

PRAYING THE  
JEWISH-CHRISTIAN  
LETTERS: 

DISCOVERING THE RHYTHMS  
OF THE GOD-LIFE THROUGH  
PARAPHRASE, POETRY AND PRAYER

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## INTRODUCTION TO PRAYING HEBREWS

The Holocaust casts an inescapable shadow over *The Book of Hebrews*. To read *Hebrews* without cognizance of the Holocaust (and, before it, centuries of pogroms, persecution, and prejudice by Christians against Jews) is both a moral and literary offense. It is a moral offense because it neglects the responsibility Christian theology, teaching, and practice has in creating the culture of hatred that led to the Holocaust. It is a literary offense because it neglects the reality that centuries of prejudice obscure our ability to comprehend what we read within *Hebrews'* pages. Reading *Hebrews*, therefore, requires both moral courage and a rigorous adherence to intellectual integrity.

The theological word for the above dilemma is called "supercessionism." Supercessionism is the belief that Christianity replaced, or superseded, Judaism. Many Christians assume this reality is fact and a rather harmless fact. Nothing could be further from the truth.

There are three, primary ways the relationship between Judaism and Christianity has been taught within Christian theology: punitive, functional, and structural supercessionism.

*Punitive supercessionism*<sup>1</sup> teaches that Jews who refuse Jesus as Messiah are rejected by God and worthy of punishment, with God's promises to them revoked. The 3<sup>rd</sup> century theologian Hippolytus of Rome declared, "[The Jews] have been darkened in the eyes of your soul with a darkness utter and everlasting."

*Functional supercessionism*<sup>2</sup> teaches that Israel's role in salvation-history is replaced by the Christian Church. The 2<sup>nd</sup> century theologian Justin Martyr wrote, "For the true spiritual Israel ... are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ."

*Structural supercessionism* recognizes that for many in the Christian Church, the norms and values of the Hebrew Scriptures related to God's work of redemption are often ignored by Christian thinking and practice, becoming irrelevant for many Christians.

The essential message of these three kinds of supercessionism is each offensive in its own way: (1) "I hate you," (2) "I don't hate you but am far superior to you," or (3) "It's not that I hate or feel superior to you but that I just don't think about you at all." Each of these messages cultivates antagonism and disdain rather than respect between Jews and Christians, and each can argue that support for the perspective is found in *The Book of Hebrews*.

*Praying Hebrews* suggests a different way. Pope Francis, in a document called *Evangelii Gaudium*, pointed to this way beyond supercessionism when he wrote,

We hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has never been revoked, for "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (*Rom* 11:29). The Church, which shares with Jews an important part of the sacred Scriptures, looks upon the people of the covenant and their faith as one of the sacred roots of her own Christian identity (cf. *Rom* 11:16-18). As Christians, we cannot consider Judaism as a foreign religion; nor do we include the Jews among those called to turn from idols and to serve the true God (cf. *1 Thes.* 1:9). With them, we believe in the one God who acts in history, and with them we accept his revealed word...<sup>3</sup>

God continues to work among the people of the Old Covenant and to bring forth treasures of wisdom which flow from their encounter with his word. For this reason, the Church also is enriched when she receives the values of Judaism. While it is true that certain Christian beliefs are unacceptable to Judaism, and that the Church cannot refrain from proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Messiah, there exists as well a rich complementarity which allows us to read the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures together and to help one another to mine the riches of God's word. We can also share many ethical convictions and a common concern for justice and the development of peoples.

Drawing upon Paul's metaphor in Romans 11:11-22, the Christian Church lives because it has been engrafted into Israel. Israel is not to be punished, disrespected, nor ignored but celebrated, honored, and engaged as a partner in God's work of bringing *shalom* into the world. This is *Praying Hebrews'* perspective. When provided with the opportunity to uproot supercessionism, to prevent its roots from being planted, *Praying Hebrews* will seek to interpret the Greek text in ways that convey genuine respect while acknowledging authentic differences of opinion, perspective, and purpose between Jews and Christians.<sup>4</sup> It is past time for the hatred to stop.

Brad Munroe  
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## Hebrews 1:1–14

The Name<sup>5</sup> has always been about the business of restoring the creation: speaking to our ancestors through truth-tellers time and again and in ways too numerous to count. Recently The Name intensified his speaking—almost shouted, as if from the rooftop—through his Anointed One, his Son, whom he established as the One who will receive all things: heaven and earth, the creation and the cosmos, every atom, proton and quark. The Son will receive all these things because The Name created all things through him—they came from the Son and will return to the Son.

The Son is the radiance that flashes in the night, illuminating all, making everything so that it can be seen for what it is—its true nature. The Son reflects The Name's light and life into the creation, making it new creation. The Son whispers and The Name's *dunamis*<sup>6</sup> is unleashed, new creation bursting forth in praise, galaxies singing The Hallelujah Chorus. The Son purged<sup>7</sup> the dross from human abuse, betrayal, and corruption to give our fractured minds and splintered spirits hope for new beginnings, and then he went to heaven to chill with The Name, as The Name's right hand.

Lots of people are impressed with angels and rightly so, but the Son is so far superior to the angels that it's unfair to compare them. Of which angel did The Name ever say,

You are my Son, my begotten,  
now I have brought you forth to shine.<sup>8</sup> Or,

I'll be The Name to you,  
You will be my Son.<sup>9</sup> Or,

Hey, Angels, come take a peek at my Son!<sup>10</sup>

When The Name has spoken about the angels, what did he say? He said nice things, yes, but nothing so lofty:

I created you angels as spirits,  
You are servants who help purge me the dross.<sup>11</sup>

Being one of The Name's servants is a high honor, but it's not in the Son's league:

Come, sit on your throne!  
Take your time: it will be here for all eternity.

Come, hold your scepter!  
Hold it high, for it is a symbol of justice for all.

Come, you who adore right relationships!<sup>12</sup>  
I have fixed you as the brightest light in highest heaven.

Come, you who abhor abuse, betrayal, and corruption!  
My joy will refresh you—always and forever.<sup>13</sup>

The Name also says of the Son,

From the beginning, you are Sovereign,  
You laid earth's foundation and set heaven's lights.

Though heaven and earth perish,  
You will be and abide and be adored,

Though heaven and earth become a raggedy robe,  
You will be clothed in glory and honor and majesty.

Though heaven and earth suffer corruption,  
You endure into all eternity—always who you are.<sup>14</sup>

Let's be honest with one another. The Name never said to one of the angels,

Come, chill next to me!  
Rest your feet upon my enemies' backs.<sup>15</sup>

Angels are wonderful, yes, and they have a sacred purpose: to serve, to encourage, to support the becoming of our true self as we become whole and complete in the Son.

*Above those who caused laughter.*<sup>16</sup>

*Above the one who silenced the tongue.*<sup>17</sup>

*Above the one who announced a maiden's exaltation.*<sup>18</sup>

*Radiance.*

*Reflection.*

*Reality that exists in Creation's heart.*

*Alleluia!*

*Alleluia!*

*Amen.*

*God, it's me. I celebrate Jesus! I honor his name that is above all names. I rejoice that he is honored above the angels. Yet in my rejoicing, teach me also the ways of respect for those who do not or cannot see Jesus as I see him. Give me humility to acknowledge the many times and too numerous to count ways I and my fellow*

Christians have brought dishonor to his name. Reveal to me the moments when my lips must remain shut even while my heart bursts in praise. Show me the times when I must walk the path of humility and confession for the sake of my Lord, in whose name injustice was done.

### Hebrews 2:1–9

We must attune our ears to the acoustics<sup>19</sup> of the God-life, listening attentively to the God-harmonies that help us to dance the God-rhythms. We certainly don't want to stumble because we try to dance with two left feet! Indeed, the word spoken by angels endures and deviating from its truth leads us to grasp that which destroys—why lay hold of that which harms us and so be unable to embrace The Name's *agape*<sup>20</sup> that seeks to adopt us? Wholeness awaits us, our true self blossoming into what The Name designed us to become. She has sung this song for ages through actions that invite wonder and evoke awe. She also makes us able to join her chorus through gifts of the Divine Spirit, freely given through her joy and determination.

The Name created the world she intends not through the mouths of angels but in the word spoken by the Son, of whom the Psalmist bears witness:

What is humanity that you care, O Name?  
What is the Son of Mortality to occupy your mind?  
You created humanity a stitch lower than angels.  
You crowned mortals with honor not quite as high, yet  
You place all things beneath their feet!<sup>21</sup>

In placing all things under humanity's feet, all things are subordinate to humanity, all things are lesser. Yet that is not what we observe! Humanity does not appear superior to all things—certainly not superior to the majesty of mountains nor the galaxies that hint of eternity. What, then, are we to understand about the Psalmist's words?

Though humanity is not ascendent, Jesus is.<sup>22</sup> We see Jesus, who was human—made to be lower than angels—but only for a time. This Jesus is now crowned with honor and covered in The Name's goodness, exalted above all names. Jesus was exalted through humiliation, his goodness displayed in welcoming the disobedient, his power paraded through weakness, his glory ascending as high as his humiliation descended. In Jesus, who dined at Death's table for everyone, The Name's loving-kindness was uncovered for all to witness.

*Who gets an invitation?*

*Is the Table large enough for everyone?*

*Is the Host up to all that is required for the celebration?*

*You've received an invitation—how will you RSVP?*

God, it's me. The mystery of Jesus invites wonder and evokes awe. Jesus bears the image of our humanity while radiating the light of your deity. Help me to understand the mystery of Jesus not as an abstraction but through the embrace of my spirit. Lead me to meditation that centers my heart and mind. Open me to a prayer life of contemplation that deepens connection with the One who is lower than angels yet above all the heavenly host.

### Hebrews 2:10–18

Now why am I comparing the Son to angels? Because many assume the angels are superior to humanity and, therefore, the God-life cannot be repaired by mere humanity.<sup>23</sup> However, in leading the beloved to reflect the divine image, The Name acted conspicuously,<sup>24</sup> through a “mere human.” All heaven and earth exist because of The Name and for The Name, and he chose a mere human as the Archetype<sup>25</sup> and Author of new creation! Indeed, so audacious was The Name that he leads the beloved to become new creation through the One who suffered! The One sets apart the beloved for a purpose: to join together as The Name's family in the kin-dom. And Jesus is pleased to call by their true name those whom The Name wooed to his bosom: beloved. He says,

I celebrate you, my beloved!  
I sing thanksgiving among The Name's gathered.<sup>26</sup>

I have full confidence in you all,  
that you can be persuaded by what is trustworthy.<sup>27</sup>

So here I stand with my beloved,  
with all those whom The Name has entrusted to me.<sup>28</sup>

Because those The Name entrusted to Jesus are flesh and blood, Jesus shared their humanity, becoming incarnate, God *en carne*.<sup>29</sup> He embraced the form of mere humanity in order to give us eternal dignity. He immersed into human experience in order to absorb death itself into his person, and so be able to make null and void<sup>30</sup> the power of the Accuser—Death is now idle and need not be feared. Angels don't need this help—but humanity does!

