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Hebrews 12:18 - 13:25



Hebrews - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg delves into Hebrews 12:18 - 13:25, focusing on several themes and warnings presented in the text. Gregg explains the analogy drawn by the author between children growing up and believers maturing in their faith. He also discusses the significance of the heavenly Jerusalem and how the New Testament church saw itself as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Toward the end of the talk, Gregg highlights the importance of obeying God's word, especially in light of the final warning presented in the text.

Transcript

All right, we're going to return to Hebrews 12. We began Hebrews 12 at the beginning of our last session, but actually we kind of picked up some scraps from chapter 11 at the beginning of our last session, and in doing so, took precious time away from chapter 12. We were doing so well.

Through most of Hebrews, we've got one whole chapter per session, which is always neater and desirable if it can be done, but not at the expense of content, so we have fallen behind now, but not behind what we have scheduled. We have enough classes scheduled to finish even as things stand now. In chapter 12, the author has been urging them to run a race valiantly and not to weary or quit the race, in other words, not to fall away from Christ.

Of course, the direction they're tending to fall is toward Judaism, so he's urging them to hold the course and not go backward to Judaism, which was no doubt their youthful religion before they were Christians. He compares it to running a race. He also compares it to children growing up.

He says growing up for a child isn't always comfortable. Rearing a child involves not always putting a child through joyful things. The child doesn't always welcome the lessons that need to be learned, and especially the punishments that may be involved, but not all of the chastening is punishment.

It's just all child rearing, and God is rearing us as children, and he exposes us to things

that might be outside our comfort zone so that we can grow stronger, just like you do with any child. You develop your child mentally, educationally, of course, and spiritually and physically, and that growth always involves new lessons that go beyond what the child can comfortably handle, but it also stretches the child toward maturity. The author compares the sufferings the readers are going through to that phenomenon of God chastening his children.

Thus, verses 5 through 11 are a lengthy treatment of that point. Then, in verses 12 through 17, we have exhortation to be encouraged. After all, since things that seem so discouraging in their lives right now are actually God's method of bringing them to maturity, that should be encouraging.

These same experiences that would once discourage them should now be looked at through a different lens so that they're now encouraged and not discouraged, and they should certainly avoid the trap that the Israelites often fell into in the Old Testament, and Esau is given as a notable example, of thinking that you can disregard your spiritual birthright, that you can go your own way and please yourself rather than God, or take the easy way rather than the way of discipline that God has for you, and still come out okay. In this particular case, if they would take the path of least resistance, they'd be going back to Judaism because that's the society they were in. Their parents, their friends were Jewish and were persecuting them for their departure from Judaism.

The easiest thing to do would be to go back, please their parents, please their neighbors and their relatives, alleviate themselves of the persecution. That's the easy way, but it's not God's way. God was taking them on the harder path of discipline to become mature Christians, not to be driven back and discouraged by the discipline.

If they think that they could, in fact, go back and do things other than God's way and suffer no consequences, they are particularly miscalculating in this instance because the system they're going back to is about ready to come under divine judgment. If you go back to run into a house that's about ready to be demolished, you're going to your own destruction. That is, of course, implied and stated in numerous places in this epistle.

Now, verse 18 says, For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and to the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the words should not be spoken to them anymore. He's, of course, talking about Mount Sinai. He calls it a mountain that might be touched, which, as it reads here, would mean it's a physical mountain, and the mountain that we do come to, which he mentions later in verse 22, is not a mountain that can be touched.

It's a spiritual phenomenon, not a physical. I would just point out that in some translations, it reads not a mountain that might be touched, but a mountain that might not be touched. It doesn't really matter which it is.

If it's a mountain that might be touched, it means a physical mountain. A mountain that might not be touched is a reference to Mount Zion, the physical mountain, anyway, which was they were forbidden to touch it, and that's the point he makes. You weren't allowed to touch that mountain.

They put up a barrier around it. If even an animal touched it, they were to be put to death. It was too sacred to touch is the idea, if you take the line, the mountain that might not be touched.

Different translations render it differently. I am assuming it's a manuscript difference, but the idea is not significantly changed, even if you make it the reverse of touching or not touching. In Exodus 19.12, this is what he's talking about.

It says in Exodus 19.12, you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, take heed to yourselves, that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow.

Whether man or beast, he shall not live. When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come up near the mountain. They can't touch it, they can come near it.

Obviously, if they touch it, they have become so unclean that even the people who kill them can't touch them. They have to be killed without being touched, because there's just that much awesomeness and reverence that's associated with this mountain. Now, the writer of Hebrews says, you haven't come to that mountain.

Now, if you go backward, you'll be going to that mountain, because that's the law. That's where the old covenant was established, at that mountain. But notice what kind of a mountain it was.

It was a terrifying thing. Even Moses said, you know, he was afraid. We read that in verse 21.

And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I'm exceedingly afraid and trembling. Now, that particular line from Moses is not found in our Bible, but it is found in the Septuagint, in Deuteronomy 9, 19. In Exodus 19, 16, in our Bible, we have this statement.

Then it came to pass on the third day in the morning that there were thunderings and lightnings and thick cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. So they were afraid, but it doesn't mention Moses trembling, although he was in the camp, so I guess it would include him. There's no specific mention in our rendering of it where Moses said that he feared and quaked, but in Deuteronomy 9, 19 in the Septuagint, it is rendered that Moses said that.

So not only the people, but Moses himself was terrified by it. This is the covenant you want to go back to, something as terrifying as that. Why would it be terrifying? Because there was a death sentence attached to violating it.

Even touching the mountain was a violation that could end your life. To say nothing of the rules and regulations that were imposed that could end your life if you violated it. This is not a friendly mountain.

This is not a comfortable place to go. It's not the covenant you have come to as a Christian, nor is it one that's very desirable to go back to. So you haven't come to that mountain, but, in verse 22, but you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of a sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

This list here, of what we have come to, in contrast to the old covenant, he's just piling on different names for the new covenant and the things associated with it. The first thing he says is Mount Zion, and he adds to that the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. These would all be synonyms, of course.

The earthly Zion was the mountain upon which Jerusalem stood. The earthly city of Jerusalem was the city of God. So, in a sense, these terms, Jerusalem, Zion, and city of God, would be synonyms, but he's not talking about the physical Jerusalem or the physical Mount Zion or the physical city.

He is talking about the spiritual, the heavenly Jerusalem. Now, in clarifying what he means by that, in verse 23, he says, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. Our names are registered in heaven, and we've come to the church of Christ, the firstborn.

And that is the Zion we've come to. That is the heavenly Jerusalem, the church. Now, part of this church is in heaven.

Part of it is on earth, but it's one church. We're connected organically with heaven because part of the body that we're part of is already there. The head is.

