

Sunday January 6th 2013
The Letter to the Hebrews
Part Seventy

1). Heb 12:11 *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. 14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.*

a). We have seen in previous weeks that the child training of the Lord in all its facets is for our profit, for our benefit, for our gain, as it is preparing us and qualifying us to receive so great a salvation, qualifying us to be placed as a firstborn son within the family of God so that we might exercise the rights of the firstborn within the Millennial Kingdom of Christ - Ro 8:17 ¶ *and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

b). We have seen how Christ, our High Priest, has entered the heavenly tabernacle that is not of this creation to minister on our behalf so that our sins committed beyond our eternal redemption would not keep us from successfully completing the race of the faith and receiving the adoption – Heb 9:11 *But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.*

c). We have seen how Christ was appointed as High Priest not according to fleshly commandment, but according to an oath sworn by God the Father concerning it – Heb 7:15 *And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest 16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. 17 For He testifies: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." 18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a*

better hope, through which we draw near to God. 20 And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath 21 (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The LORD has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek'"), 22 by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. 23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

d). We have seen the faithfulness of God - Heb 6:16 *For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. 17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.*

e). And how God's faithfulness with respect to the hope may keep us steadfast - Heb 6:19 *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

f). We have seen the catalogue of OT saints in Chapter 11 given to us as examples of those who have successfully completed the race of faith to encourage us in our own race - Heb 12:1 ¶ *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*

g). And how we are to look to these examples and the example of Christ so that we do not become weary and discouraged in our souls; so that we may focus on the goal out ahead and keep running, all the while urgently pursuing the peace of God and holiness with respect to our relationships with each other.

2). And then we will remember that in the midst of all this encouragement the Lord has interspersed a progressive warning so that we may guard our hearts and minds against the deceitfulness of sin.

a). This warning began in Chapter 2 with the admonition - Heb 2:1 ¶ *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation*

b). Our blessed hope, which is the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ [and all that entails], we have as that anchor of our soul, but if we do not give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard with respect to this hope then there is no anchor and we can easily drift away – and if we do so, thereby neglecting ‘so great a salvation’, then we can only expect a just recompense of reward for our actions.

c). The warning begun in Chapter 2 is then built upon in Chapters 3 and 4 and can be summarized in these verses - Heb 3:7 ¶ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. 10 Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" 12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

d). Not hearing His voice and hardening our hearts as a result of drifting away gives rise to the sin of unbelief, the sin that so easily ensnares us, that will inevitably lead to our downfall.

e). The third part of this progressive warning deals with the failure to go on to spiritual maturity, something that would be unavoidable if we were to drift away and harden our hearts through the sin of unbelief - Heb 6:1 ¶ *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits. 4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*

f). And perhaps we should note here that all three parts of our warning, as with the remaining two parts, deal, not with the ignorant, but with those who have heard and understood the Word of the Kingdom to the extent that they know what is on offer and have like Orpah and Ruth begun the journey – this then is a warning to those actively in pursuit of the Kingdom, those whose eyes have seen the coming of the glory of the Lord – this warning is for all of us both near and far.

g). The fourth part of the warning we find in Chapter 10 and builds once again upon that which has gone before - Heb 10:26 *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

h). The willful sin here is of course the sin of unbelief – the sin introduced into our warning in Chapter 3. And what we see here in this 4th part of the warning is what we know as apostasy – a process that began with not giving the more earnest heed to the things heard concerning Christ and His Kingdom, that gave rise to unbelief, which then has the result of stepping away from the truth – of drawing back to perdition.

i). And this is a position where there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

3). Now all 4 parts of this progressive warning, as with all the Chapters in the Book of Hebrews we have studied thus far, have been leading us to the climactic 5th part of the warning in Chapter 12 – Let's look at it once again –Heb 12:15 *looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.*

a). The central focus of this 5th part of the warning is Esau's rejection of his birthright, but before we look at Esau specifically let's look at that which immediately precedes his introduction.

b). v15 says that we need to be 'looking carefully lest' and the original Greek word for the phrase 'looking carefully' is the same word used to describe elders as 'overseers' in 1 Peter 5:2, those who diligently 'look over' the flock as shepherds. Now the point here through the use of this word is that we need to diligently exercise oversight of every aspect of our lives to make sure that we are not in the process of falling short of the grace of God.

c). This idea of falling short of the grace of God takes us back to a verse in an earlier Chapter - Heb 4:1 ¶ *Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.*

d). Literally, this has to do with being left behind in the race with the result of not achieving the goal – to fall short of the inheritance at the Judgment Seat – falling short of God's grace and coming short of His rest are one and the same thing.