The Anointed One was fashioned into human form—made fully human in every way—so that he could be the living exemplar of both The Name’s mercy and human trusting. So that he could serve not just as a priest but as the High Priest, to bring together heaven and earth, to embrace humanity with his deity and usher humans into the divine presence. He gets how hard it is to be human! He entered into human suffering that he might transform it, embraced our brokenness that he might heal it, accepted being tested that he might help others pass their test. As the High Priest, he makes us whole and complete.

*Experience  
when shared  
creates intimacy,  
a way of knowing and being known  
that transcends cognition and  
saturates the soul  
with love.*

God, it’s me. Wonder and awe fill my spirit as I contemplate the mystery of Jesus: the lowly One healing all creation, with suffering as the balm used to mend broken hearts, embracing the human experience as the path back to the divine. Audacious, indeed!

### **Hebrews 3:1–6**

Oh, my beloved, who are set apart for the God-life, you who share a holy communion with Jesus the Son: focus on Jesus—never let your gaze drift from the One whom The Name sent from heaven and made him the mediator between the earthly and the divine. In holy contemplation, ponder the divine mystery: Jesus brings heaven to earth and earth to heaven!

As you gaze upon Jesus, notice how trustworthy he was to the calling The Name gave him—as faithful as Moses and yet even more essential to The Name’s work of restoring all the cosmos. And Moses was faithful—The Name’s instrument of blessing to her family!<sup>31</sup> But just as Moses received respect for his service to The Name’s family, so Jesus is honored for his service as The Name’s Son. Moses was The Name’s instrument of building a dwelling place for her family, and Jesus is the dwelling place for The Name. Moses spoke The Name’s promise for the future that was fulfilled and is being fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus the Anointed is also our dwelling place as<sup>32</sup> trust embraces assurance. Dwelling in Jesus our hope finds a home. Never look away. Never let go.

*Fidelity  
is neither contest nor race  
but opportunity:*

*Where will I look?  
What challenge lies before me?  
Who calls me forward?*

*Where are my sights set?  
What choice will I make?  
Whom shall I serve?*

God, it’s me. I look to Jesus, but what visage do I see? Blonde Jesus or Baby Jesus? Laughing Jesus or Unflappable Jesus praying in the Garden? The Jesus that looks (and acts) like me? The Jesus that seems perfectly comfortable in our churches, communities, and culture? I hope not. Rather, when I look to Jesus, I see one who seems strange: as if from a distant era and unfamiliar culture, as one whom I cannot possess. I see one who both calls and commands, one whose rebuke is received as blessing. I need no artist’s rendition to see the earthy Jesus who spit upon the ground to make healing mud or the lonely Jesus who sought out solitude. I feel trepidation in the presence of the angry Jesus who turned over tables or know sorrow as I kneel before the broken Jesus who hung from a Roman cross. I look to Jesus, fixing my eyes and heart upon this man whom I cannot possess but who occupies my soul. I cannot bring myself to send him away and doubt he would listen if I tried.

### **Hebrews 3:7-18**

The Name’s Divine Spirit tells it like it is:

Hey now, right now:  
Keep your ears open and your hearts soft.

Rebellion closes ears and hardens hearts—  
Failure is inevitable!

Our ancestors failed their test—  
The Wilderness was too much trial for them.

Even The Name grew weary at how easily they deceived themselves and each other.

Distorted desire led to intention, which led to choices, then to practices, then to habits—habits that killed.

The Name spoke truth into the distortion of their lives, “Chaos cannot know calm.”<sup>33</sup>

So, beloved, learn from our ancestors’ example: chaos cannot lead to the God-rhythms. Distorted desire leads us away from the God-life. Instead, infuse courage into each other’s hearts—do it today, right now! We need each other to dance the God-rhythms and live the God-life—we can’t do it alone! As we are partners with one another in the God-life, so we are also partners with Jesus the Anointed. We hang on to our trust, our assurance, and our hope, found in him. Never looking away. Never letting go. Not until the Day when our hope is made manifest and becomes fulfilment.

I remind you again of what the Psalmist said,

Hey now, right now:  
Keep your ears open and your hearts soft.

Rebellion closes ears and hardens hearts—  
Failure is inevitable!<sup>34</sup>

And who rebelled? Was it not our own ancestors? Those we revere? Those who journeyed with our forefather Moses? Yes! And The Name, frustrated by their lack of trust, allowed distorted desire to lead them astray. The choices they made became practices and then habits—habits that killed. So, beloved, learn from their example the importance of trust and assurance. Our hope must be placed in The Name’s Son. Never look away. Never let go.

*Resilience:*  
*the common oyster creating a pearl,*  
*a simple creek carving a canyon,*  
*prayer shaping faith,*  
*mercy forming character,*  
*justice infusing love into the world.*  
*Never looking away.*  
*Never letting go.*  
*Not now, not ever.*

God, it’s me. “Ears open and hearts soft” sounds so simple, yet I find it deceptively difficult! The author didn’t say it, but I heard it: “Ears open (mouth closed) and hearts soft (spirit willing).” I find it easier to keep my ears open (to you and to others) when I’m not

scripting my speech. My heart is softer when I allow your Spirit to whisper to my spirit. O Name, make me eager to desire what you desire. Grant me the courage to do what you desire. May your desire guide my intention, so that intention would become an act, and actions repeated would become my practice, and practice over time would become a habit that shapes and forms my character according to the image of Jesus. Today—right here and right now—may your will be done on earth, through me, to all those I will encounter.

#### Hebrews 4:1–11<sup>35</sup>

Companionship with The Name is open to all. The solitude of a walk in the garden or a stroll on the beach is The Name’s invitation to us, and you don’t want to miss it. Sitting with The Name along the riverbanks, what an opportunity! Our ancestors missed the opportunity to accompany The Name into a land flowing with milk and honey. The invitation was delivered to them, and they rejected it because they could not trust her promise—that she would dwell with them, and they would dwell in her.

We who trust The Name experience her dwelling in us—the Divine Spirit inhabits us as her home. Those who refuse to listen to The Name (because they do not trust) cannot experience her indwelling them. As the Psalmist writes,

I am passionate to proclaim,  
“Without trust you cannot dwell in me and I in you.”<sup>36</sup>

The Name’s rest is a gift written into the creation’s DNA. In Genesis, we read that The Name’s creative energy culminated on the seventh day and dwelling with The Name became an invitation for all humankind. But some refuse the invitation through obstinate apathy<sup>37</sup> and so cannot discover both the welcome she extends to enter her home and the opportunity for us to become her dwelling place.

Hey now, right now:  
Keep your ears open and your hearts soft.

Rebellion closes ears and hardens hearts—  
Failure is inevitable!<sup>38</sup>

Joshua did not invite our ancestors to enter The Name’s promised land (for in their apathy they did not

trust), but instead pointed them toward a future horizon, a day when they might discover her true purpose, when they might learn to dwell in The Name and have her dwell in them. So, let's not be like them and turn away from The Name's offer to be with and within us. Our ancestors' apathy—and its consequences—should warn us to walk the path of trust that leads to The Name's indwelling.

*I remember the long drives from Illinois to Florida,  
the back of the station wagon  
cluttered with the bodies of my three siblings and me.  
The journey was arduous for a six-year-old,  
but the welcome of Granddaddy and Grandma,  
on the porch of their pink, cinder-block bungalow,  
made the journey a hazy dream.  
Welcome is home.  
Love is home.  
Home is a place I long to dwell.*

God, it's me. I long to dwell with Jesus—abiding in the home with many rooms. Help me remember the simple, present joy of dwelling with Jesus today: solitude, sabbath, remembering I am beloved. O Name, as I dwell in you and you in me, may I open my heart to others in whom you also dwell. May I remember in my daily hustle-bustle the presence of their struggles. May I recognize amidst my scurrying about that these others also are in need of the simple joy of being with you. And may I love accordingly.

#### **Hebrews 4:12–16**

The Name's Word brings God-life; indeed, it infuses the God-life with divine energy—constantly creating, always calling, guiding and directing according to the God-rhythms upon which the cosmos is founded. Like the tip of a sword that forces a decision, The Name's Word penetrates the soul and pervades the spirit, down to the very marrow of our being. We cannot fool the Word, for it is able to discern our thoughts and even our intentions. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden, we cannot hide. Like our spiritual ancestors, we walk naked before the Word and must answer when called upon to tell the story of our lives.

*There are times I read the Bible—  
mere ink upon a page,  
and times when the Bible reads me—*

*whispers encouragement,  
punctures ego,  
draws me into wonder.*

*The dividing line between good and evil  
intersects my heart  
causing me to doubt the story I might tell.*

*And then I remember the story will be told  
not as a monologue but as a chorus—  
Jesus with and within me.*

God, it's me. I crave the God-life—constantly creating, always calling, guiding and directing me. When this comes, I discover the path that helps me craft a narrative infused with the God-rhythms. May my story be a part of your Story, my life infused with divine energy as I walk the Way of Jesus and live with him and for him.

#### **Hebrews 4:14–5:10**

Do not lose heart! Jesus, The Name's own Son, stands between us and this divine requirement to justify all we are and all we have done—a great High Priest who brings heaven to earth and lifts us into the heavenly realms. Jesus brings The Name to us and us to The Name.

Hold fast to this word of our hope! For Jesus has both traversed the expanse of the heavens and the dusty paths of human suffering. Jesus experienced the trials, tests, and temptations that cause us to fall yet did so as one able to stand. Therefore, we can be bold. We need not fear to give account of our lives. Rather we amble into The Name's very throne room with confidence, as those who have already been granted the gift of his loving-kindness. We approach The Name with confidence, assured that help is on the way.

High Priest is not a job one applies for but one for which you must be chosen and chosen by God, as Aaron, Moses' brother, was chosen.<sup>39</sup> The High Priest in the Jerusalem Temple stands<sup>40</sup> before The Name's throne and brings the people to The Name and brings The Name to the people. The High Priest represents the people—is the people's stand-in to offer gifts of gratitude and acts of apology. The High Priest comes from among the people and shares in their human obliviousness to the God-rhythms; the High Priest, like everyone else, sometimes fails the God-life (which is why he offers sacrifices for his own sins, too).

In a similar way, The Name chose the Anointed One for the honor of becoming the last High Priest. The Name said to him,

You are the One to whom all my authority is given, for you spring from the womb of my heart.<sup>41</sup>

And,

The Last High Priest you are, Eternal and Sovereign—justice and right relationships the result of your reign.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout Jesus' life as he walked among us, he lived the life of a faithful priest: offering prayers, feeling anguish for our suffering and his own, yet always with a spirit that honored The Name. Jesus was drawn ever deeper into human obedience through what he suffered. Although everything that belonged to The Name had been given over to Jesus, yet he gave himself over to the work of attentive listening<sup>43</sup>—to The Name and to the experience of suffering. Always learning, forever immersing into the human experience, Jesus became the consummate vessel for The Name's restoration—perfect form for the function of making people their true selves. Through Jesus, all who listen attentively to the whispers of The Name's heart are made whole and complete: today, tomorrow, and into eternity. This is why The Name anointed Jesus to be the Last High Priest, the Eternal and Sovereign One, with justice and right relationships the result of his reign.