We're still the part that's touching the earth, so I guess we're like the feet, by this analogy. But a body that's got its feet on earth and its head in heaven belongs to both places. And so we are part of the heavenly order, the heavenly Jerusalem, although we may, as individuals, be still living on earth.

But this is no doubt what he's thinking of at the end of verse 2 when he says, I wonder how the writer of Hebrews formed an opinion about how many angels there are. I sometimes wonder if some of the authors of the other New Testament books actually

had Revelation available to them as a resource. The Gospel of John seems to refer back to Revelation.

James does too, and 2 Peter might. There are at least three books in the New Testament that arguably relate back to Revelation. This one might, and especially if it was written very near the time of Jerusalem's fall, which it sounds like it might have been, it might have been written after Revelation, and if so, it might have been familiar with it.

Now, in Revelation, as nowhere else in Scripture, we definitely read of an innumerable company of angels that we have come to. In Revelation chapter 5 and verse 11, it says, then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was 10,000 times 10,000. That'd be 100 million, I think.

And add to that thousands and thousands of thousands. So you've got about 100 million plus, throwing thousands of thousands more. A thousand thousand is another million.

So 10 million plus millions and millions more, basically. That's how many angels we have come to. That's how many angels are worshipping God with us.

So the church is in heaven and on earth simultaneously. We happen to be members of that body that are still groveling right down here. But we have come to a church that is already gotten into heaven.

Our head is there, many of our members are there, have died and gone on. And the angels are there as part of the accompaniment there of the church's worship and singing. Now, he says in the end of verse 23, to the spirits of just men made perfect.

This may refer to the spirits of those people who were listed in chapter 11, the Old Testament saints, who without us were not able to be made perfect. But now they are not without us. They are made perfect.

And so he might be referring that way to that. Or he might be saying that the church we attend here on earth is made up of just men whose spirits have been made perfect. Because he's been talking earlier about how with one sacrifice, Christ perfected forever.

The Christians perfected the conscience. And so just men, the spirits of just men, who that is, their spirits have been made perfect. The men aren't exactly perfect, but their spirits are.

Could be a reference to the fellowship that we are in now on earth. It's very unclear exactly which way he means this. But one thing that seems clear is that he heaps up synonym after synonym for what he calls the general assembly and church of the firstborn who registered in heaven.

So that the church is the heavenly Jerusalem is made undeniable here. And as I said, if he has been influenced at all by the book of Revelation, we know what part it was. Because it was Revelation 21 where we first read or just see a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem.

And it clearly is the church. For example, in Revelation 21 verse 9, it says, then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me saying, come, I will show you the bride, the lamb's wife. Well, this is an unambiguous reference to the church.

The church is the lamb's wife, Christ's bride. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me the great city, holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven. That's the heavenly Jerusalem.

Coming down from God. This is the lamb's bride. This is the church, the city.

And we saw this earlier in Revelation 21 where it says in verse 2, Revelation 21, 2, then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband. It's in verse 9 that we learn it was the lamb's bride. It's the church.

The heavenly Jerusalem is the church. The writer of Hebrews, of course, takes that for granted. Does he take it for granted because all Christians knew that anyway? Or that he had read the book of Revelation, he expects that his fellow readers of the book of Revelation has concluded that.

In any case, he uses them synonymously, the heavenly Jerusalem and the church. And Paul, entirely separately, and a long time before this was written, because in Galatians, Galatians is one of the oldest books of the New Testament. It's one of the earliest books written.

And it would have been decades before the book of Hebrews that it was written. But in Galatians 4, Paul is making a distinction between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, and he compares the Old Covenant to Jerusalem, that now is. And the New Covenant, he compares with the Jerusalem above.

And interestingly, he says in Galatians 4, 26, but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. So all us Christians, our mother is the Jerusalem that is above. Well, the church is the mother of the Christians.

The church is the bride. The church is the womb through whom God brings forth his children. And clearly, the heavenly Jerusalem is the church.

I mean, it's unambiguous in Hebrews. Less so in Revelation and less still in Galatians, but what necessarily we see that they all harmonize, that the early church viewed itself as

the heavenly Jerusalem and saw themselves as the fulfillment of many of the Old Testament prophecies about Jerusalem. And this is an area where the early church seems to have had a different set of assumptions than, say, modern dispensationalists.

Because modern dispensationalists, whenever they discover a passage in the Old Testament about Jerusalem, especially the messianic age and so forth, and Jerusalem and all that, they say, well, Jerusalem has to be literal Jerusalem. This can all happen over in Israel, in the Middle East someday in the future. Well, it's reasonable enough if that's how the early church understood things, but they didn't seem to.

They would cite passages about Jerusalem from the Old Testament and they would apply them to themselves, the church. They spiritualized it, in other words. So that he says, we have already come to Zion.

And we read in our last session in Isaiah 35, 10, it says, the ransom to the Lord shall come to Zion. He said, well, you have. You are the ransom to the Lord.

You have come to Zion. Why would you go back to Mount Sinai? Why would you go back to a covenant associated with fearful judgments and darkness and terrifying threats? When you can be in part of a covenant that's full of angels and light and just men whose spirits are made perfect and all of that, certainly you don't want to go back. You've also come, verse 24, to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, Christ's blood, of course, was mentioned earlier as we've been sprinkled from an evil conscience by the blood of Christ, it says in chapter 9. We've come to a blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Now, what is this statement that the blood of Christ speaks better things than the blood of Abel? Well, it assumes that the blood of Abel speaks something and the blood of Jesus something better. What does the blood of Abel speak? Well, we actually have a reference to that in Genesis chapter 4 in the portion that actually talks about the story of Cain and Abel, and after Abel had died, his blood was speaking. So we read in Genesis 4.10, in verse 9, the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? And he said, I don't know.

Am I my brother's keeper? And verse 10 says, And God said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. So Abel's blood was speaking, crying out, shouting, in fact. For what? For vengeance.

For a balancing of the score. For punishment. He was murdered.

His blood is crying out for redress. The blood of Abel, the first innocent blood to be shed on earth, of man, cried out for vengeance. Christ's blood cries out for something better than that.

Mercy. That speaks better things than the blood of Abel does. Now, verse 25.

These last few verses, the last five verses of Hebrews 12, are the final, the fifth and final warning section of the book. We've seen four previously. This is a short one, as the first one was.

And it has some of the same thought as the first one. Because in the first one, in chapter 2, verse 3, it says, How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? This one also raises that question. It says, See that you do not refuse him who speaks.

For if they did not escape who refused him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from him who speaks from heaven. This is very similar to the exhortation at the beginning of chapter 2, where he says, If the word spoken by angels receives such serious punishment, how shall we escape if we neglect the salvation that has been spoken by Jesus and by those who heard him and the signs and wonders that were given to confirm it? Again, we're talking about escape. It's a strange word to use if we're talking about eternal destinies.

