rich man who approached Jesus and asked him: "what must I do to inherit Eternal Life?" Jesus went right to the law and enumerated the last part of the Ten Commandments. The rich man's mistake is that he thought, and said, that he fulfilled them all; but he never could have done them. This is the very purpose of the Law. It was to show us that it cannot save anyone, and this is why Yeshua came.

At the end, when the rich man left, the text in **Luke 18** says that both Jesus and the rich man were *exceedingly sorrowful*. The rich man was sad because he was very rich and did not want to part with the things of this world, and Jesus felt sorrow for He saw a man going to perdition, like these people in **Hebrews 10**.

What about today?

We have no Temple to go back to, but many are often going back to the world that is still out there. Today, the words of the Book of Hebrews do not lose any of their severity, because the reality is the same. If the believer leaves the Messiah for anything else, he will encounter these severe Words of God.

But who are these people who triggered such strong words; are they believers or non-believers?

I believe these words were addressed to both. The primary group must be the non-believers, for the words are very harsh and it is this group who must have begun the exodus back to the Temple. These are what many call apostates. An apostate is one who comes close to God, understands salvation, knows and even experiences the Spirit, but refuses to accept the offer of God and departs.

These are not regular unbelievers, they came inside the flock and we are told in our text that they *insulted the Spirit*, something which is like the blasphemy against the Spirit. They even *trampled the Son of God underfoot*, the word *trampled underfoot* is one word and it means exactly that - to step on something or someone we despise. At times it is preferable to stay out the church; because such a place could bless or condemn.

Apostasy is really the sin of the demons; these were up there and saw the works of God, more than any individual, but they rebelled against their own Creator. This is perhaps the main reason why they cannot be saved, because there is no salvation after apostasy, for it is then *impossible to renew them again to repentance*, as we have learnt in **Hebrews 6**.

But why is the writer putting so much emphasis on the apostates here?

After all the epistles were not written for unbelievers; they were written for the believers, to strengthen them, so why addressed these people here?

The problem may have been that the difference between an apostate and a backsliding believer was no longer obvious. If the writer is using such strong language, it was perhaps an attempt to call back the true believers, whom he saw departing and following the wrong people, because he could not really distinguish anymore who was who in the mass of people leaving.

This passage had a great influence in the history of the church. They could not reason out how a believer in God can just slip so far away and sin willfully. So at this time, many gave a limit to sin. In the Shepherd of Hermas, a second century book that is even considered Scriptures by some early church fathers, we read: "But anyone who sinned once after baptism could, after due repentance, receive forgiveness once more, and be assured of ultimate salvation if he did not fall again." (Vision 3.5.1ff.; Mandate 4.3.1ff.; Similitude 5.5.3; 5.6.3 FF Bruce)

For them a believer could not commit the willful sin more than once after Baptism, however, these missed the point as well. What happens today, when a believer commits such a sin?

Grace says in **1John 2:1**

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Now, this verse is not a license to sin. However *if anyone sins*, after struggling and struggling against sin, and after praying and living a life in the Word, then this verse is for them. There is a long history of struggle and sanctification behind a godly person who sins and is forgiven.

For us, there is an advocate – a lawyer– this word has a judicial tone to it. At the time of the first century, this was how they called the lawyers who pleaded on behalf of an accused person. So for those who sin, there is a Lawyer for them at all times – our Lord Yeshua, who is now in heaven sitting at the right hand of God.

The Mosaic Law, then, took care of sins one committed by mistake, unintentionally or by omission but not for willful sins. This is why we need to go to Yeshua and this is the writer’s point here.

Until now the writer, in so many ways, showed that Jesus is the last stop; he showed that He is the last sacrifice and beyond Him there is nothing that can bring an individual to God.

In **Hebrews 10:14** we read that “*by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified*”; in **10:18**, he says that “*there is no longer an offering for sin.*”

It is after this, that the writer now turns to his people and begins a long series of encouragement. First he reminds them how they suffered and how they previously defended the faith and then he brings them to the great words of chapter 11; there was a strong group within this congregation.

Hebrews 11: 32-34

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:

partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

Many, and perhaps the majority of the believers, of this church underwent much persecution, public ones, and many had their properties plundered. It was not a new congregation; they had some mature subjects in there. But to which persecution in history is the writer referring?

Depending on where you think this church was located, you have many instances of persecution to choose from, because the church was going through rough waters.

If you believe this church was in Rome, history tells us that when Claudius became emperor in 41 AD, he imposed severe restrictions on Jews and, eight years later, he expelled them from Rome (Bruce) - among whom were Priscilla and Aquila.