*To stand in the gap  
holding the hand of the dying  
walking beside the grieving  
listening attentively to another's flooded emotions  
while acknowledging one's own loss and pain  
is the work of a priest—  
ushering others into The Name's presence  
then stepping aside to allow her to heal.*

God, it's me. I am thankful Jesus did the heavy lifting of his priestly calling: bringing earth to heaven and heaven to earth, creating (and becoming) the path for wholeness, rewinding Death itself! Wow! All that yet never turning away from suffering—not his, not ours. How did he do it? I am not a priest, merely a "Minister of Word and Sacrament," yet I find it difficult to lean into human suffering (and would prefer to avoid or ignore it). I am thankful Jesus is my High Priest, who did the heavy lifting for me. I am grateful that when

I cannot bear to suffer alongside those whom I am called to love, Jesus is there with them. He always is and always will be.

### Hebrews 5:11–6:3

There is much for us to say about all this, but it may be more than you can handle right now. If you do not open your ears, you cannot listen to The Name's whispers. If you are not attentive, you will never perceive The Name's wisdom. Indeed, you ought to be able to teach her poetry by now but are still learning your A-B-Cs. Instead of feasting at The Name's banquet table you remain suckling at her breast. Her milk will keep you alive but only her solid food will help you grow more fully into right relationships. Discerning good from evil is no work for children but work for the mature. You're not ready—not yet. You need to grow up.

Therefore, let's move beyond the ABCs of the God-life and toward maturity in Jesus the Anointed. Move beyond saying, "I'm sorry" and trusting The Name to act on our behalf; beyond avoiding the things of death and trusting The Name for life; beyond rites and rituals and even beyond things like believing in resurrection and heaven. All these are good! But they are basic—like suckling mere milk when you should be learning to dance the God-rhythms every moment of every day as the Way to live. May The Name allow us the wonder and awe and joy of learning to dance.

*Beyond...  
my now  
my failure  
my being tired  
my being stubborn*

*Beyond...  
implies something more  
invites a journey  
entices with hope  
encourages a step*

*A step beyond where I am is all that is needed for today.*

God, it's me. Help me take the next step—the step beyond where I am. The step toward you. The step toward becoming my true self. The step toward loving neighbor and stranger, friend and enemy. The step I need this day. And only that step.

## Hebrews 6:4-12

Those who have heard the Heavenly music and danced to the God-rhythms, those who have tasted the sweet fruit of the God-life, those who have shared intimacy with The Name's Divine Spirit, if they then turn away from him cannot be coerced into returning.<sup>44</sup> To reject the Word after one has feasted upon it is like sitting with Jesus at his Last Supper and then shouting for him to be crucified—truly disgraceful behavior. Such people are not like land that receives The Name's blessing of rain and produces fruit with which to bless others. Rather such people are like land that receives rain and then produces thorns and thistles—the kind of land you don't want to go near—which is restored only when it is purged. The prophet Malachi spoke of such people when he said,

The fires of purgation reveal The Name's glory;  
dross is taken away,  
only that which is precious remains.<sup>45</sup>

While dross covers their eyes, they will not see. While dross fills their ears, they will not hear. Their only hope is the Refiner's fire.

Beloved, please do not fear such warnings but be confident The Name holds you firm and sure. He is just! He remembers that you love not with mere feelings but as actions, showing love to The Name by how you serve his people and help all. We set our hearts on the hope you will persevere on your journey—walk toward the horizon of your wholeness! Don't give in, never give up, for there are no slackers in The Name's kin-dom but only those who mirror the trust and forbearance of those who have already received his promised blessing.

*Will I be defined by my worst moment?  
Will I be judged by my worst decision?*

*or*

*Is there a Balm in Gilead?<sup>46</sup>  
Is there deliverance beyond what the mind imagines?*

*perhaps*

*The journey really is the destination!  
The destination rests with The Name more than with us!*

God, it's me. Lead me beyond green pastures to the places where I am confronted by the Cross: challenged to let go of childish ways, invited to trust what I cannot see (but for which I hope), emboldened to choose love. Lead me beyond the ABCs of the faith to the high and holy calling of the God-life: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you, my God.

## Hebrews 6:13–20

We need never doubt the assurance of The Name's embrace, for it endures from moment to moment, generation to generation, and into eternity. The Name's embrace is rooted in The her promise to our ancestors and grounded in the soil of her character—her own Name the basis of the promise to Abraham,

I will bless you and keep you  
My face will shine upon you.  
I will make you the father of many.  
My promise to you will endure forever.<sup>47</sup>

After many years, Abraham was blessed to receive what The Name had promised.

Here is how we can be confident The Name's embrace will never leave us: people are restrained by those who are stronger than themselves. In a similar way, people are compelled to live a certain way by sacred values honored by all. This is why people take an oath in a courtroom or pledge allegiance to the ideals of a nation—to promise publicly to speak truth, act with honor, and seek justice. But who is great enough to restrain The Name or compel her behavior?

Only The Name.

And so she promised by her own Name—her unchanging character of loving-kindness—to be the foundation of our hope, the assurance that brings courage to those who trust in her. This hope is like an anchor for our soul and keeps us from drifting even while tossed about by wind and waves. With this hope we dare enter into intimacy with her. There, in The Name's presence, we find Jesus, who like an advanced scout discovered the trail to The Name's embrace, created the path, and became the Way. Jesus brings The Name to us and us to The Name—forever a High Priest,<sup>48</sup> eternally the King, with right relationships always the gift he gives to all.

*Embrace*  
*giving, receiving*  
*assurance of affection*  
*physical manifestation of care*  
*connection*

God, it's me. I need to be embraced—by your love, by your care, by your presence felt as a heavy blanket on a winter's night. In your embrace I can sit and be still. In your embrace I peek through the darkness to eye the first glimmer of dawn. In your embrace I remember who I am and to whom I belong.

### **Hebrews 7:1–10**<sup>49</sup>

Melchizedek of the Hebrew Scriptures was king of Salem and a priest of The Name Most High. He encountered Abraham when our patriarch returned from defeating his enemies. Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham gave a tenth of all he possessed to this king-priest.<sup>50</sup> Melchizedek was a foreshadowing of the eternal priesthood of Jesus.

First, Melchizedek's name literally means “king of right relationships”<sup>51</sup> and *Salem* is a variant of *shalom*—meaning the robust peace of a community's wellness. Further, the Hebrew Scriptures recount no genealogy for Melchizedek—without mother or father, without beginning of days or end of life. In this way, Melchizedek resembles The Name's Son and remains a priest forever!

Second, Melchizedek was so great that even our patriarch Abraham gave to him a tithe—a tenth of his best possessions. Now, we know that in the Torah, the Levitical priests—that is, those who are descended from Abraham's son Levi, whom The Name appointed to be the tribe of the priesthood<sup>52</sup>—collect a tithe from their fellow Israelites, even though they too are Abraham's descendants. Melchizedek, however, wasn't a part of Abraham's family and wasn't a part of the Levitical priesthood, yet he collected a tithe—not from Abraham's descendants but from Abraham himself!

Third, we know (and this is beyond any dispute) the lesser is blessed by the greater. And what happened between Melchizedek and Abraham? Abraham (the lesser) was blessed by Melchizedek (the greater).

Finally, we must compare Melchizedek to the Levitical priests in this way: priests collect tithes and eventually die, whereas Melchizedek collected a tithe and, by the witness of the Scriptures, lives on. Think about this, too: as Levi was still yet to be born, there is a sense in which

Levi was still “in” Abraham, so when Abraham offered up a tithe to Melchizedek, it is as if Levi also gave the tithe.

*How far*  
*we go to “prove”*  
*a conviction that rests in faith*

*How high*  
*our own opinion*  
*that disregards others' beliefs*

*How wide*  
*God's vision*  
*that observes our hijinks*

*How much*  
*God's heart breaks*  
*at the lengths we travel to judge*

God, it's me. I love Jesus. I really do. And I believe the Christian faith, my faith, rests on a firm foundation of truth and logic, of experience and conviction. Must I work so hard to convince others (and myself) that Jesus is superior? What happens if I merely trust Jesus is enough? Enough love. Enough light. Enough life.

### **Hebrews 7:11–19**

So here is the question we must answer: If wholeness and completeness exist through the Levitical priests, why was there need for any other kind of priest? If Aaron's lineage of High Priests was sufficient to make people whole and complete, why did we need a priest like Melchizedek—the king of right relationships?

The answer is: When the premise changes,<sup>53</sup> so does the argument. When the “facts on the ground” change, so the response that is proper must change. When the old ways needed to pass away (for they could not accomplish all that was needed), a new Way was given. The new priesthood was revealed—unveiled in the person of Melchizedek—and the God-life itself was transformed according to new rhythms, a new beat. A new Way was born.

Melchizedek belonged to no tribe; he was not one of Abraham's sons. He never served at an altar—nothing died by his hand. Death never entered the world through his life. We know the Anointed One descended from Judah, not Levi. Beyond dispute, then, is this: when a priest

like Melchizedek is unveiled in the world, he enters the vocation not through tribal lineage as the Levitical priests did, but on the basis of his rising<sup>54</sup> into life anew and life eternal. Therefore, the Psalmist declared:

You are a priest into eternity;  
as Melchizedek, so you;  
he the foreshadowing, you the fulfillment.<sup>55</sup>

The premise changed because the old ways were unable to make us whole and complete. The Name sent the Anointed One to change the “facts on the ground” and create new rhythms for the God-life, through which intimacy with The Name can be received as a gift.

*As Autumn gives way to Winter  
so change my patterns  
of sleep and companionship  
and what brings joy  
and health.  
“Facts on the ground”  
like shifting sand  
cannot endure  
until enters the eternal Spring  
of resurrection.*

God, it's me. I participate in well-intentioned rituals: Sunday liturgy, morning prayers, dinner with my family, Netflix before bed. Show me which of these rituals are life-giving, spirit-deepening, friendship-enriching. Show me, too, what new patterns for making meaning and doing justice you would have me embrace, and then teach me not only to embrace but to practice them; not only to practice but to allow them to become habits of my heart, that the habits of my heart may shape my character and form the image of Jesus within me.

### Hebrews 7:20-28

There is yet another difference, too, between Melchizedek and the Levitical priests, who do not take an oath, for they are born into their vocation. Melchizedek, however, became a priest based on an oath—not his own but The Name's Word to him:

The Name's conviction is rooted in her character.  
Her conviction will not change:  
“You are a priest into eternity.”<sup>56</sup>

The Name's Word, rooted in unchanging conviction, assigned Jesus a holy calling: to ensure the sanctity of The Name's sacred promises.

The Levitical priests come and go, for they are born and die. Jesus, however, lives into eternity and so his priesthood is eternal. He will always bring The Name to the people and the people to The Name. He will always bring people's brokenness to her. He is the One through whom the people's cry is given Voice. Therefore, Jesus is able to make all people whole and complete—thoroughly and absolutely their true selves.

Jesus is the real deal—has the skills to do whatever is needed in this work of healing and transforming people into the divine image: beloved of The Name and without guile; pure in mind, body, and spirit amidst the contaminants of the world; heaven's emergence on earth.