I mean, he could, of course, mean how will we escape hell. But he's never mentioned hell in his book, nor does any other epistle in the Bible mention hell as a place of people going. The only references to hell in the New Testament are in Revelation and in Jesus' teaching.

And even Jesus' teaching is questionable whether that's what he's talking about, depending on what Gehenna is. The interesting thing is Paul never mentioned hell. The writer of Hebrews never mentioned hell.

Peter, 2 Peter, mentions hell, but he's not talking about our hell. He's talking about Tartarus, where the fallen angels go. Apart from that, hell's kind of not in there, not talked about.

Now, I should say the word hell. There are certainly references, and we've encountered some of them already, to fiery indignation that will devour the adversaries. We have encountered references to serious judgment.

And it may well be that this should be associated with hell, though he has given no indication that that's what he means. We do know that there was such a judgment impending at the time of writing because he says the old system's about ready to vanish away, and we know something about how that happened. The horrible Holocaust that occurred and came upon the Jews in A.D. 70 fits all the descriptions of judgment that the writer of Hebrews has hinted at or stated.

And when he says, how shall we escape? Again, that's a strange wording if you think about salvation. If we're thinking of salvation as an escape, I don't think of salvation as an escape. I think salvation is being reconciled with God.

We may indeed escape something as a result, but salvation, I don't know, it may be. But

I think he's talking about escaping that judgment that is coming. And the Christian Jews did escape it.

That's the right word for what happened. Before the Romans came, an oracle came to the church in Jerusalem saying, get out of town. The Romans are coming.

They left. The Romans came and besieged the city. All the Christians were gone.

They escaped. The rest did not. The ones who were still committed to the old system did not escape.

Now, in this place, it says, see that you do not refuse him who speaks, for if they did not escape, who refused him who spoke on earth, what did they not escape? Hell? Well, we don't have any knowledge about whether that's the case or not. We know that they didn't escape death. That's the point he's made several times in his warnings, that the people who violated Moses' law died.

That's physical judgment. Physical death. They didn't escape.

How can we escape? If we refuse the more, the greater dignity of the one speaking from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth, meaning at Mount Sinai. You know it shook the earth there. We just were talking about that a few verses earlier.

Mount Sinai shook. God's voice shook the earth. Everyone trembled.

It says, whose voice then at Mount Sinai shook the earth, but now he has promised, saying, yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven. That's actually a quote from Haggai. Chapter 2, verse 4. And it's an interesting passage.

It's a passage that I think can only be made sense of if it's applied to the New Covenant. And it certainly seems to be how the writer of Hebrews is applying it. But he's saying, look what he says.

Yet once more God says he's going to shake not only the earth, as he did at Sinai, but he's going to shake the heavens too. Now, when Jesus died and rose again, there was a shakeup in the heavens. The principalities and powers were disarmed.

Satan was cast out. Things like that. The heavens were shaken out.

But that might not even be referring to this here. It might be that he's talking about the whole spiritual realm is being overturned and shaken up. The abandonment of one covenant replaced by another.

An entire system by which people approach God, the God of heaven. That whole system is being shaken out. And I think we may have to consider that the shaking of heaven and earth is like he shook the earth when he made the Old Covenant.

He shakes the heaven and earth when he destroys the Old Covenant. And in view of that possibility, at least something to consider. Verse 27 says, now this yet once more indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken.

Present tense, not future tense. Right now, these things are being shaken up. And this yet once more when he shakes heaven and earth, that's already happening now, he says.

This is referring to the removal of things that are being shaken. Like the temple, maybe. And the system.

As of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Now, things that are made, I think he means man-made. Made by people.

Anything people make can be shaken. And he's sort of equating that which can be shaken is that which is made. Of course, what God makes could resist shaking.

But man-made structures are very vulnerable to earthquakes and things like that or just disappearing with time. He says, it's going to be removed. As of the things which are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Now, what cannot be shaken? He says, therefore, since we are receiving, present tense, a kingdom which cannot be shaken. All right, so what do we got? We got an old system that can be shaken and will be shaken. And it's going to be removed.

But the kingdom we have received is going to withstand that shaking. It can't be shaken up. There are things that can be shaken, the things that are man-made.

Not the kingdom of God, that's God-made. That can't be shaken. And therefore, it sounds like he's talking about this, that Haggai is talking about the shake-up of the downfall of the old system.

And the continuance, despite that shake-up, of an unshakeable kingdom, which Christ has brought us into. And we are currently receiving. Notice, this is the important thing, is the tenses of these verbs.

He's not talking about eschatology. He doesn't say, this is speaking of things that will be shaken. It says, in verse 27, the things that are being shaken.

He doesn't say, we will receive a kingdom. He says, we are receiving a kingdom. This is talking about something that was happening at the time of writing.

And he says, oh, by the way, I would say this, that Jesus very famously said, some of you standing here will not taste death until you see the kingdom coming in power. And he says, we're receiving that kingdom now. It's coming with power.

We're receiving it even at this moment. And the old things that are being shaken are being removed. He says, therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace.

Law won't do much good. The temple's going down. The whole legal system won't be of any value.

Let's have grace instead. By which we may serve God acceptably. The Jews thought they served God when they went and brought sacrifices to the temple.

That was the service of God. But we serve God in a more acceptable way, by grace. By which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

For our God is a consuming fire, implying there's a fiery judgment that God is going to bring upon his enemies. He's already made reference to that. You want to serve God acceptably, not in an old order that God has rejected.

Which David said, as was quoted in chapter 10 of Hebrews, in sacrifices and offerings, you had no pleasure. Quoting Psalm 40, we saw this in Hebrews 10, verses 5 through 7. But David said that God had no pleasure in sacrifices and offerings. So if we want to serve God acceptably, or in a way that pleases God, it's got to be with grace, not with law.

Not with the old system, but with the new order. John said in John chapter 1, the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. So grace and truth replace it.

Now, we're going to find that the last chapter here is essentially just a miscellany of exhortations. Each one is worthy of a sermon, a complete sermon. But we won't have time to give a complete sermon.

But we need to know that in chapter 13, it's not as if the argument, it's not like there's a flow of argument continue here, where you can just take several verses and say, now here's essentially where he's going with this. He's not going anywhere with it. It's like shotgun, popcorn, exhortations about miscellaneous things.

Like he realizes he's getting near the end of his parchment. And he says, oh, I had so many more things to say. I better just say them real short.

A whole bunch of various things. And so we find in chapter 13, let brotherly love continue. That's a good freestanding exhortation.

Brotherly love, that's what characterizes Christians. So keep that up. Do not forget to entertain strangers.

For by doing so, some have unwittingly entertained angels. This is a classic verse about hospitality. You never know who those strangers are that you have occasion to host.