If the congregation was in Alexandria Egypt, Philo writes that in 38 AD Jews were forced to leave their homes, which were left for looters. (Philo, *Flaccus* 56. Bruce & WBC)

If in Israel, it was worse. After the outbreak in 66 AD, Josephus writes that Jewish communities throughout the countries were victims of looting and massacre. (180 Josephus, War 2.457–80)

The Messianic Jews were persecuted from all sides; from Gentiles for being Jews, and from mainstream Judaism for believing in Jesus. But these believers in the book of Hebrews stood their grounds and these are the first examples of faith that is presented to us. It is with them that a great teaching begins on *how to live the richest life ever*, here on earth. There were all kinds of subjects in this one church, as in any other godly church - some who contemplated living, others who showed such a great faith. The writer greatly encourages them. What he does, beginning in **Verse 37**, is the same kind of encouragement the Hebrew Scriptures believers got from the prophets of God; he brings us right to the future to see the end of it all, and he tells us how to live now.

Let us see how he does this - let us first read **Hebrews 10: 37-39**

"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

For yet a little while, and He will be coming. The anticipation of the coming of the Lord was this driving force behind the believers of all times, even from Enoch to now. These verses are a quotation from the Book of Habakkuk, a prophet of hope. *For yet a little while...* this is what Habakkuk was told when he witnessed all kinds of evil in his days; he is the one who began his book with the words "*O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save.*" (**Habakkuk 1:2**).

In his response, God brings him to see the punishment of those behind the violence. First, He brings him to see the Babylonians' invasion of Jerusalem in 536 B.C., and then he brings him to see the Second Coming of the Messiah. This changed Habakkuk's perspective of life. From complaining and prosecuting the offenders, Habakkuk turns out to be their lawyer and asks God to forgive them. When he realizes what is coming in the future, he took comfort in God's sovereignty and wrote these words that we find in **Hebrews 10:37-38** - that He is coming soon! Look unto Him and not at the transient things around you.

It is in **Verse 38**, where we see these very important words, the words which influenced the history of the church: *Now the just shall live by faith* - not by works, but by faith. This phrase differentiates the religions of man from the Scriptures. Because that one common denominator between the various religions of man is to work for salvation - do and you will gain heaven. But in the Bible, it is faith; and if only faith, it is for the simple reason that no one can go to God through his own means. This is a message given from the very beginning. It is a phrase that is written all over the pages of the Scriptures.

Men of God were not ignorant of this and they knew there is a distinction between the law and grace - something the people of **Hebrews** did not. Even before the construction of the Temple, the very first prophet Samuel said that *Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.* (**1Samuel 15:22**)

David, whose utmost desire was to build the Temple, said: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart* (**Psalms 51:17**) - not by works of any kind, but through faith.

Even some rabbis in the Talmud, who were staunchly law abiding, understood this. Speaking of the 613 commandments in the Mosaic Law, one rabbi said that Habakkuk reduced these laws to one commandment, *the just shall live by faith* (Maccoth 3). Many of them knew the difference.

It is in the last verse of this chapter where we are told why we are here on earth.

Hebrews 10:39

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

This defines the believers well. A believer is one who goes forward and does the one thing that he cannot do in heaven - *the saving of the soul*. This is one main reason why we are still here - *to save souls*. We can do most of the rest in heaven. In many different ways, each and every member of the body of the Messiah contributes to this work. The one who has the gift of prayer as much as the one who has the gift of giving or service or evangelism; we are all working towards this end. Those who were going back to the old ways could not do this work; they were too consumed with their own problems. It was Paul who said *I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.* (**Romans 1:14**) We owe it to them to tell them, since there is nothing else we could have done; it is all the work of the Messiah.

This is where we come to this great chapter of **Hebrews 11**, the chapter of faith. This chapter gives us the answer as to how to live our life with God in this world.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

This verse is so loaded! This is what faith is. It is not a feeling or a floating thought; it is divine; it comes from above. When you have it, you know it is true because it is from God and it is reasonable.

The word *substance* is as a real foundation. In **Hebrews 1:3**, it says that Yeshua is *the express image of His person*. That is, He is the *substance*, or the *assurance*, of God; faith is to us the assurance of the truth of God and of the reality of heaven. For secular Greek at the time, this word *substance/assurance*, expressed the existence or reality of something; so is faith. It is not something that the eye sees, because it is of another dimension. When our human hope is directed to God, He sprinkles it with the blood of the Messiah and it becomes this powerful faith.

Faith does not allow me to say: *I hope I get to heaven*. It will bring us to say: *I know I am going to heaven*. Do you have this conviction; have you grasped this conviction?

It is free; ask for it, and pray for it. As someone said: faith is the gift of God; so is the air, but you have to breathe it; so is bread, but you have to eat it; so is water, but you have to drink it.

In **Hebrews 11: 2**, he shows us that faith is this foundation on which men and women of God stood. *For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.*

The believers of old, all of them, had it and it was their lifeline to heaven. They knew, through faith that God exists and not only that, but that He is so involved in the things of this earth.

Faith will affirm you; it will give you wisdom and freedom.

Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

See how far he brings us?

Here he brings us beyond this world, before its creation, and tells us that all was created but the *word of God*, out of nothing - ex-nihilo. We know this by faith. Only faith can affirm this fact. Beyond faith and the Word, there is nothing which tells us how the world was created.