Jesus is not like the High Priests elected annually. These High Priests must kill and kill and kill—continually—for their own sins and the sins of the people. Their sacrifices are temporary; needed again when sins are repeated. Jesus, however, ended the need for sacrifices to forgive sins when he offered himself. The Torah appointed the Levitical priests, but The Name's conviction, rooted in her character, named the Son according to her intention. The Name's oath created, conveyed, and consummated her purpose:<sup>57</sup> to transform both people and creation toward becoming whole and complete.

*Subtle the difference between  
conviction rooted in character  
and rigidity.*

*Faint the distinction between  
temporary blessing  
and eternal assurance.*

*One leads to a good place  
while the other leads to the only place  
I will be in you and you in me—forever.*

God, it's me. So much of my life is built on ethical foundations. My habits express that which is good and just and true. And yet the still, small voice of your Spirit whispers and invites and (sometimes) cajoles: The Name's intention is a character that reflects Jesus. The Name's design is the transformation of all things. The Name's invitation is for me to participate in all of it to the fullest. Whoa! May my choices today say, “Amen!” to the fullness of The Name's invitation.

## Hebrews 8:1–13

Now, here's the point: Jesus is just such a High Priest (of the order of Melchizedek—king of right relationships). Jesus is The Name's "right hand man" and hears when The Name whispers his desire, delight, or determination. Jesus serves in the midst of The Name's eternal dwelling place, the heavenly home that no human hands can build. Every High Priest, being mortal, is assigned special gifts to offer and ordinary sacrifices to make. But not so with Jesus. (Were Jesus merely mortal and of the family of Aaron or Levi, he too would offer such sacrifices, as Torah commands. But as Jesus is eternal, he serves not for a lifetime but for eternity.) The Temple in which the High Priest offers sacrifice is the shadow of The Name's heavenly home, a glorious replica of the eternal, but still only a replica. This is why Moses was warned while speaking with The Name on Mount Sinai to build the Tabernacle—also known as the Tent of Meeting—to precise standards, so that it would convey the spiritual truths that it represented.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Jesus' ministry of creating right relationships is more dependable, for it is built on a more certain foundation.<sup>59</sup> Cracks exist in the foundation of the Levitical priesthood that Jesus' priesthood repairs and makes whole.

*The Saguaro in my backyard beckons:  
"Can you wait with me?  
Can your prayers and praise remain lifted  
as long and as high,  
enduring beyond your mortal existence?"*

*The Saguaro scoffs at my temporal concerns:  
I flit about like a gnat,  
waxing hot and cold,  
refusing to endure,  
failing the test of steadfastness.*

*I must learn from my friend the Saguaro:  
Patience is a gift.  
Endurance is a virtue.  
Praise and prayer are intended not for the moment but  
to sculpt a soul worthy of eternity.*

God, it's me. I long for certainty: not the kind conveyed by power and privilege, nor that which comes from market success or insurance. No, I long for the certainty that my life is built on that which endures: character and hope and a love that will not let me go.

I long for the certainty that my well-being depends not on human choices but upon Divine choosing: I belong to you—body and soul, in life and in death. I am humbled and grateful, that my longing is welcomed by Jesus.

## Hebrews 8:8–13

We see The Name's desire to repair right relationships and make whole again the human family in the words she spoke through the truth-teller Jeremiah:<sup>60</sup>

"Look to the horizon!" says The Name.  
"I will fulfill all goodness for the divided and exiled;<sup>61</sup>  
sacred promise I will accomplish.

"This promise—my promise—is fresh:  
an open window through which the Wind blows,  
a wide-open door that welcomes and invites.

"This promise depends only on my Word:  
neither the distracted trust of our ancestors  
nor their journey's detoured steps define what shall be.

"This sacred promise I make to my people:  
I will inscribe justice upon their hearts and minds;  
I will embrace them as a mother with her infant.

"Through intimacy and experience  
they shall know me;  
Through perception and intuition, I shall be known.<sup>62</sup>

"I will envelop them in mercy that astonishes;  
I will cause their brokenness to become like a dream.  
I will restore them to their true purpose."

In declaring this sacred promise, The Name reminds us that transformation only comes as that which is tired and weary is relinquished.

*Tired and weary,  
Covid continues to oppress  
yet new every morning  
the dew of God's mercy—  
the yellow finch upon my fountain,  
the encouraging word from my friend,  
the gentle touch of Holy Spirit reminding me,  
"I am known, and I am loved."*

God, it's me. Help me to hear your covenant as if you spoke it this morning, as fresh word. Help me to receive it not merely with my mind but also in the depths of my soul. This promise—your promise—was spoken to those desperate for hope and longing to believe they were still your beloved people. Help me to hear it just as they heard it.

### Hebrews 9:1–10

When The Name crafted the sacred promise between him and his people Israel, it included rules and rituals to show the way people are to live in mutual love with The Name and one another. Israel's ritual life is enacted in a grand and glorious Temple, whose every furnishing foreshadowed The Name's perfect plan for his people.

There is a curtain separating the people from a room called Sacred Space. The Levitical priests each serve in this room, which contains a lampstand and bread, symbols of The Name's power and provision. A second curtain separates Sacred Space from a room called Divine Dwelling, for it leads the High Priest into The Name's direct presence. The symbols in this room are all covered in gold, call people to prayer, and remind the people of The Name's power. Ancient artifacts are contained in the ark of the covenant—manna, Aaron's staff, and the stone tablets upon which the commandments were inscribed. Above the ark hang representations of heavenly beings, which overlook an elaborate seat, known as the Seat of Mercy, upon which the High Priest offers sacrifices. So sacred is the Divine Dwelling that only the High Priest enters it and only once a year, and always with sacrificial blood to be offered for his own sins of commission and the people's sins of omission. (There is more to these sacred rooms, but this is enough detail for now.)

The Name intends for these rooms and the rituals commanded for them to be a foreshadowing of that which was fulfilled in Jesus the Anointed. The Divine Spirit works in these places and through them, upon these priests and through them, both to enact The Name's mercy and to point to the culmination of The Name's mysterious plan: that in Jesus foreshadowing becomes fulfillment. That which foreshadows lacks the power to form the moral conscience<sup>63</sup> of the worshiper, but that which is fulfillment transforms the worshiper into their true self. Rules and rituals, as valuable as they are (especially as they are given by The Name), are but heralds awaiting the *kairos*,<sup>64</sup> the sacred time when The Name sets things straight.

*Shadows expose light. I  
see God's face in the other,  
see Jesus in the least of his brothers and sisters.*

*Foreshadows point to light not yet dawning. I  
trust beyond experience,  
hope beyond vision.*

*Shadows and foreshadows—though glorious—  
revealed as sacred imitation  
when consummation comes.*

God, it's me. I confess I read this passage through the lens of my competitive spirit—"My team is better than your team!" I repent, for both "teams" belong to you. I seek your mercy, that I may see how you choose us all to craft your Story—the good news narrative told not in a single lifetime but from generation to generation and age to age. I seek to be formed and transformed, that I might see not merely what is but perceive what can be. May I look not merely at what I am but behold what you would have me become. May I step from shadows into light and beyond foreshadowing into fulfillment.

### Hebrews 9:11–15

When the Anointed One was revealed as High Priest of all the good foreshadowed in the Temple (and now fulfilled in his person), he drew near the Divine Dwelling of The Name's presence in heaven and not merely the room found in the Jerusalem Temple. He drew near not by means of animal sacrifice but through the offering of his own self. He drew near to reclaim all creation from the grip of the evil one, to repurchase our lives for The Name's purpose. He drew near not merely to make us outwardly clean but to form our moral conscience. He drew near that we might turn away from marching into death and begin to serve The Name as the path for our life.

The Anointed One is The Name's ultimate and final "go between," bringing us to The Name and The Name to us. Through the Anointed One we receive her invitation to lay claim to our divine birthright. Through the Anointed One we hear her summons to live as her beloved children. Through the Anointed One we are liberated from looking back upon our falls and failures that we might live into the lovingkindness in which we now find ourselves.

*Intimacy is a wondrous gift  
seductive and scary  
inviting discovery while requiring revelation.*

*Jesus said it best,  
“that they may all be one. As you, Father,  
are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.”<sup>65</sup>*

*Patrick said it well, too:  
“May the Christ in me speak to the Christ in thee,  
that we may be one in him.”<sup>66</sup>*

*Draw near...  
Draw near...  
Draw near!*

*God, it's me. As Jesus drew near to you, may I follow  
in drawing near. As Jesus drew near to me, may I draw  
near to him. As Jesus drew near, not just to tidy my  
outward person but to transform my inward being, may  
I accept his influence, welcome his comfort, receive his  
challenge, and walk boldly into his lovingkindness.  
Liberated from looking back upon my failures, may I  
walk forward with him toward my best, true self.*

## **Hebrews 9:16–28**

“Why is it,” you ask, “that the Anointed One had to die? Wasn't the Anointed One chosen and beloved of The Name?” It's complicated.<sup>67</sup>

First, let's remind ourselves how covenants—as sacred promises—work. They are like a person's will. When one makes a will, their intentions are made public to all—convictions and commitments extending beyond life and into death. The covenant, like a will, requires death before it is enacted, for it was made to endure for all time.

So it was with the first covenant made with Israel—The Name's promise spoken through Moses. When Moses explained to the Israelites both the gifts and responsibilities of being The Name's beloved, he expressed the solemnity of both The Name's blessing and the people's obligation.<sup>68</sup> Moses used symbols of commitment and cleansing to honor the sacredness of the moment: the sacrifice of calves, the sprinkling of blood and water to consecrate both Word and people. He said, “The calves' blood is both sign and seal of The Name's sacred promise and our holy commitment to live as his beloved.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, Moses sprinkled blood in the Tent of Meeting and in many other rituals: each a sign to remind the people to

let go of their old lives and their false selves.<sup>70</sup> Only by releasing our brokenness can we embrace The Name's healing lovingkindness.

So it is also with the new covenant made through Israel and extended to all humankind—it was enacted through death not using those things that were mere copies: signs that pointed to the heavenly reality, symbols that signified a purpose greater than themselves. The Anointed One entered not the human copy—the Temple—but the Divine Dwelling in The Name's direct presence! The Jerusalem Temple, with its unending need of sacrifice—priests drenched in the blood of bulls and calves, sheep and doves—was not sufficient to transform all things into new creation.

Therefore, the Anointed One entered the Divine Dwelling to present himself as the perfect gift, which he needed to do only once for all eternity rather than over and over, for his sacrifice was not mere calves and goats and doves but his eternal person. The Anointed One did not suffer again and again from the beginning of creation, but once for all *chronos* to bring about the *kairos*<sup>71</sup> of new creation. In the Anointed One is the consummation of creation's purpose—its fulfilment discovered in his self-emptying love. Everyone dies and looks into the mirror of their own brokenness, which is a weight we cannot carry, a truth we cannot endure. But the Anointed One carries what we cannot and brings to us a truth deeper than ourselves—the truth that we are beloved, embraced, and held near to The Name's bosom. When the Day comes and the Anointed One is revealed in his full radiance, he will bring to us the culmination of this truth, and we will be made whole and complete, our true selves.

