

Review the flow of thought

- *The priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ enables us to have bold faith*
- *Like the heroes of faith we press on to the end*
- *We are privileged*
- *We outwork our faith in our daily lives*
- *Prayer and benediction*

We are saved yet heed the warnings

1. Christians have come to a city

The land of Israel and Jerusalem point forward

- *Israel points to the new earth*
- *Jerusalem points to the heavenly headquarters of the kingdom of God*

Let us be sure that we are following the thought of this letter! The priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ enables us to have bold faith^{□1}. We have to draw near to God and find daily strength from God^{□2}. This is the opposite of drawing back in unbelief^{□3}. The heroes of faith have pressed on to the very end to attain what God is promising them^{□4}. We run the race like them, looking to Jesus who also lived by faith^{□5}. God's fatherly correction must not discourage us^{□6}. There is no need for us to be like Esau^{□7}.

Our writer is coming towards the end of his great letter. We Christians – he says – are in a highly privileged position. We are not at Sinai^{□1}; we are on Mount Zion^{□2}. Unlike Israel we must not refuse God's voice^{□3}; soon everything will be shaken and consumed except that which is obedient to God^{□4}. So – he says – let us work out our faith in love and hospitality and purity^{□5}, obeying our pastoral leaders^{□6}, trusting Jesus^{□7}, avoiding false teaching^{□8}, living on the fulfilment of the old covenant^{□9}. Their leaders – he says – are trustworthy^{□10}. They should pray for the writer and his colleagues^{□11}. Then the author of the letter ends with a prayer^{□12}, a request^{□14}, an item of news^{□15}, more greetings^{□16} and a closing benediction^{□17}.

We have reached the part where he is insisting that his readers are saved people who are virtually in heaven already! When we consider the warnings of Hebrews we need to remember the times when the writer insists on their present salvation. Our writer is not dealing with some kind of half-Christian who is enlightened but not saved. He says they have not come to Sinai. ²²*On the contrary, you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to tens of thousands of angels in joyful assembly.* ²³*You have come to the church of the firstborn sons and daughters, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God the judge of all and to the spirits of righteous people who have been perfected,* ²⁴*and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling speaking better things than the blood of Abel.*

1. Christians have come to a city. Four times in Hebrews^{□1} we are told that the people of God are looking for a new land with a new city. The Mosaic system is not literally kept by the Christian, but is fulfilled in the gospel.

In much the same way the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem are also shadows of spiritual experience. I do not mean that the spiritual experience is ghostly or non-material. The new heavens and new earth will be physical. The resurrection body will be physical (although it may well have new and unusual powers). But the land of Israel pointed to the new earth which is to come. And the city of Jerusalem pointed to the heavenly headquarters of the kingdom of God. Jerusalem was captured by David and made the headquarters of his kingdom. It was a city chosen by God^{□1}. It was famous for its unity (Psalm 122:3 speaks of Jerusalem as 'built as a city that is bound firmly together'), its security^{□2}, its centrality in the purposes of God^{□3}, its steadfastness (Isaiah 33:20 says there is a city which is an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its cords be broken). This stability comes because the city has foundations. Even the Edomites spoke of its foundations^{□4}. Yet all of this was only a shadow of the heavenly dwelling-place of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Christians are travelling towards it^{□5} and yet in a sense they are already there. They belong to it. They think of it as home.

- 1 1:1-10:18
- 2 10:19-25
- 3 10:26-39
- 4 11:1-40
- 5 12:1-4
- 6 12:5-15
- 7 12:16-17

- 1 12:18-21
- 2 12:22-24
- 3 12:25
- 4 12:26-29
- 5 13:1-6
- 6 13:7
- 7 13:8
- 8 13:9
- 9 13:10-16
- 10 13:17
- 11 13:18-19
- 12 13:20-21
- 13 12:5-15
- 14 13:22
- 15 13:23
- 16 13:24
- 17 13:25

- 1 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14

- 1 1 Kings 11:36
- 2 Psalm 125:2
- 3 Isaiah 2:3

- 4 Psalm 137:7

- 5 see 13:14

think of it as home.

The city's great characteristic is that God lives there. Just as God revealed himself in the holy of holies of the tabernacle, so now he is (although present everywhere) present in an intensified manner in the heavenly city. It has the same characteristics as Jerusalem (unity, security, steadfastness).

2. A foretaste of fellowship with the angels

2. Christians are having a foretaste of fellowship with the angels. The people of God are there in the heavenly city already, but so are the angels who are famous for their joy and their worship. We are already part of the same heavenly choir, the heavenly ministry-team who serve God.

3. A foretaste of the church in its full glory

3. Christians are already having a foretaste of the church which is to come, the church in its full glory. The 'church of the firstborn sons and daughters' of God is the total number of the **obedient people** of God. Their names are written down for honour. This means (i) they are the elect of God and (ii) they have been rewarded by God. They did not lose their reward. Hebrews focuses at this point on the Christians who have received their reward. Firstborn sons have a double portion of the family possessions, and the right to rule within the family. The assembly that our writer thinks of consists of those who have overcome all opposition. The one who conquers will have this heritage¹. It was this that Esau lost the family of Isaac. The heavenly church is the church that has been purified, the church 'in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing', the church that Jesus presents to the Father². It might be asked: what happens to those who 'suffer loss' and are 'saved but only as through fire'? They are still saved. More than that we cannot say. Would it help us to know more?

• The obedient people of God

• Overcomers

4. Christians have come to God and are already part of the people who have been glorified

4. Christians have come to God and are already part of the people who have been glorified. You have come to God, says our writer. He has already 'justified' us and pronounced us righteous. We are as good as in heaven already! Although there is a little more to happen before we finally enjoy heaven on earth, yet already we belong to the people who have been favourably judged by God. In heaven righteous people have been 'perfected'; they have already seen Jesus, already been judged. I would even argue they already have a resurrection-body (the final judgement day is the publication-day of what has happened already!). The key to everything is that we have come to Jesus, the Mediator, the one who has an everlasting relationship with us, the one whose blood does not cry for judgement as did Abel's but makes utterly sure that we are accepted for ever by our Father-God. We are there already! The remainder of our life is simply a matter of laying hold of the full blessings of the position that we already have and which can never be lost.

• Laying hold of the full blessings that are ours

¹ Revelation 21:7

² Ephesians 5:27



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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