1Pe 1:13 ¶ *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*

e). Remember that God has provided for us the necessary grace that we may patiently endure – Heb 4:16 *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

God's grace never fails, but we can fail to take advantage of it; and we would fail to take advantage of it for one reason only – unbelief.

f). And it is unbelief that we find in the second half of v15 – having diligent oversight of our lives is to include 'looking carefully' to see if a root of bitterness is presently in the process of springing up. Now in the first instance we would automatically see 'a root of bitterness' having to do with our relationship with one another, something we had seen in the verses that came before v15, and this would not be incorrect as bitterness of this sort can only arise out of unforgiveness and unforgiveness is a manifestation of unbelief - Eph 4:32 *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*

g). Then in addition to this perhaps we can also think of bitterness as the opposite of sweetness where sweetness is often used as a metaphor for the efficacy of the scriptures - Ps 119:103 ¶ *How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

h). A root of bitterness then could be a root of unbelief, that which is contrary to the scriptures, and this would certainly have to potential to defile, to contaminate many – this I think we have seen with our own eyes.

i). And we might see this idea concerning bitterness confirmed to us through Moses' words to the 2nd generation of Israel concerning God's covenant with them recorded in – De 29:18 *"so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood;*

i). And according to v16 we are also to 'look carefully' *lest there be any fornicator or profane person* – the reference to a fornicator here should be understood both literally and figuratively. Literally, we know that – Eph 5:5 *For this you know,*

that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

j). And figuratively we know that sexual immorality is used as a metaphor for entering into relationship with the things of this world, under the god of this world – an example of this we have just seen in Deuteronomy - *whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods* - And it is that which we see in – Jas 4:4 *Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

k). Whether literal or figurative the person engaged in ‘fornication’ is a ‘profane’ person. The word translated profane means commonplace and is the opposite of holy.

l). And so throughout the fabric of these verses we can see the thread of the self-life – living according to the flesh, that which makes us commonplace rather than the spirit which would make us holy – all of which brings us to Esau – a ‘profane person like Esau’.

m). Now Esau was not a fornicator, but we could certainly classify him as profane and the profane person or fornicator [literal or figurative] of our day is just like Esau, both in action and outcome.

4). Heb 12:15 *looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.*

a). So then, we come to Esau whose type brings us to the climactic conclusion of our progressive warning – a conclusion with respect to the attitude of heart and mind that ignoring the warning will result in and a conclusion with respect to the ultimate outcome for those who would be ‘like Esau’.

b). The original account concerning Esau is to be found in Genesis Chapters 25-27 and there is a multi-faceted spiritual truth contained in the account that we must make sure not to miss. We are not looking at just a single truth, but a series of interrelated truths that will open to our understanding as we study.

c). To begin let’s look at the birth of Esau and Jacob - Ge 25:21 *Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 But the children struggled together within her;*

and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."

d). There are several things we can note here – ‘the children struggled together within her’, ‘two nations’ were in her womb, ‘two peoples’ would be separated from her body, ‘and the older shall serve the younger’.

e). As we have seen in a previous study that which is pictured for us here within Rebekah’s womb is the enduring struggle of the man of the spirit against the man of the flesh – Ga 5:17 *For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*

f). This contrast between the spirit and the flesh is the very thing we also see presented through the naming of Esau and Jacob. Esau receives his name because of his description at birth – he was red and like a hairy garment – the name Esau having to do with being rough to the touch.