*Forgiveness as letting go  
releasing past hurt  
sending painful memories away  
embracing a new future.*

*God no longer punitive,  
not finding glee,  
neither inflicting suffering,  
nor cosmic child abuse.*

*Forgiveness, then, begins  
with emptiness  
seeking fullness in what  
brings justice and joy.*

God, it's me. I shudder at the thought of how barbaric rituals were in centuries past: the blood of calves required for reconciliation. I mock the ancients, who believed such barbarous things could represent the God-rhythms. Far more sophisticated is our generation, who decimates thousands from the air—If we cannot see them, did people really die? Far more urbane is our culture, whose urban landscapes overmatch ancient Jerusalem in the shedding of blood. O Name, I am so glad I have moved beyond my silly, ancient forebearers, who thought forgiveness was somehow painful. I am so, so glad to have adopted a more modern perspective that says forgiveness is easy, abundant, and, above all, cheap.<sup>72</sup>

### Hebrews 10:1–18

The Torah is an outline<sup>73</sup> of The Name's good that will be revealed in fullness, but it is not the full reality. Like a shadow that presents one's silhouette but cannot display one's heart and soul, so the Temple's sacrifices guide us in the direction of the God-rhythms and signify the God-life without being able to transform one's true self. The sacrifices remind us annually, from year to year and age to age, of our need—and also that bulls and goats cannot make us whole and complete.

The Anointed One pointed beyond the sacrifices of bulls and goats to a deeper truth. He quoted the Psalmist:

O Name, you do not yearn for what I give beyond me;  
your desire is for what I give from within me—  
not the riches of calves and coins,  
but the treasures of my heart.<sup>74</sup>

What is given from beyond oneself is good and The Name commands it in accordance with Torah, to point toward the God-rhythms and to signify the God-life. Yet giving from within oneself, the treasures of one's heart, is the Way to discovery of one's full humanity. The Anointed One let go of the former to embrace the latter. The Anointed One established the Way of the God-life: to stand for The Name not through bulls but through the offering of his own body, given once for all eternity. The Anointed One established that it is not through the sacrifice of calves but through the offering of the Christ that we are made whole and complete.

Day after endless day, the Levitical priests slaughter livestock—turning Jerusalem's streams red during the Passover—only to return to slaughter again, for guiltless and goodness are not the same thing. Those who offer sacrifice take away guilt for a time, but without goodness one must return—again and again and again.

But since the Anointed One, as a priest like Melchizedek—the king of right relationships, offered his own body rather than a bull, his goodness affects all who encounter his lovingkindness. The Anointed One needed not to return again and again to slaughter but instead returned to his home in The Name's presence. He was commissioned with The Name's authority and awaits the culmination of the age to come. By his one act of self-giving, the Anointed One makes whole and complete all whom The Name has set apart for salvation and for service.

The Divine Spirit bears witness to this new reality through the truth-teller Jeremiah:

“This is the sacred promise I make,” says The Name.  
“I will inscribe my poetry upon their hearts,  
my prose upon their minds.  
Broken they are, yet I will forget it;  
Ornery they are, yet I will remember it no more.”

When The Name heals our brokenness, bulls need not be slaughtered. When The Name releases us from our own orneriness, calves rest easy and give thanks for the Christ.

*I spoke kind words  
(with rage in my heart):  
Was I just and good?*

*I wrote the check  
(begrudging every stroke of the pen):  
Did it draw me closer to God?*

*I stopped pretending  
(honesty and authenticity are surprisingly difficult):  
Is this the Way of Jesus?*

God, it's me. May I grow toward becoming good even as I seek to look good. May my inward growing toward the image of Jesus be reflected in actions and attitudes toward those I encounter each day. May I both give you the treasures of my heart and express outwardly the truth you are forming inwardly. Help me, O Name, to realize your call upon me is both/and rather than either/or.

## Hebrews 10:19–25

Because we have been released from our own brokenness by Jesus' healing balm, we are confident—assured that we belong to The Name's family. Because we have been liberated from our own orneriness, we walk forward with conviction that Jesus escorts us into The Name's Divine Dwelling—assured Jesus offered his service freely; indeed, it brought him joy to serve in this way.

Therefore, we draw near, resting ourselves upon The Name's bosom, with confidence, conviction, and trust that we are both declared innocent and immersed into the renewing waters of the God-life. We grab hold of The Name's hand knowing he will never let us go. We walk beside The Name rejoicing in his faithfulness, rejoicing that his promise is our hope.

Therefore, we plan day and night how to encourage each other toward *agape* and inspire each other toward goodness. We gather together because we know it builds a strong foundation for our being "In-Courage-Minted." We continue to gather because we know we are "In-Sprit-led" when we are together rather than isolated, alone, and without the support that only our family in Jesus can provide. This is important! And we need each other all the more as we await the Day of Jesus to be revealed.

*COVID cases rise,  
my temptation to hunker down rises, too.  
My head lies to my heart,  
"I don't need other people around."*

*COVID cases rise,  
my determination rises faster.  
My heart responds,  
"Separate doesn't have to mean isolation."*

*COVID cases continue,  
my affection for the Body of Jesus grows.  
"Christian" is always a plural, never singular:  
"me" and "we" intertwined in love.*

God, it's me. Though an individual, grant unto me the gift of community. Though I have my own thoughts, grant unto me the joy of learning from others. Though I enjoy a little "alone time," grant unto me the joy of knowing your fellowship of love. Though I like "me," grant unto me an even greater appreciation for "we."

## Hebrews 10:20–39

If we knowingly walk in the wrong direction, we will not get to our destination. If we deliberately choose isolation, we will not share community. If we purposefully aim for a lesser good, we will miss the mark of The Name's perfect desire for our wholeness.<sup>75</sup> The only thing we should expect is for our choices to be delivered into The Name's purging fire.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, it is better that our choices be consumed as The Name's enemies than for us to be consumed!

To treat Moses' teachings as unimportant is to miss their ability to bless us. Playing hide-and-seek with The Name's mercy is foolishness. Anyone who treats the sacred as profane obscures our vision of the God-life and compromises our ability to dance the God-rhythms. When we treat the profane as sacred, we obscure the beauty and blessing of The Name's Beloved, the Anointed One. His giving himself as an offering invites us to join him in a life-long journey of discovering our best and true self. Why would we treat The Name's lovingkindness so contemptuously by rejecting her invitation to dance?

Have a healthy awe of and reverence for The Name's judgment. As the Torah and the Psalms speak:<sup>77</sup>

"I live by my values," says the Lord.  
"Decisions of right and wrong affirm my character."

Or again,

The Name will separate wheat from chaff,  
Dividing precious metal from dross.

Being held in The Name's hands inspires awe and invites right action, especially for those wise enough to heed the opportunity to draw near!

Remember the early days of your journey with the Anointed One, when you accepted the light shining upon and within you. Remember that even great suffering could not dissuade you from trusting The Name: insult and intimidation were no match for your conviction. You walked with siblings in their suffering and surrendered earthly possessions to snatch up heavenly ones, in the certainty that only heavenly possessions endure.

Don't lose confidence now! Instead of losing confidence, persist, persevere, and proceed ever deeper into The Name's heart and mind. Dive into her waters. Immerse yourselves in her lovingkindness. Bathe in the hope of her promise that she is near.

The *kairos* is near  
The One who comes is coming!  
The *chronos* approaches when all shall be revealed.<sup>78</sup>

Or again,

Trust is the path to right relationship!  
Joy cannot be found by those who hide from love.<sup>79</sup>

We are not those who hide from love, shriveling in fear that we might be seen as we are. Instead, we trust that even as we are seen, so we are loved. We trust that though we are broken, so shall The Name make us whole and complete—our best and true selves.

*Woke up this morning to  
possibilities, opportunities, challenges  
to be shaped, formed, and transformed  
or twisted, distorted, and warped,  
taking another step  
with your lovingkindness as companion  
on a journey toward becoming  
my best and true self.*

*God, it's me. Help me be present in the moments I live today: aware and noticing myself and others, recognizing hurts and listening to your Spirit's nudge. Help me live where my feet happen to be and not repeating an unforgiven past or rehearsing an uncertain future. Help me to claim your lovingkindness for me in this moment and then share it with the one and the many whom I will encounter today. Help me make choices that become habits and practice habits that will shape me in your image.*

## Hebrews 11:1–16

Trust is the mortar that holds the walls of our spiritual home in place. Trust is the guarantor that our conviction is sufficient foundation upon which to build our spiritual home. Trust creates our conviction that even though our physical vision is limited, yet our spiritual discernment rightly perceives The Name's goodness and the many gifts that come from his lovingkindness.

The ancients lived and died singing the wonders of The Name's goodness and gifts. Our spiritual fathers and mothers discovered the blessings that can be received only through trust. Trust conceives in us wonder and awe that The Name spoke all creation into existence—from nothing

to abundance as a single Word. Consider the lived and living witness of our spiritual fathers and mothers—all of whom received The Name's blessing through trust.

Abel, who trusted The Name that his gift would be welcomed and who, also through trust, was welcomed into right relationship. Abel's trust speaks to each new generation even though he is long dead.

Enoch, who trusted The Name and whose life was taken into the heavenly dwelling, Enoch made The Name's heart happy. Without trust, it is impossible to make his heart happy, but through trusting that The Name is and loves, we are compelled to seek his face, which always shines upon those who seek him.

Noah, who trusted The Name enough to build a HUGE boat on nothing more than The Name's warning. Noah's trust led him to save his family. His trust declared with conviction the brokenness of the world; his trust led him to inherit right relationship with The Name.

Abraham, who trusted The Name when called to go to a foreign land, a land not his own, among a people not his own. He obeyed, taking a journey into the unknown. What Abraham knew (but only because he trusted) was that The Name had made him a promise. That promise was enough for Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob to wander forward, in search of the dwelling place not constructed by human hands but grown from the seeds of trust planted in The Name's promise.

Sarah trusted The Name's promise. Though she was well past the ideal age for childbearing, Sarah trusted The Name would be faithful to her and to his promise that she would bear a son through whom all nations would be blessed. From Abraham and Sarah, well-elderly though they were, came great nations—offspring as plentiful as the stars in the night sky or as abundant as the sand on the seashore. Sarah's trust has led generations to trust.<sup>80</sup>

All these ancients were still living by trust when they died. The Name's promises were still in front of them, still their horizon. They were strangers to the experience of receiving The Name's blessings fulfilled, foreigners to the full benefits of being citizens of his beloved community. They understood their true citizenship is not on earth but is discovered wherever The Name dwells. They weren't looking for a country to call their own but searching for their true home in The Name's presence, wherever it would be discovered. They weren't looking backward, homesick for their past, but forward toward a future in which they would walk alongside The Name. And The Name welcomed them into his beloved community, for they made his heart happy.