The Greek for *the Word of God* is so well chosen; it brings us back to the first chapter of the Bible. The word here is not *Logos*. If it was, we may have thought that it spoke of the Messiah, but the word is *Rhema*, which means a *statement*. It speaks of the spoken word, just like we find in **Genesis 1**. Ten times the words “*God said*” are found in **Genesis 1**, because everything was created *by the Word of God*, out of nothing. This is how it happened.

There were mountains, trees and the animals, created; all came out ex-nihilo, right away, at God’s Word. They were all there, formed with the appearance of age. But some people did not believe it then and they don’t believe it now. Plato taught a dualism of creation which is called *ex materia*, out of preexisting matter. Today, many within Christianity believe the same thing. There is a teaching of *theistic evolution* or *evolutionary creationism*. These are the ones who try to marry the Theory of Evolution with the Bible.

They say that God created the heavens and the earth, and all life on the earth, through this process over billions of historical years. They say and I quote, “He has been in charge of this process since the beginning of time and He still is in charge. He directed the unfolding of life forms over time that many people call evolution.”

This is a very nice thought; it is always nice to try to accommodate everyone, but the Bible does not teach this. It simply states that *the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible*. Is this not enough?

This is confirmed by the account of **Genesis** which says that God spoke and they were created. How can we know this?

It is by faith only. It is a more reasonable faith than a faith in evolution.

It is in **Hebrews 11:4-5** where we meet the first two of the great cloud of witnesses. From this point on, we will see how the Spirit was Himself impressed with so many men and women of faith who stood out in history; so much so that He inscribed their names in the His Book.

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

The first two individuals in this long list of heroes are Abel and Enoch. Without going too deep into this teaching, these two individuals are a type of believers from the very beginning to the end. Abel offered the right sacrifice, he knew how to approach God and his heart was in the right place. Enoch, as well, knew how to walk with God; it says that *God took him*, as He takes and will take all believers to himself at some point in time.

Abel and his brother Cain may represent the two groups present in the congregation of **Hebrews** - the apostate and the believer. They both knew God, but the difference between Abel and Cain is in the sacrifices they offered, which in turn translates the condition of their relationship with God. Abel, in many ways, sums up what the book of Hebrews has been teaching about the sacrifices. He already knew of **Hebrews 9:22**

And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

Abel offered blood to God. Abel, as we are told, still speaks; he does so because he understood the demands of God and complied. Not so for Cain. One can offer a cereal or wheat offering, but not by itself, it must be done over a blood sacrifice. This is why it is written at the end of **Hebrews 9:22** “*without shedding of blood there is no remission.*” This must have been the case with Cain, who offered an unworthy sacrifice. This must have been the case with all those who left, and who *trampled the Son of God*, because they thought they did really believe in Him. These also *insulted the Spirit of Grace* for they did not need Him either and went to other gods.

To conclude, I want to bring you back to **Hebrews 10:25**, as the writer encouraged his flock to be together in the faith; he concludes by saying:

... but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Which Day was this?

The first century believers were very much in tune with the prophecies of the Scriptures. They believed the prophecies and this belief did save many of them from sure disasters. There is one prophecy of Jesus which they were aware of and which saved the Messianic Jews, because they believe His Word. The historian and church father, Eusebius, who lived before the year 300 AD, reports in his writings that, before the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem moved to a region called Pella or Perea, after being warned by a revelation about the destruction of Jerusalem. (hist. eccl. 3.27.2)

Actually, it was really a revelation through the prophecy of Jesus.

Luke 21:20-21

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is near.

“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.

Here, Yeshua gives them signs to look for. Before Jerusalem was to be destroyed, He tells them that when they see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, they should get out of it. This is what they did when they saw the Romans surrounding Jerusalem. This prophecy was fulfilled in a most wonderful way. It was in the year 66 AD, that the first Jewish revolt broke out against the Romans. The governor of the region, Cestius Gallus, brought his army which surrounded Jerusalem. However, he only had 20,000 soldiers, which was not enough to quench the revolt. So he decided to draw back and to come back with a more important army. It is when he drew back that the Jewish believers remembered the prophecy of Jesus, in **Luke** and **Matthew**, and moved out of Jerusalem to a city called Pella. Two years later, another Roman general, Vespasian, and his son Titus came and surrounded the city and took it and killed 1,100,000 Jews. However, those Jewish Believers who believed in Yeshua’s prophecy were saved.

The words of **Hebrews** “as you see *the Day approaching*” speak to us also, as we see our very world following the prophecies of the Bible. Europe, Russia, Asia, the Moslem countries and Israel are all present as they were described by the many prophets of the Bible and by our Ultimate prophet, Yeshua. Today, how many in Christianity or even in Judaism are taking the end time prophecies seriously enough?

Let us speak of the *day approaching* and of *comforting each other* with the soon coming of the Messiah (**1Thess. 4:18**). Let us share the verses which speak of eternity and the destiny of the unsaved, and follow the commandments of the Law of the Messiah, *exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching*.