You never know. They might be an angel. Who's he referring to? Who in the Old Testament entertained angels into their home without knowing they were angels? Well, Lot probably did.

It seems that the two men that Lot brought into his house in Sodom, they certainly were angels. And he may not have recognized that initially. As far as we know, he was just showing hospitality to a couple of guys who were otherwise going to sleep dangerously in the streets.

So there's no, you come into my house. It's only safe there. If he knew they were angels, he probably wouldn't think they needed his protection.

Or it could be Abraham, a chapter earlier in chapter 18 of Genesis, where God and two angels came to visit him and he fixed them a meal and so forth. Eventually he knew it was God. But initially the story sounds like he didn't know it was God.

He was just being hospitable. And then it turned out that God had a word for him and he recognized it was God and brought him up short. There are no doubt more cases than this in the Bible or maybe not even in the Bible.

Maybe in modern times. We've heard lots of hitchhiker stories about someone picking up a hitchhiker and then the angel. It turns out to be an angel.

I don't believe any of those. Those are like an urban legend that's been passing around the body press for a long time. I wouldn't say it's impossible that you might pick up an angel.

Picking up a hitchhiker is hospitality. Inviting them into your car, taking them out of the weather. I mean, that's like hospitality.

But it's not impossible that a hitchhiker you pick up could be an angel. But I just don't believe any of the stories I've heard just because they all sound so much like each other and they do circulate. But the point here that's being made is it's not unprecedented.

That someone simply showing basic hospitality to a stranger ended up showing hospitality to angels not knowing it. Now, there's an even better incentive for showing hospitality. That is that Jesus said, inasmuch as you do it to the least of these, you do it to me.

Not only have people shown hospitality to angels without knowing it, they've shown hospitality to Jesus without knowing it. Jesus says, I was a stranger and you took me in. They said, when were you a stranger and we took you in? When you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me.

In other words, if we look around the room and say, who are these people in our house?

Maybe they're angels. Well, I don't know if any here are angels, but I know they're all Jesus. Because if we do it to them, we do it to Jesus.

That's even better. My wife is an angel, but she's the one showing the hospitality, so that doesn't fit. Anyway, the point here is that you ought to show hospitality just to show hospitality, just to be loving.

You never know. You might have a guest in disguise who you'll run into later, maybe in heaven. He says, remember me? I was an angel.

I came and you took me in. Or Jesus himself saying, I was a stranger and you took me in. So, in other words, this is a strong urging to show hospitality.

Now, the word hospitality in the Greek actually means love of strangers. So, it actually does. I mean, everyone in our house right now is a friend, not stranger.

It's still hospitality. They're strange to our house. They're foreigners to our house.

They don't live here. But love of strangers even speaks of a point where you're not just doing something for a friend. You're doing something just because they're a person, just because they're a person who has need.

You don't even know who they are. They're a stranger to you. So, certainly picking up a hitchhiker would be that kind of hospitality.

And, of course, the emphasis here is you may be doing more good than you know. You may be helping someone more significant than you are aware. Just do it routinely and you may find out later who some of those guests were.

Verse 3. Remember the prisoners. And no doubt he means by this Christians in prison. The author himself was once a Christian in prison.

And they remembered him. Remember in chapter 10, verse 34. You had compassion on me in my chains.

So, they didn't forget him. He was a stranger. I'm sorry.

He was a prisoner. And they didn't forget him. And he says, I'm not a prisoner anymore, but there are people still in there.

There's some other Christians still in chains. So, don't forget them. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them.

And those who are mistreated since you yourselves are in the body also. We're one body. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, if one member suffers, all suffer.

So, even though we're not in prison, if any member of our body, the body of Christ that

we're part of, is in prison, we are in prison with them. We should think of it that way. We should do to them as we would hope would be done to us if we were there.

In a sense, we are. And I'm convicted about that because I do know some Christians who are friends of mine. They went to jail for crimes, but they were crimes they committed sort of it was inconsistent with their normal Christian walk.

They were really Christians, but they're kind of backslidden for the moment and did something that they got thrown in jail for. And then repented again, which, by the way, their repentance is more of what their pattern has been through most of their life. Actually, I'm thinking of one man in particular who's serving a very long term for something that didn't take very long for him to do wrong.

But, and I've lost track of him. I wish I'd written to him more. He's not in this state, but I, you know, we can maybe think of people, Christians, who are today not able to do what we can do.

Walk around free. Go entertain ourselves. They're in jail.

And a lot of people in other countries are in jail simply because they are Christians, and it's much worse than being in jail here. It can be really awful. And remember that if they are, and they're in our body, we're in jail with them.

And we need to remember them with that kind of sympathy. Verse 4. Now, it's interesting that he would mention fornication a couple of times to this particular audience. These are Jewish Christians thinking about going back to Judaism.

And yet he tells them back in chapter 12, lest there should be any fornicator or profane person among you. Chapter 12, verse 16. As if maybe some of them are falling into fornication.

And here he says it again. Fornicators are going to be judged. Don't do that.

Of course, it shouldn't be too surprising, because after all, even in our churches, people fall into fornication. Fornication is a temptation for everybody. But in the Jewish religion, it must have been the case that some of the sin they offered sacrifices for occasionally were sexual misconduct on their part.

And it's not too surprising, because people are tempted in those areas. Because of temptation, he recommends marriage. Marriage is honorable among all.

Now, Paul didn't indicate that everyone will be married or should be. He said one man has this gift, one has another. He says, to avoid fornication.

This is 1 Corinthians 7. Paul says, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and every woman her own husband. He says, I say this by permission, not by command.

Because I would that everyone were like myself.

Single, he means. So he's saying that being single is certainly an option. But he says, I don't mean to put a leash on you about this.

One man has one gift and one has another. So, in other words, Paul says marriage is a good thing to avoid fornication. Although, if you happen to have the gift of being single, I wouldn't want you to give that up.

Because that's a valuable thing, too. Here, the author says, marriage is honorable among all. That is, everyone who does it should consider it to be a legitimate and honorable thing.

Assuming the person you married is actually available and isn't somebody else's wife. And by the way, a lot of Christians are marrying people who are someone else's wife. They just don't know it because they've got a divorce.

They've got a legal divorce and they remarry even though they don't have legitimate grounds for divorce. So Jesus said that's adultery. He said if you marry a woman who's unjustly divorced, then you commit adultery with her.

So marriage is not honorable if you marry someone who's actually someone else's wife. Or a divorcee who's not legitimately freed from the previous marriage. Fornicators and adulterers will be judged.

But it says the bed is undefiled. Now, I want to say that the translation we're reading, notice it says marriage is honorable. The *is* is in italics.

That means the word *is* is not in the Greek. It just says marriage honorable. And many translators think that what he's saying is not so much an indicative but an imperative.

Let marriage be honorable and the bed undefiled. No one knows. No one can really decide.