*Life shatters, sometimes, like a broken mirror,  
distorting the image I see before me.*

*My brother and father died the same week.*

*The Capitol was invaded and officers died.*

*My friend without insurance needs a hip replacement.*

*What is trust when the mirror breaks?*

*What image do I see when I look into its fractured shards?*

*Trust sees the hurting child within another.*

*Trust hears the plaintive cry in the harsh barking.*

*Trust feels civility's heartbeat—not quite dead, yet.*

*Trust extends an olive branch in spite of all the evidence.*

*Trust looks in the shattered mirror*

*and sees the one becoming like Jesus.*

God, it's me. It's hard to trust when your brother attacks—did Cain compromise Abel's trust? It's easy to trust on Easy Street—Ah, to be escorted to heaven like Enoch! It's scary to trust in the face of cataclysm—“foxhole faith” that endures, like Noah possessed, is easier said than done. I like the experience of Abraham and Sarah, for mutual support and encouragement make trusting much easier. O Name, however it happens, help me to trust that you exist and you love, now and for always.

### **Hebrews 11:17–31**

The story of “salvation history” cannot be told without trust. Trusting The Name, Abraham passed his test. Though Abraham had embraced The Name's promise that he would be the father of a great nation, he was asked to offer up his son, as if—quite suddenly—The Name had embraced the practices of the pagan gods to demand child sacrifice (of course, we know this was not the case). Abraham did not understand how The Name's seeming demand conformed to the promise, but trusted The Name could raise the dead, if need be. Indeed, through Abraham's trust in The Name's goodness, Isaac was not sacrificed, and Abraham received his son—his one and only son—into his embrace.

Trusting The Name, Isaac blessed his two sons, Jacob and Esau, toward the fulfillment of their journeys.

Trusting The Name, Jacob blessed all of Joseph's sons, even as he approached his death and had to lean on his staff to do it.

Trusting The Name, Joseph inspired hope in his family that they would be led out of Egypt to return to the

land of promise, and even gave them instructions to take his bones with them when they left!

The story of “salvation history” cannot be told without trust. Trusting The Name, Moses' parents hid him for three months, in defiance of Pharaoh's decree that the Hebrews' male babies were to be slaughtered. Trusting The Name, they were unafraid of Pharaoh.

Trusting The Name, Moses refused to be known as son to Pharaoh's daughter (even though she raised him) but instead joined himself to The Name's family (even though they were rejected and relegated to abuse, oppression, and suffering). Moses' trust foreshadowed a devotion to the Anointed One—the emptiness of Jesus being preferred over the fullness of Egypt, ephemeral indulgence rejected for the sake of eternal extravagance.

Trusting The Name, Moses provoked Pharaoh's anger, yet persevered because he perceived The Name's presence was behind, beside, and before him.

Trusting The Name, Moses enacted the Passover, applying the blood of goats upon the door frame to preserve the firstborn children of Israel from the Destroyer.

The story of “salvation history” cannot be told without trust. Trusting The Name, the Hebrew people passed through the Sea just as the Destroyer had passed over them as a people. The Egyptian armies, however, were not so fortunate and became the Destroyer's feast.

Trusting The Name, the armies of Israel marched around the walls of Jericho for seven days—The Name's victory their Sabbath rest.

Trusting The Name, Rahab the Canaanite welcomed the Hebrew spies, and she and her family and all who belonged to her were saved from destruction.

The story of “salvation history” cannot be told without trust.

*Trusting The Name  
human assent  
to divine yes.*

*Trusting The Name  
courage and humility  
in conjugal union.*

*Trusting The Name  
her story  
becoming our story.*

God, it's me. The river of history meanders, its path changing course because of single acts of courage. History, like that river, deepens during seasons of humility and becomes perilous when arrogance is ascendent. Teach me, therefore, to intertwine courage and humility so that, when called upon to act, I might choose wisely.

### Hebrews 11:32-40

Oh my! I don't have time to tell all the stories of The Name being at work through truth-tellers and rulers, through both the mighty and the humble—Gideon and Barak, Samson and Jephthah, David and Samuel, and so many others. With The Name at work through their trusting, kingdoms fell and justice rose, the mouths of lions were shut and the fury of flames quenched. With The Name at work through their trusting, soldiers escaped the sword and the weak were filled with strength, enemy armies were routed and mothers saw their children return home alive, as if raised from the dead!

Still others<sup>81</sup> showed The Name's strength through their willingness and ability to endure opposition. With The Name at work through their trusting, they faced angry mobs, unfair punishment, and even imprisonment. With The Name at work through their trusting, they were executed—stones thrown and swords swung, some even sawed in two! With The Name at work through their trusting, they were clothed in poverty and adorned with persecution. The world found no place for them, so they wandered the deserts and camped in the mountains, caves their boudoir and crevices their study. Yet even these made The Name's heart happy because they trusted him. Though they did not see the promise fulfilled within their own lifetimes, they trusted The Name's inexorable plan, his inescapable vision, would bring them to us, and we will be made whole and complete together.

*Trusting The Name—  
at times a ballet of blessing  
at times a samba of suffering*

*Trusting The Name—  
path diverging in the woods  
choosing the one that leads to wholeness*

*Trusting The Name—  
not always easy  
always best*

God, it's me. Temptation comes: to define my faith in terms of blessing, the Tempter at work through bad theology and my own privilege. I do not want to see suffering in others and cannot welcome it in myself. Yet life comes to me as it does to all, and when it does, will I affirm you are with me even then? When confronted by opposition, will I seek ways to have you at work through my trusting, or choose to show the bastards what I'm made of? Which is the path that makes your heart happy?

### Hebrews 12:1-3

Look around at all the people who have lived trusting The Name—a throng of sacred testimony to her work among them and through them, a chorus of witness from every century, singing songs of praise to her justice and joy. With mentors like this, be inspired! Be encouraged! Take your broken ways of living, stuff them in a box, and set the box out front to be collected with the trash. Persevere toward the goal of becoming your true self. Turn the agony<sup>82</sup> of sin into the triumph of transformation through daily practices that become holy habits.

Here is a good place to start this work of transformation: Look at Jesus—don't turn away and don't take your eyes from him. Jesus started us on the path of trusting and will accompany us every step of our journey. He will make our trusting whole and complete so that we will become our true selves, which will be his great joy to see. For the sake of this joy Jesus endured the Cross, didn't care a whit that others thought it shameful, for he knew it was the Way that would lead us back to The Name. At The Name's side is where we can find Jesus now, running the family business of *agape*.

More than just glancing at Jesus, keep looking, then ponder and wonder: How deep was his love for us that he would endure such hostility and hatred? As you ponder and wonder, turn your thoughts toward meditation—give it a good think. Then you will be inspired and encouraged. You will neither fade nor falter from the sacred work of keeping your gaze on Jesus.

*The willow beckons  
its arms relaxed in contemplation  
inviting me to join in silent admiration.*

*The dove dips its beak into the fountain  
thirsty for The Name's provision  
inviting me to relish creation's goodness.*

*The Cross, a multi-colored Talavera, hangs  
like Jesus to whom it points,  
reminding me to celebrate: I am not alone on this journey.*

*Seeing, looking, pondering until I perceive  
the cloud of witnesses in creation and community,  
with Jesus, my Savior, my beatific vision.*

God, it's me. Fix my eyes on Jesus. Let me not look away—when social media roars or church gossip whispers. Let my gaze remain steadfast—when family troubles erupt or obligations burden. Let me perceive the One who entered into human suffering to bear it and break its power. Let me ponder the truth that only that which is embraced can be transformed. Fix my eyes on Jesus. Let me not look away.

### **Hebrews 12:4–17<sup>85</sup>**

Becoming your true self is a difficult journey, and you all still have far to travel. You believe yourselves to be constantly fighting against your addictions, your temptations to betray your values, and your desire for personal control over people and circumstances. Yet in your struggles, you have not yet given your lives but have neglected the truth found in Proverbs:<sup>84</sup>

My child,

The Name allows you to endure struggles;  
through them you draw near to him,  
and are trained in right relationships.

As The Name's beloved children,  
struggles forge your identity—  
adoption the journey's beginning,  
inheritance the journey's end.

Struggles and even suffering tutor us in the Way of Jesus, which is a cruciform life. Without adversity, there is no learning, no growth, no formation nor transformation into the image of Jesus within you. Without adversity, it is as if you aren't even The Name's children!

As we respected our earthly parents' discipline, their imperfect attempts to train us to be good and kind and faithful, so we must accept, receive, and submit to The Name's tutelage, which leads us toward right relationships and being made whole and complete. Through struggles, the image of Jesus is formed within us. Through suffering, our character begins to mirror his. Adversity, then, can be

our *paidagogos*,<sup>85</sup> the path our journey takes to lead us toward right relationships and The Name's *shalom*.

If all this sounds overwhelming, take heart. Be of good courage! Be strong in The Name, remembering these words from the Proverbs:<sup>86</sup>

The Name walks with us on our path:  
the lame walk, and the broken are healed.

Therefore, search for The Name's *shalom* for yourself and seek it for your community—being set apart from the values of the world and set apart for The Name's purposes. Being set apart enables us to see The Name clearly, whereas being mired in the muddy waters of the world obscures our vision and our visage. Cultivate loving-kindness in one another because its absence even in one causes trouble for many and is the root of bitterness within the gathering. Warn those who pervert their desires, exploiting people and things. They reason with their loins and think with their stomachs, like Esau who sold his blessing for a pittance. What did it get him? Only heartache and tears.

*The road less traveled:  
I don't want to travel it!  
Yet it leads to me.*

God, it's me. Discipline is not something we like in our culture. We prefer rights to responsibilities. If we choose discipline because we are a scholar or an athlete, it is "our" choice, not something imposed upon us by another. Yet life does not cooperate. Choices are taken away by illness or accident, by circumstances and choices (our own and others'). Rather than rage at the unfairness of life, help me learn this truth in every given moment: You are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me, and you are forming the image of Jesus within me. Open my heart that I may accept, receive, and submit myself to you, even when life's troubles confront me.

### **Hebrews 12:18–29**

Though your struggles are great, you need not fear. Consider what confronted our ancestors: a mountain that could not be touched, enveloped in flames, shrouded in darkness, gloom, and storm. They heard a trumpet blast from above and a voice that caused those who heard it to

beg that the voice would speak no more, for it overwhelmed them with fear: “If an animal touches this mountain, kill it!” Even Moses was afraid.<sup>87</sup>

Your path is different, for you were invited to journey with Jesus to Mount Zion—and not just the earthly city of Jerusalem but the Jerusalem that comes from above, the heavenly city of the living God. You accepted the invitation to join tens of thousands of The Name’s messengers gathered in celebration and song. You are among those whose names are inscribed in the halls of heaven, who have become members of an inclusive gathering: those who belong to Jesus, the proto-human—elder brother of us all. With Jesus leading the Way, you stand before The Name without fear—trusting her judgment will lead to you being made whole and complete. You trusted that the sprinkled blood of Jesus, who lived fully human yet without sin, spoke more powerfully even than Abel’s innocent blood (which is saying quite a lot).

Therefore, do not avoid the word spoken by Jesus, and the Way his life directs you to walk. You cannot escape the message his sprinkled blood whispers to us all: “I gave my life for you, for you are precious to me. Do not reject my love!” If our ancestors did not escape consequence when they rejected Moses, who is of the Earth, how will we escape consequence when we shun the gracious invitation and loving-kindness of the One who comes from heaven?