g). The name Jacob literally means ‘heel catcher’ and although we will often see this name interpreted as ‘supplanter’ it also can mean to restrain by holding the heel and as a derivative has the idea of taking the place of another as a substitute.

h). The scriptures then continue, after the description of their birth, to give us more information about Jacob and Esau as they grow – Ge 25:27 *So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents.*

i). And as we look at this verse again I am sure we will remember the contrast seen in it – Esau is a skillful hunter, compared with Jacob, who is a mild man. Esau is a man of the field, compared to Jacob who dwells in tents.

j). And these contrasts of course are not without significance. In the skillful hunter we may well hear echoes of Nimrod who was a mighty hunter before the Lord and ‘the field’ in scripture is used as a picture of the world – Mt 13:38 *"The field is the world....."*

k). So Esau being a man of the field would make him a man associated with the world, a worldly man, a fleshly man, carnal by nature. Jacob on the other hand is described as a mild man – the word ‘mild’ meaning upright, undefiled, righteous. And Jacob lives in tents, the very same description that we have seen given to Abraham attesting to the fact that he considered himself a stranger and a pilgrim upon the earth, because his focus was on that which was to come. And so to put this simply we see that Esau is conformed to the things of this world with his focus in the present

whereas Jacob looks beyond the present to the age to come. Then to make this more simple still – Esau is a picture of the first birth, the man of the flesh and Jacob the second birth, the man of the spirit.

l). And we had seen in Genesis 25:23 that God had clearly stated that the older, Esau, the man of the flesh, would serve the younger, Jacob, the man of the spirit.

m). Now on the historical level this would be pointing to the fact that it would be Jacob and not Esau who would hold the rights of the firstborn, but on the foundational level as a type, we would understand that the man of the flesh, pictured through Esau, will have no inheritance with the man of the spirit, pictured through Jacob. This is the same truth that is taught through Isaac and Ishmael – Ga 4:30 *Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman."*

n). The son of the bondwoman, Ishmael – born before Isaac – provides commentary for us on that seen through Esau and of course the same would be true for the son of the freewoman, Isaac, with regards to Jacob.

o). So then, it is only through our second birth, through the man of the spirit that we can attain the rights of the firstborn – this is the clear teaching of scripture in foundation in the OT as well as that seen in the NT – Ro 8:13 *For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Ro 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

5). Ge 25:29 ¶ *Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom. 31 But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." 32 And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?" 33 Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

a). Now we should be clear that although God had declared back in v23 that Esau would serve Jacob the choice Esau makes here to sell his birthright still remains an absolutely legitimate one.

b). And in this legitimate choice we have another facet of spiritual truth for us. Without doubt the all-knowing God already knows which of us will successfully complete our race of the faith, but this does not take away from the freedom we have to make choices along the way.

c). But what we should also note is that the choice Esau makes to sell his birthright is the inevitable outcome of his living according to the flesh.

d). And the lesson here for us would be a simple one – if we should, like Esau, allow our flesh to be the controlling factor in our life then the choices we make along the way will demonstrate the despising our birthright and to do so can have only one conclusion.

e). Now we see that Esau's demise comes through a single action – the selling of his birthright for a bowl of stew – and this is presented to us in this fashion so that we might marvel at the absurdity of his actions. How ridiculous it seems to trade the rights bestowed upon a firstborn son for something as transient and inconsequential as a single meal. The one does not come anywhere close to the other.

f). And this is the point isn't it? – Exactly what is there in our carnal desire that can compare with the rights given to a firstborn son of the living God?

g). Isn't this exactly what the Lord taught? - Mt 16:26 *"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

h). Even if we should gain the whole world it remains as transient and inconsequential as Esau's bowl of stew and just as worthless.

i). And even if our hearts, hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, refuse to accept this, there will come a day when the full realization of what we have done will cause us unimaginable grief - Ge 27:33 *Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, "Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came, and I have blessed him-and indeed he shall be blessed." 34 When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me-me also, O my father!" 35 But he said, "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing." 36 And Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" 37 Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?" 38 And Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me-me also, O my father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.*

j). We shall continue next time – if the Lord is willing.