Is he giving a command or making a statement here? Is he simply saying that marriage and sex in marriage, it's okay. It's honorable and it's undefiled. Or is he saying make sure you keep your marriage and your marriage bed honorable and undefiled.

Which might imply if it were that way that there would be some activities that even a husband and wife might do sexually that would be, you know, not honorable and not undefiling. I don't know which it is. One thing is clear, though, that this teaches that marital sex at least can be undefiled and should be.

And, therefore, that sex is not a dirty thing. Sex is a good thing in its proper place. And, obviously, done in the proper manner.

If he is saying let it be this way, then he'd be arguing that you need to, you who are married, need to conduct yourself sexually in a way that is honorable and undefiled, which suggests there might be alternatives to that. But the way it reads in the King James and the New King James, which we're using, is simply the indicative. Marriage is honorable, among all.

The marriage bed is clean. He then says in verses five and six, let your conduct be without covetousness. Covetous means greed.

It means acquisitiveness, wanting to acquire things. Let your conduct be without covetousness and be content with such things as you have. For he himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

So we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me? Now, notice in these opening six verses, there have been several exhortations along very different lines from one another.

The general exhortation is to love. One might actually suggest that all the others are, in a sense, unpacking that. These are different ways that love is manifested.

First, in showing hospitality to strangers. Secondly, in empathizing with those of the body of Christ who are suffering in ways that we are not, in prison and so forth. Thirdly, in marriage, having a loving relationship, even in the sexual relationship, having it be a loving relationship rather than just a mere passionate, selfish, making use of somebody else for your own gratification.

Marriage and sex are supposed to be about love. Sometimes, among people more carnally oriented, it's not really so much so. And then, not coveting what other people have, but being content with what you have.

That too is loving. You'd rather see them enjoy their things than you get their things from them and take them and enjoy them for yourself. Now, he says you don't have to be covetous for things.

You can be content with what you have because God has said, I will never leave you or forsake you. Interestingly, this is a statement God made to Joshua in Joshua chapter 1. And I like this quote here for the simple reason that we often wonder, promises that are made to individuals in the Old Testament, are they just for them or couldn't we claim any of them for ourselves? And yet, the original setting of this statement that is quoted in verse 5, is Joshua 1.5. And it's in God's commission to Joshua, personally. And yet, the author acts as if we can just claim that for ourselves.

God said to Joshua, I'll never leave you or forsake you. So, take that as a promise to you too. It's interesting to contemplate how many promises made to individuals in the Old Testament might have application to us.

It's probable that some of them don't. For example, when you read that God said he's going to make him the father of a multitude, not every Christian can count on that being true of themselves. But there are generic things about God's relationship and his blessings on his people that could be applied as this passage is.

Now, if God will never leave you or forsake you, why would you ever be discontented? This assumes that what you want is God, most of all. Now, if you don't want God most of all, you might be discontented even though God's with you. Because you don't care much about him, you care more about other things.

But the assumption is, you love God, don't you? Well, he's always with you. You don't have to be covetous for anything. You don't have to want to acquire more things.

Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6, he said, having food and clothing, we will with these things be content. So he's not saying that people have to be reduced to such few things, that we have to only have food and clothing. But actually Paul and Timothy and some of the missionaries like him, that's all they did have.

He said, well, we'll be content with what we have. It does suggest that while it may be very legitimate for God to bless us with a lot more things than food and clothing, we should be content if we're reduced to that. If we're ever put out of our homes and have no cars, have no computers, have no, you know, fancy things of any kind, and we only have clothing to cover us and food to eat, well, be content with that.

Because he has said, I'll never leave you nor forsake you. These people, he says, be content with what you have. What do they have? Well, earlier they joyfully endured the spoiling of their goods.

They lost a lot of stuff. He has mentioned that. If they lost a lot of stuff, they might not have a lot of stuff.

He said, be content with what you have. You've got God. That's enough.

So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear what man, what can man do to me? The King James says, I will not fear what man can do to me. I like it both ways.

The point is, and it's a quote from Psalm 118, verse 6. All right. Then it says in verse 7, remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So if he dealt with them a certain way, if their conduct was rewarded, then God hasn't changed. You can follow their example. Remember what they've done and taught you.

They may be gone, but Jesus remains the same. Now, in our introduction to Hebrews, I

mentioned that a lot of commentators say that this was a second generation of Christians, and their first batch of leaders had died. And they've used this verse to say something.

I actually mentioned in the introduction, I'm not really sure why they would say they had died. And especially when you read about the leaders, again, in verses 17 and 24, where it certainly does not indicate their leaders are dead, verse 17 says, obey those who rule over you and be submissive to them. And in verse 24, greet those who rule over you.

Now, rule over you is a bad translation. The Greek word means who leads you. But it's clear that in verse 17 and 23, or 24, those who lead you are not dead.

And so I wonder why did they think that just because it says remember them in verse 7, that they must be dead. I've since looked that up in the Greek, and I can see where they're coming from, though I'm not sure that they're right. Although we have the same phrase in all three verses in our English, it's different.

Because in verse 7, it's the noun, your leaders. Where in the other two verses that the phrase is found, it actually says, those leading you. So those leading you in verse 17 and 24 are clearly living people.

Those who are leading you, obey them, be submissive to them, greet them for me. But in verse 7, it doesn't use the phrase those leading you. It simply says, your leaders.

And it's a noun instead of the verb. And therefore, the translation is different, and that kind of, I have to say that led me to not understand why some think that way, because there are some past tense verbs in verse 7 in the Greek. Remember your leaders who have spoken the word of God to you.

And so some translators and commentators believe this is referring to an earlier generation of leaders that they had in the church. They have a new generation of leaders. There are people leading them now, as mentioned in verse 17 and 24.

But they had an earlier group of leaders, perhaps, who spoke the word of God to you back then. Suffice it to say there is a possibility that verse 7 is talking about leaders who spoke in the past. See, in my opinion, it might not be.

It might be their current leaders who have already earlier spoken to them and taught them the ways of God. So there's no certainty, in my opinion, from that verse, that a group of leaders have died. But I can see now why commentators have taken that verse that way, because there is the past tense of spoke.

And it doesn't say those leading you, like the other two instances do. It says your leaders, which could mean previous leaders, if that was the way it was. So in any case, let's talk about those verses about the leaders right now.

We'll talk about all three of them, because this has to do with responding to church leadership. And we're told three things. Remember them.

Well, more than three things. In verse 7, remember them and follow their faith. Follow their example of faith.

Leaders are people who you should remember them and follow their example. And then in verse 17, to obey them. And then, of course, in verse 24, to greet them.

Not too much controversy would be associated with the greeting part, but the obeying part is sometimes questionable. Some people say, well, how much do we obey our leaders? There was a movement called the shepherding movement, and there are many cults that have an emphasis on this verse 17 about obey your leaders, because, of course, it seems to give carte blanche to spiritual leaders to dominate your life any way they want to do. And unfortunately, when carnal people are in positions of leadership, that's exactly what they want to do in most cases.