In the days of Moses, the Earth shook. In the days to come, both Earth and heaven will shake. All creation will have its reckoning, and only those who abide in The Name will remain.<sup>88</sup> Those who do not reject but who receive The Name cannot be shaken and will remain. Therefore, let us be thankful and worship The Name with the goal of pleasing her—showing her reverence as we are filled with awe. That which cannot be shaken will endure, for,

The Name is a fire that consumes.<sup>89</sup>

*Reject or receive?*

*Heart closing or opening?*

*Fear overwhelming or reverence blossoming?*

*What shall I choose?*

*Choosing to abide*

*I lean into the love*

*of the One who fills*

*me with trust.*

*Receiving*

*Opening*

*Blossoming*

*I am chosen for love.*

God, it’s me. It is easy to fear these days. Heck, it’s always been easy to fear. As I grow older (and, hopefully, more mature), I recognize the temptations to be afraid are accompanied by a growing, maturing assurance of your love. I choose to abide in your love, to remain in your embrace, to stay with you “though the waters roar and the Earth quakes, for you, O Name, are my refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.”<sup>90</sup>

### Hebrews 13:1–6

Here is a hodgepodge of wisdom and counsel. Abide in love<sup>91</sup> as siblings called to travel together on a sacred journey.

There are consequences when we neglect to welcome strangers, not the least being that we might turn away those whom The Name sends to us as messengers!

Suffer with those who are in prison as if you are the one who suffers and suffer also with those who are tortured<sup>92</sup> as if you are the ones being mistreated.

Marriage is a trust to be honored by all who make promises before The Name and to each other. Don’t vandalize the promises you made but remain conscientious, connected, and caring to your beloved. The Name’s refining fire consumes the behavior of all who choose to stray.

The Way of Jesus is like the love of family—accepting one’s situation and circumstances as best as we are able, embracing both joy and sorrow, free to choose to be our best, true self. The Way of Jesus does not replace people with things but trusts The Name who said,

I got you! Every step, every breath.

‘Til long journey’s end.

Short step or giant leap, I’ll be there.<sup>93</sup>

And so, with robust hope, we confess,

The Name’s got my back!

I have nothing to worry about.

Live or die, I’m on The Name’s side.<sup>94</sup>

*Hodgepodge of wisdom  
Sharing in community  
All are beloved*

God, it's me. The Church, YOUR Church, is called many things: the Body of Christ, the Beloved Community, a gathering of saints and sinners. It is also the place where we discover how delightful and how difficult it is to do life together in Jesus' name. Like our human families, our church families are places where we learn to love (and find the lessons trying at times). Help me both to learn the lessons I need to learn and be beneficial to others in learning the lessons you have set for them.

**Hebrews 13:7–19**

Remember the way your leaders live; recount their words and emulate their behavior. Look closely and see how their behaviors become practices. Look closer still and perceive how their practices become habits. Mimic them that the image of Jesus the Anointed may express itself in you. His character and fidelity remain unwavering yesterday, today and into all tomorrows.

Don't stumble over weird teachings whose focus is fringe concerns. Focus instead on what matters: The Name's loving-kindness that strengthens our hearts. Debates about rituals and ceremonies or what foods make one more likable to The Name don't benefit you. (They don't really benefit anyone.) The animal sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple need not concern us. The High Priest carries the blood of animals into the Divine Dwelling as an offering, but the other priests burn the animal's flesh outside the city. This is all symbolic of what happened to Jesus, who suffered outside the city gate to lead people into right relationship with The Name. Likewise, we walk beyond the city, to follow in Jesus' footsteps, to walk his Way, even if it leads us to be reviled and repudiated as unworthy of The Name. We know where our true home is—not Jerusalem but the place that remains,<sup>95</sup> the abiding place The Name intended from before the beginning of time, intends today, and will bring to fulfillment in the Day of Jesus.

Through Jesus let us offer sacrifices—of praise! Praise Jesus morning, noon, and night! Talk openly about him and then match your walk with your talk—doing good in partnership<sup>96</sup> with others. This is the sacrifice that truly matters and makes The Name's heart happy.

Be willing to yield to the leaders who keep watch over you as responsible for others' well-being. Help them help you grow toward your true self. Make their work among you a source of joy not grief, for leaders who experience their jobs as drudgery are rarely able to maintain cohesion in the Body.

Finally, pray for us, for we seek the beauty and wholeness that comes from living as The Name's beloved. Especially pray that I may find my way back to you soon, restored to my place in your beloved community.

*Easy to confuse  
symbols for substance,  
appearances for deeper truth.*

*Simple to see  
what matters:  
partnership and praise.*

*Trust your belovedness.  
Walk ever deeper into the One  
whose character and fidelity remain unwavering.*

God, it's me. I seek your face in others: friends and mentors and spiritual guides. When I see you in them, I am encouraged and inspired to walk deeper into my belovedness. Do others see you in me? Are others encouraged and inspired? O Name, help me to walk the way of Jesus that I may reflect his image to those whom I encounter today.

**Hebrews 13:20-25**

The Name's peace rest upon you. The Name's power work through you. The Name's purpose inspire your vision and direct your service. The Name who spoke a sacred promise, who raised Jesus from the dead, and who designated Jesus to be the Good Shepherd of her sheep. May The Name equip you for all you will do, empower all your doing, and be pleased by all you have done, through Jesus the Anointed, to whom all doxology is sung today and into all tomorrows. Amen.<sup>97</sup>

Beloved, endure with patience my words of encouragement and exhortation, which I have written briefly. I want you to know Timothy is no longer in prison—Yay! If he comes soon, I'll bring him with me when I visit. Greet all your leaders and laypeople alike. The beloved in Italy send greetings. The Name's loving-kindness surround and embrace you all.

*Peace, limp without power.  
Power, lifeless without purpose.*

*Promise, pointing to the plan.  
Plan fulfilled in the person of Jesus.*

*Equipped and empowered—both are needed to  
Please the One to whom all doxology is sung.*

God, it's me. May this become my daily prayer: may I know your peace, power, and purpose; may I remember your promise fulfilled in Jesus; may I be equipped and empowered to serve you through loving all whom I meet, ever pleased and ever pleasing in your sight.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Adherents include Hippolytus, Origen, and Luther.

<sup>2</sup> Adherents include Justin Martyr, Augustine, and Barth. This is often called economic supercessionism.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 247 and 249, (2013).

<sup>4</sup> c.f. notes 35, 36, 59, and 73 for specific examples of interpretive choices.

<sup>5</sup> Jewish adherents do not speak God's name, out of respect for the Divine. Instead, they substitute *ha shem*, which in Hebrew means "The Name." In this work I experiment with using The Name when speaking of the divine and rotate using masculine and feminine pronouns by passage to be gender inclusive. In previous works in the *Praying the Scriptures* series, I experimented with using *Abba* and *Imma* (Aramaic for "daddy" and "mommy") to convey God's name; also in the attempt to be gender inclusive. In future works in this series, *Praying the Jewish Christian Letters*, my intention is to use a different divine name for each book. As of now (before the other letters are written), my intention is to pair the following: Sofia/James, The Sovereign/1 and 2 Peter, The Love/1, 2, and 3 John, The Holy/Jude, and The Glory/The Revelation.

<sup>6</sup> *Dunamis* is the word translated as "power" but from which we get dynamite and dynamic. I paraphrase the Greek with the Greek, for we become more dynamic when we release our power to allow God's dynamite to unlock opportunities and overcome challenges.

<sup>7</sup> HELPS Word Studies 2512: "*katharismos* ("to purge") – purification resulting from God removing undesirable admixtures (eliminating impurities)."

<sup>8</sup> c.f. Psalm 2:7.

<sup>9</sup> c.f. 1 Samuel 7:14.

<sup>10</sup> c.f. Deuteronomy 32:43 in the Septuagint (Greek) text.

<sup>11</sup> c.f. Psalm 104:4.

<sup>12</sup> The Greek word used is *dikaosune*, which is usually translated as righteousness. In this work, *dikaosune* will be paraphrased as right relationships for two reasons: for its linguistic connections with the Hebrew words for justice (*tzedakah* and *mishpat*, both of which connote relational nuances). Righteousness in the English language has adopted an almost exclusively behavior focus that I want to redirect toward a more biblical perspective. For the record, though, I am not opposed to ethical behavior. 😊

<sup>13</sup> c.f. Psalm 45:6-7.

<sup>14</sup> c.f. Psalm 102:25-27.

<sup>15</sup> c.f. Psalm 110:1.

<sup>16</sup> c.f. Genesis 18:10-15.

<sup>17</sup> c.f. Luke 1:19-20.

<sup>18</sup> c.f. Luke 1:35.

<sup>19</sup> The Greek word used is *akousthesin*, which is often translated as "hear" and is where the English "acoustics" comes from.

<sup>20</sup> *Agape* is one of several Greek words for love and connotes a perfect, selfless, outpouring of benevolence toward others. The New Testament has different words for different kinds of love, including: *agape*, *eros* which is sexual love, *phelos* which is deep friendship or brotherly/sisterly love, (thus the reason Philadelphia is "The City of Brotherly Love), and *storge* which is empathy or a

close bond. There are seven Greek words for love, of which the New Testament uses four.

<sup>21</sup> c.f. Psalm 8:4-6.

<sup>22</sup> Most interpreters would argue the Psalmist intends the words in Psalm 8 to refer to humanity, yet the author of Hebrews refers these verses to Jesus. This is an example of the ways New Testament authors use Scripture differently than modern commentators. It seems as if the author of *Hebrews* used the common literary device of speaking of an individual in corporate terms, as representative of all.

<sup>23</sup> These two sentences are not in the Greek text and are added to provide cultural context. The passage transitions from arguing Jesus' superiority to angels even though he was human (1:1—2:9) to begin to reason why it was necessary that a human be the agent of salvation.

<sup>24</sup> The Greek word used is *eprepon*, often translated as "fitting" yet also connotes "conspicuous."

<sup>25</sup> The Greek word used is *archegon*, which may convey "author" and "originator," and suggests the English "archetype."

<sup>26</sup> c.f. Psalm 22:22.

<sup>27</sup> c.f. Isaiah 8:17.

<sup>28</sup> c.f. Isaiah 8:18.

<sup>29</sup> Literally, "in meat."

<sup>30</sup> The Greek word used is *katargeo*, which Strong's defines as "(a) I make idle (inactive), make of no effect, annul, abolish, bring to naught, (b) I discharge, sever, separate from." (Strong's: 2673)

<sup>31</sup> The author uses the Greek word *oikos* throughout this passage as an extended metaphor. *Oikos* can mean either "family" or "house."

<sup>32</sup> Here is a simple bit of translation with significant consequences. The Greek word here is *ean*, which often is translated as "if," but also means "as." "IF" conveys a conditional deal and suggests something that we lose, or worse, will be taken away in a punitive manner if we do not live up to our "part of the bargain" (i.e. Hebrews 11:1 trust, etc.). However, "as" conveys a sense that Jesus will continue to be our dwelling place while we trust in him. When we stop trusting, etc., we will no longer experience Jesus as a dwelling place, but this is no longer something taken from us and something we have relinquished. By renewing trust, etc., we will once again experience Jesus as a dwelling place.