And they can appeal to this verse, say, you've got to obey me. It says obey your leaders. But we have to remember that in the mind of the author, the leaders were of a certain caliber.

And we read of them, their caliber, in verse 7. Those who spoke the word of God to you and who have set an example for you of the Christian life that you should be following. The assumption is these are Christ-like people who are faithfully telling you what God said in the word. Those people obey, not because of who they are, but because of what they've told you.

They've told you the word of God. You obey the word of God. As I understand it, a spiritual leader is not an office in an institution, like an institutional church.

A spiritual leader is someone who is spiritual and who leads others spiritually. He may hold no office or he may hold an office that's irrelevant. If a man tells me to do something that the Bible actually says I should do, I'll obey him.

I don't care if he holds an office in the church or not. It's the word of God I'm subject to, and he's supposed to be telling me the word of God. That's what it says.

The leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Obey them, because they speak the word of God to you. Now, when a leader, when someone speaks something to me that's contrary to the word of God, I'm not going to obey them.

I don't care if they have a label or not. They don't have to be. They can be a leader or not a leader in some organization.

If they tell me something contrary to the word of God, I'm not going to obey it. If

someone tells me something agreeable with the word of God, I'll obey it. They don't have to be a leader.

That is, they don't have to be an officer in a religious organization. Spiritual leadership is communicating the word of God to people. We're Jesus' sheep.

We're supposed to be following him. A good shepherd who's, you know, an under-shepherd of the sheep, like a pastor or an elder or whatever, or even just a friend, will shepherd you by telling you what Jesus said, what God says. If they speak the word of God to you, obey that.

They qualify as a spiritual leader. If they're speaking contrary to the word of God, they don't qualify as a spiritual leader. It's just that easy.

It's not a man holding an office with a badge that has authority. It's the word of God that has authority, and a good leader will be only interested in communicating the word of God to people, not, you know, inserting his own domineering agendas. Now, verse 9, Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines, for it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods, meaning kosher diet, which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

This strange doctrines is obviously the Judaizing doctrine. Obviously, the idea that you need to go occupy yourself with food, kosher foods and so forth. No, get your heart established in grace.

This would be a good verse for, I think, many in the Hebrew Roots Movement today. They're very fascinated with foods and with strange doctrines about the need to obey the Jewish law. No, you need to get your heart established in the grace of God.

That's a different thing than the law. We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat, for the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for the sins are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also that he might sanctify the people with his own blood suffered outside the gate.

Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. 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.

But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. He starts by saying we have an altar to eat from that those in the tabernacle can't eat from. He's probably referring to the communion table in all likelihood.

Just knowing how the early Christians thought about communion is probable. That he's thinking about when we eat the bread and the wine, we're participating in a sacrificial meal much better than the sacrificial meal the priests eat when they eat the sacrifices

brought to their altar. We have a better altar.

But because it is an altar, there are sacrifices to be made and we are a priesthood to offer them. And so he says in verse 15, Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. That's one sacrifice we offer, but there's more.

Verse 16, don't forget to do good and to share, that would be financial sharing, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. So the sacrifices we offer at this altar are praise to God, doing good deeds and sharing with people. In the midst of it he says, In the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, they took parts of the animal that were unclean, at least with the sin offering they did.

You can read about this in Leviticus 4 verses 11 and 12. They took parts of the carcass and burned it outside as an unclean thing, outside the camp. And he said that's kind of how they treated Jesus.

They treated him like the unclean part of the sacrifice. They sacrificed him outside the gate, outside Jerusalem. So just like they treat part of the sacrifices as unclean and burn it outside the camp, so they treated Jesus that way.

And if they're going to treat Jesus that way, let them treat us that way too. Let's go with him outside the gate and bear his reproach too. If that's how they're going to treat our Lord, let's let him treat us that way too.

Because we don't have a continuing city here anyway. Let the Jews reject us like they rejected Christ. What's that matter? Their city's going down, ours is staying up.

Theirs is going to be shaken, ours cannot be shaken. That's what he's saying. Go ahead and let the Jewish persecutors reject you for being Christians.

Our city is more enduring than theirs. Theirs is soon to go. Then he talks about obeying the leaders.

And then there's just general exhortations closing the book. Pray for us, for we are confident that we have a good conscience in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you sooner.

Apparently he wants to come visit them sooner and their behavior will help speed that up. I'm not sure exactly how. Maybe by their being obedient instead of going back to Judaism.

In verse 20, it says, Now may the God of peace, who brought up 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. Now this is one of the longer sentences in this chapter, and it is full of allusions to other parts of Scripture, and particularly verse 20, I think, is a deliberate summary or application of a couple of passages in Ezekiel.

Two passages, but they're kind of identical in meaning. The book of Ezekiel is one of the most repetitious books in the Bible. It's much longer than we might think it might need to be because although it's 48 chapters, most of what it says could be said in probably 35 chapters because Ezekiel repeats almost everything.

Several chapters are substantially repeated in the book, but I say substantially. Usually there's a little bit of a different set of points in the repetition that wasn't in the original, but some is verbatim or almost verbatim repetition, and that would be true of chapters 34 and chapter 37, not the whole chapters, but sections of those chapters. It's a section that is in Ezekiel 34 and also in Ezekiel 37 that I think is in the mind of this author when he's making some of the statements he is, and so I'd like to look at those passages in Ezekiel and then see what the author here is doing with them.

In Ezekiel chapter 34, not the whole chapter, but just to call your attention to the fact that the whole chapter is about shepherds of Israel. Now, in biblical metaphors, the leaders of the nation of Israel were called shepherds, and shepherds in Israel were God's flock of sheep, and as such, Israel was regarded to be vulnerable, stupid. Sheep are pretty stupid.

They'll get themselves into trouble, in fact, they'll get themselves killed if someone doesn't look after them. Besides that, they're very defenseless creatures. About the most defenseless creature there is that has much meat on its bones, and that makes them an attractive prey to carnivores.

They can't defend themselves, and they've got a lot of meat on them. So sheep are always in danger of wolves and mountain lions and bears and things like that, and that's what shepherds are there for. Shepherds are there to take care of them and to lead them to places where there will be food, where there's plenty of grazing.

And God, in chapter 34 of Ezekiel, treats the leaders of Israel, that would be the religious and political leaders, as having an assignment to take care of his sheep, the people of Israel. It's a flock of sheep, and the leaders that God raises up are seen as if they are the caretakers to protect and feed the sheep. And he begins the chapter by saying, The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

Prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds, Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves, should not the shepherds feed the flocks. So these shepherds were using their positions of leadership as most politicians do, and frankly, many clergymen do, to feather their own nest, to exploit the people that they

served rather than to feed the people, rather than look out for the interests of the people. Now you give a man, the average man, power over other people, and he'll devise ways to milk them.

He'll devise ways to fleece them. He'll try to feed himself and improve his standard of living if necessary at their expense. Why not? He's got control over them.

He can kind of take advantage. And that's what people usually do when they're put in charge of other people, unless they're good people. I mean, if they're people of character, that's different.

But people of character are not in the majority of the population. You put the wrong person in charge, and he's going to exploit that. And that's what these people were doing.

These were corrupt leaders, and they were not doing good to the people that they were governing. And that would be true of the religious leaders too. And so this chapter goes on after discussing how angry God is with these shepherds, and he points out that they don't feed the sheep, they don't protect them from predators, and so forth.

And when the sheep are wandering off, they don't go after them and bring them back. They're not doing any of the things a shepherd has to do to keep the sheep safe and healthy. But in verse 11, he says, For thus says the Lord God, Indeed, I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out, as a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among the scattered sheep.

So I will seek out my sheep and deliver them from all the places where they've scattered on the cloudy and dark day. Now, what God's saying is, the shepherds of Israel have failed, but I'm not giving up on my sheep. I'll have to come and do this myself.

Never send a boy to do what a man has to do. These people can't do the job, so I'll have to come and do it myself. Now, when Jesus, in John chapter 10, said, I am the good shepherd, he spoke as if they had some kind of frame of reference.

The good shepherd, not a good shepherd. He didn't say, I'm a good shepherd. I want to tell you a parable about a metaphor of me taking care of sheep.

I'm like a shepherd. No, he says, I'm the good shepherd, as if there's some particular good shepherd that they were anticipating. And I personally believe that it was chapter 34 of Ezekiel that Jesus was alluding to when God said, I will come and call my sheep back and do what has to be done for them.

I think Jesus is saying, I am God. I've come in fulfillment of this promise that was made in Ezekiel, and I'm that shepherd. Now, as you go through the passage, it says in verse 20, where do I want to start? Verse 23, I think, chapter 34, 23, I will establish one shepherd

over them.

That's interesting. God says, I will shepherd them, but I will establish a shepherd. And this is that mystery of who Jesus is.

He's God, but he's sent by God. How does that work? Well, God exists in Jesus and external to Jesus too. Jesus said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father, but he said the Father is greater than I. I mean, I am, he's saying, the physical, tangible manifestation of God among you, but there's more of God than what you see right here.

He fills the whole universe too. Jesus was sent by God, but he was sent as God inserting himself into a human being. So we have the paradox of, even in the New Testament, Jesus speaking about the Father as if that's someone different than him, and also saying, I am the Father.

The Father's in me, and I'm in him, and if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. And this has always confused people, and I'm not going to try to resolve that problem for us here. That's the mystery of the Trinity, but we see the same phenomenon here.

God, in verse 11, says, I will be the shepherd. Then he says, I'll send my shepherd. It's kind of the same thing.

He's talking about the same thing. Jesus coming as God, or as a man sent from God in whom God lives in a human form. He says, I will save my flock.

Verse 23 says, I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them. Then he says, my servant David, he shall feed them and be their shepherd, and I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David, a prince among them, I, the Lord, have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them and cause the wild beasts to cease from the land.

He means the persecuting nations who persecute the sheep, Israel. He says, and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. Now, notice several things.

God says he's going to establish a shepherd. He identifies that shepherd as David. Now, we have to remember, David had died 500 years before this.

More than 500 years before this, David was dead and is not really coming back. This is not really referring to the historical David. David's name is used for a couple of reasons.

One is because David historically was a shepherd and a good leader of Israel, too, so he was everything that these leaders were not. David had, in his earlier life, shepherded actual flocks of sheep. Later, he became the shepherd or the leader of the nation of Israel and the best one they had in their history.

So, the Jews looked forward to a new ruler coming, the Messiah, who would come, who would be more like David than anyone else had been since him. And David is seen as

what we call a type of Christ. He is a foreshadowing of Christ.

It is made very clear in the Old Testament that when the Messiah would come, he would descend from David. He would be the new king of the lineage of David's royal line. He would be the final king of that line, and he'd eternally reign on the throne of David.

This all is affirmed in various places in the Old Testament, and the New Testament confirms it about Jesus. What's interesting is that David, the name David, became the line, I should say, the name of the dynasty of David. Like Pharaoh is not just a proper name, it's a title of all the kings of Egypt.

Abimelech was a similar name for the kings of Gerara, a Philistine city. David became the name not only of the man David, the founder of the dynasty, but of the whole dynasty, so that his grandson, Rehoboam, when the people rebelled against Rehoboam, they said, go to your own, cede your own affairs, David. They spoke to Rehoboam and called him David.

He was the present ruler of the Davidic dynasty. He was the grandson of David. His name was not David, but he was a Davidic king of the line of David.

The dynasty is called David. The Old Testament writers often referred to the Messiah, but they didn't know what his name would be. In the Old Testament, it was never said what the Messiah's proper name would be.

Therefore, to give him any name would be somewhat of a symbolic name, a name that wouldn't be what we would later know him as after he's born on the earth. He's the son of David, the Bible says, and so to call him David is as good a choice as any. It's sort of like at the end of Malachi, when God says, I'm going to send Elijah, the prophet, and he means John the Baptist.

Remember, Jesus said, if you can receive it, John the Baptist is Elijah who was supposed to come. Well, why did he call him Elijah then? Well, simply because in the Old Testament, God didn't reveal the real proper names of these characters. He didn't reveal that the Messiah's name would be Jesus or that his forerunner's name would be John.

However, Elijah is a foreshadowing of John the Baptist. David is a foreshadowing of Jesus, and therefore, to give them any kind of name, the choice of a name that accurately foreshadows the character is something that prophets will sometimes do. So it says that David will be their prince.

It means a ruler of David's dynasty, sort of a second David, sort of the one that David would be a type and shadow of. This would be the one that David foreshadowed. I give all that because it is confusing.

There are some people who don't understand the way David is used and actually believe

that this prophecy is about a future millennium and that David will be raised from the dead and he will be a prince serving under Jesus in the millennium because they say, well, it says David, my prince. Well, reign over them. They're not recognizing this as a symbolic reference to the Messiah himself.

But he also makes reference to making a covenant with them. And, of course, Jesus made a covenant with his disciples in the upper room. He said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

And he calls it a covenant of peace in verse 25. And we see that these features are going to reappear in Hebrews 13.20. But before we look back at that passage, just look at a couple of chapters later in Ezekiel 37. We're going to see the same features but something additional added.

In chapter 37 of Ezekiel, verses 24 through 26, it says, David, my servant, shall be king over them, and they shall have one shepherd. They shall also walk in my judgments and observe my statutes and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob, my servant, where your fathers dwelt, and they shall dwell there, they their children and their children's children forever.

And my servant David shall be their prince forever. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them. The same phrase used in Ezekiel 34.

And it shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set my sanctuary in the midst forevermore. Now here we have, obviously, the same prophecy as in chapter 34 with a little more detail.

You've got David ruling over them as a shepherd over God's people. He's called David, but it's referring to the Messiah. Then it says God's going to make a covenant with them, and it's called a covenant of peace.

But then there's more. All those things were in chapter 34, but these parts are new. It says it's going to be an everlasting covenant.

And this is important because, of course, there were covenants God made in the Old Testament that didn't last forever. The covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, where he established the law and the tabernacle and the priesthood. The whole point of Hebrews is that that's not lasting forever.

That's over. There's a new covenant. But unlike previous covenants, this is a forever covenant.

This is an everlasting covenant. This one will not grow old and fade away and be replaced by another. This is the last one.

And this is the one that he would make with Israel through Jesus. And it's the covenant of peace. And it says God will put his tabernacle among them.

Now, let's look at Hebrews again. In Hebrews 13, 20. Notice the wording, especially in verse 20.

Now may the God of peace, who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Now, that's not the end of the sentence. But this has reference to Jesus as the shepherd, that great shepherd of the sheep, a reference back to Ezekiel 34 and 37.

It refers to him as the God of peace. Well, the covenant in those Ezekiel passages is said to be a covenant of peace. And God is specifically said to be the God of peace who's making a covenant.

And then he uses the term the everlasting covenant. Now, you know the writer of Hebrews is referring to what he's earlier called the new covenant. He's just adding the fact that this isn't the last covenant.

It's the everlasting one. It's not going anywhere. And in that respect, he's borrowing language from, again, Ezekiel 37, verse 25 or 26.

So he has this Ezekiel passage in his mind. And the interesting thing about it is he's, of course, applying this to the present circumstances. Now, why I find that interesting is because I'm always interested in theological controversies and ways people see things differently than each other, even in the Bible.

And the dispensational view holds that Ezekiel 34 and Ezekiel 37 are talking about the future millennium, after Jesus comes back. That's why they say, well, David will be resurrected when Jesus comes back, and he'll live in the millennial kingdom, and he'll reign with Christ because it says David will be their prince. And so they say, well, this is talking about after Jesus comes back.

But that's not the way the writer of Hebrews sees it. He takes the features of that passage and indicates that covenant that God says he's going to make, that covenant of peace, that everlasting covenant, he's already made it. That shepherd has already come.

That's Jesus he's talking about. So this is yet another of a whole catalog that could be listed of passages in the Old Testament, which some Christians take to be about a future circumstance that will come about at the second coming of Christ, but which the New Testament writers invariably applied to their own time and to this present time. The assumption is there that we don't have to wait for Jesus to come back in order for him to reign.

He is going to come back. The Bible says he's going to come back, but we don't have to

wait till then for him to reign. He's reigning now.

He is seated at the right hand of God. He is, and that's been emphasized here in the book of Hebrews a number of times. He's at the right hand of God.

That's a place of priesthood and of kingliness. David, in the person of his descendant Jesus, is reigning, is the prince, and he's made an everlasting covenant. There's not another covenant he's going to make in the future.

He's already by his blood established the everlasting covenant. So while this would not matter to everybody equally, those who are involved in the controversy over pre-millennialism versus amillennialism and deciding, well, the passages about the reign of the Messiah, are they going to be fulfilled at the second coming? Or were they fulfilled at the first coming? The apostles who wrote the New Testament all believed that those passages were fulfilled at the first coming, that Jesus is now reigning, and he now has a kingdom. And Paul says, we have already been translated into the kingdom of his own son in Colossians 1.13. So this is just another consideration of the juxtaposition of Old Testament prophecy with the understanding presented in the New Testament that shows that there's a certain way that those prophecies were understood to be fulfilled differently than what many popular teachers might say.

And then he says in verse 21, that God, the one, it's a long sentence. The subject of the sentence is the God of peace, which appears at the beginning of verse 20. And now, after all those subordinate clauses, it comes up with the finishing of the sentence.

May that God, the God of peace, make you complete in every good work to do his will. Now throughout Hebrews, it's been said that God has made us complete in terms of the conscience. We're perfect according to our conscience.

We're not perfect people, but our conscience has been perfected by what Christ has done. We have no more need to be carrying on guilt. That's been completely expunged by what Jesus did.

That's been an emphasis of the last four or five chapters. But now he says, may he now make you complete in your works. You're already complete in him, so to speak, but you have your works need to improve your behavior.

Works just means behavior. The way you act. The way you act has got to conform to what God has already done in terms of cleansing you in his sight.

Now, be clean, live clean, perfect your behavior. God has perfected your position in him, but it's kind of up to you to do something about completing the good works or becoming complete in good works to do his will. But it says that he is working in you what is well pleasing his sight.

That makes it a little easier. If someone says, listen, you need to do everything right. You need to do everything the way God wants it done.

You need to please God in every one of your actions. Well, that's a pretty steep assignment. God has a very high bar that he presents for us, and we can't really do that.

I mean, Israel couldn't do it. That's why they're not in the picture the same way as before. They weren't able to do.

They couldn't get over the bar that he set. Well, we're no better than they are. Gentiles are no better than Jews in terms of personal piety or intelligence or goodness, but we have something else going for us.

We have the bar set. Do this. Be perfected in all your works.

As God works in you, as God is working in you what is well pleasing in his sight. It's a lot easier to do the right thing if God has changed your heart and made you inclined toward the right thing. If you're not inclined toward the right thing, it's a huge uphill battle, and no one really succeeds in being perfect.

In fact, even Christians have never succeeded in being totally perfect. But the goal is more realistic if God is working in you a change in your inclinations. If you're inclined toward pleasing God instead of toward just pleasing yourself, it makes a huge difference in how easy or hard it is to do the things that are pleasing to God.

And this verse, as I mentioned earlier, is very similar to Philippians 2.13. It's a very Pauline-sounding verse. Paul said that we should work out our own salvation with fear and trembling because it is God, he says, who works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure, said Paul. And the writer of Hebrews has essentially the same thought and only really very slightly differing wording.

God works in you to will. He works on your will so that you don't have to change that all by yourself. And to do, to will and to do of his good pleasure.

And that's pretty much what is said here, too. Working in you what is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation. He means this letter. For I've written to you with a few words.

Know that our brother Timothy has been set free with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. Greet all those who rule over you or those who are your leaders. And all other, all the saints, those from Italy, greet you.

Grace be with you all. Amen. We actually talked about some of these verses in our introduction because they talk about the setting and the audience and who they are,

where they were, and so forth.

Amen.