<sup>33</sup> c.f. Psalm 95:7-11.

<sup>34</sup> c.f. Psalm 95:7-8.

<sup>35</sup> This passage suffers from an excess of theological accretion, like mussels attaching themselves upon a boat or pier. Theologies of the afterlife have attached themselves to the word *katapanisis*, which is usually translated as "rest." Centuries of Christian interpretation have conflated "rest" in Hebrews 4 with our eternal rest in the resurrection. The effect of this conflation is to reinforce punitive supercessionism (see Introduction): "Jews who don't believe won't get to heaven," being the implied message. I notice, however, that Hebrews 4 connects "rest" not to eternal destinies but to the historical example of entering Canaan. It is a misreading of Hebrews to amplify the "rest" the Israelites missed

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experiencing to all things, all times, and all places (especially eternal ones). Further, *katapausis* also translates as “dwelling” or “habitation.” Therefore, the opportunity the Israelites (and we today) miss experiencing through a lack of trust is the experience of dwelling or abiding in The Name.

<sup>36</sup> c.f. Psalm 95:11. The NIV translates this as “shall never enter my rest,” which is an example of the theological accretion and amplification noted above. The Greek word *ei* is usually translated as “if.” I translate *ei* as a simple negation, and the NIV amplifies this negation as “never.” Lack of trust is a prophylactic against connection and intimacy with our Creator yet it does not mean the Israelites in the desert were for all times (and into eternity) prohibited from such communion.

<sup>37</sup> The Greek word used is *apatheian*, usually translated as “disobedience” or “obstinate” but also is a cognate of “apathy.”

<sup>38</sup> c.f. Psalm 95:7-8.

<sup>39</sup> c.f. Exodus 28.

<sup>40</sup> Scholars dispute the dating of the composition of Hebrews. If written before 70 C.E., the Jerusalem Temple would still have been standing and the Temple priests would have been standing to offer sacrifices. If Hebrews was written after 70 C.E., the Temple would have been destroyed by Rome and this verb would need to be past tense.

<sup>41</sup> c.f. Psalm 2:7.

<sup>42</sup> c.f. Psalm 110:4. The Greek text says Jesus is priest in the order of Melchizedek, which is a Hebrew compound word of king (*melek*) and righteousness (*tzedek*).

<sup>43</sup> The phrase translated as “listen attentively” here and below is from the Greek word *hupakoe*, which is often translated as “obedience.” *Hupakoe* has as its root *akouo*, “to hear,” and so has nuances that focus not just on following a rule (our ordinary sense of being obedient) but of submission to what is heard or listening attentively to the word that must be followed, the word that compels.

<sup>44</sup> Commentators debate the meaning of 6:4-6. At issue is the question of “assurance of salvation.” Hebrews appears to be saying that once grasped by The Name and drawn into her embrace, one can turn away and leave—lose one’s salvation. Other commentators point to the fact the Greek verbs are all present tense, with none being future oriented, and argue that believers’ “turning away” is provincial and temporary and that after The Name’s “purging fire” (a reference to Malachi 3:2-3) they will be restored. The paraphrase leans into the former interpretation.

<sup>45</sup> c.f. Malachi 3:2-3, which is NOT in the Greek text. However, 6:6 speaks of “fire that burns” and appears to reference Malachi 3, although, admittedly, the reference is somewhat obscure.

<sup>46</sup> The “Balm in Gilead” is a reference from the Old Testament, but the lyrics of the well-known spiritual refer to the New Testament concept of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Balm of Gilead is interpreted as a spiritual medicine that is able to heal Israel (and sinners in general) in spite of their worst sin.

<sup>47</sup> c.f. Genesis 22:17.

<sup>48</sup> Chapters 7-9 are an extended discussion comparing Jesus’ “priesthood” and Jesus as “High Priest” with the Levitical

priesthood and the lineage of Aaronic High Priests. As a reminder, the High Priesthood descended from Aaron while the Levitical priesthood descended from Levi (c.f. Numbers 1:53; 3:6, 9). By the first-century C.E., the High Priest had become an appointed position and detached from Aaron’s lineage. The author of Hebrews’ focus bounces between discussion of the functions of the High Priest and the Levitical priesthood in a somewhat arbitrary manner (or, at least, it is difficult for this interpreter to follow).

<sup>49</sup> This paragraph is an admittedly obscure argument the author of Hebrews makes and references the ancient belief that the father’s sperm carried 100% of the DNA required to create human life (in ancient belief, the mother was the receptacle for the father’s seed). I am less concerned about whether the biology is correct (it isn’t) but am fascinated by the way Hebrews’ author seeks to convey the “logic” of ancient beliefs about procreation to demonstrate Melchizedek’s primacy over Abraham (first), Levi (second), and by extension the Levitical priesthood (third).

<sup>50</sup> c.f. Genesis 14:18-21.

<sup>51</sup> Melchizedek is a combination of the Hebrew words *melech* (king) and *tzedakah* (righteousness or justice).

<sup>52</sup> c.f. Numbers 1:53; 3:6, 9.

<sup>53</sup> In this passage, the author of Hebrews plays with variations of the Greek word *metathesis* which is a compound word of *meta* (meaning “change”) and *thesis* (meaning, well, “thesis”) and often translated as “change,” “transform,” or “transpose.” I lean into interpretation in this passage to highlight the dynamic comparison between Melchizedek and the Levitical priesthood and the transformative impact of the former over the latter that Hebrews seeks to convey.

<sup>54</sup> The Greek word used is *anistemi*, which the NIV and NRSV translate as “appears” but which is translated as “rise” or “be raised” in Gospel passages (c.f. Mark 16:9; Luke 24:46). The author of Hebrews clearly wants to associate Melchizedek with Jesus and references Jesus’ resurrection to elevate the priesthood of Melchizedek over the Levitical priesthood. Therefore, to translate *anistemi* merely as “appears” seems rather anemic, lacking the power of the original Greek.

<sup>55</sup> c.f. Psalm 110:4.

<sup>56</sup> c.f. Psalm 110:4.

<sup>57</sup> Throughout this passage the Greek word *horkomiasias*, translated as “oath,” has been used without adjectival modification. However, in Hebrews 7:28, the author modifies oath with the Greek word *logos* (*ho logos de tes horkomiasias*). *Logos* is most famously used in John 1:1 (In the beginning was the Word/*Logos* and the Word/*Logos* was with God and was God) and famously has rich, varied, and philosophical connotations. *Logos* conveys “purpose,” “meaning,” “logic of the universe,” “first principles,” and “word.”

<sup>58</sup> c.f. Exodus 26ff.

<sup>59</sup> This verse is an excellent example of the temptation to read supercessionism into the text. The key Greek words are *diaphoros* and *kreittosin*, which the NRSV translates as “more excellent” and “better.” However, *diaphoros* and *kreittosin* can also be translated as “differing or varied” and “stronger or more certain.” The NRSV’s choice of the former creates an unnecessary hierarchy of form.

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Obviously, the author seeks to argue for the validity of Jesus' priesthood but negating the Levitical priesthood is not necessary for a faithful translation of the text.

<sup>60</sup> c.f. Jeremiah 31:31-34.

<sup>61</sup> The Greek text names the House of Israel and the House of Judah. The interpretive paraphrase seeks to reflect that at the time Jeremiah wrote Israel and Judah had been divided from one another by civil war and both nations ("Houses") were in exile.

<sup>62</sup> This couplet reflects Hebrews 8:11 where the Greek words *ginosko* and *eido* are used. Both words translate as "know" but *ginosko* conveys the nuance of personal experience (e.g. "to know another in 'the biblical sense'") and *eido* conveys perception and intuition. Jeremiah invites his hearers beyond merely cognitive knowledge.

<sup>63</sup> The Greek used, *teleios synedesin*, literally means "to complete (or fulfill, accomplish) the moral conscience." It is disappointing that some English versions translate this phrase as "cleanse" or "clear" the conscience, which focus exclusively on what is taken away. However, *teleios* has a positive, formative connotation of what is created or that which becomes. The NRSV comes closest to the Greek nuance when it translates this phrase as "perfect the conscience."

<sup>64</sup> *Kairos* is one of two Greek words for "time" and conveys the transformative moment when change occurs.

<sup>65</sup> c.f. John 17:21.

<sup>66</sup> c.f. The Prayer of St. Patrick.

<sup>67</sup> These sentences are not in the Greek text but provide context for what is found in 9:16-28. These are the questions being answered in the verses that follow.

<sup>68</sup> Some English translations focus on Moses' giving of the Law (e.g., Ten Commandments) but the section to which this passage refers (c.f. Exodus 19 ff.) describes the giving of the covenant. A covenant requires obligations upon both parties (i.e., The Name's blessing and the people's obligation). Commandments were part of an ancient covenant, what scholars call a Suzerain-vassal treaty, of which Exodus is a form, but the emphasis in any covenant is the relationship that is established rather than mere obedience to a proscribed list of behaviors.

<sup>69</sup> c.f. Exodus 24:8.

<sup>70</sup> The Greek word used in this verse is *aphesis*, which is usually translated as "forgiveness." Thus, many English translations say something like, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness," (English Study Bible) which seems to suggest a punitive *quid pro quo*: something must die for us to live. However, *aphesis* also conveys "releasing, letting go, and sending away," which I interpret as pointing to the spiritual rhythm of emptying to be filled, letting go to embrace, losing our life that we may find it (c.f. Matthew 5:3-10; 10:39; and Philippians 2:6-11).

<sup>71</sup> *Chronos* and *kairos* are the Greek words for "time." *Chronos* conveys chronological time, and *kairos* conveys the key moment when transformation happens.

<sup>72</sup> I pray, Gentle Reader, that you hear this prayer as satire. I seek, Friend, to convey the hubris of modern readers in our judgment of the ancients while remaining blissfully in denial that our era is far more barbaric (though we pretend otherwise). I am reminded,

Sibling in Jesus, of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's distinction between "cheap grace" and "costly grace" in his *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>73</sup> Many English translations insert "only" into their translation (c.f. NIV, NRSV, ESB) without justification from the Greek text. The resulting translations reads, "The Law is only a shadow." That the Greek *skia* means "shadow" is correct, yet it can also translate as "outline." Given the word "only" is absent from the Greek text, rather than denigrate the Law (called Torah in the paraphrase), I hear the author making a "yes, and..." comment: "Yes, Torah is wonderful—it outlines the ways of God!—and yet is not the fullness of what God is doing."

<sup>74</sup> c.f. Psalm 40:6-8.

<sup>75</sup> The English text seems to suggest continual sinning negates the effects of Jesus' sacrifice ("no sacrifice for sins is left," ESB). However, this directly contradicts the previous verses specifically (c.f. 10:19ff.) and the entire book generally. Therefore, I have paraphrased 10:26-27 as targeting our choices that "miss the mark" (Greek *harmatia*) and which The Name gives over to judgment so that only our true self remains (c.f. next note).

<sup>76</sup> c.f. Malachi 3:2, which uses the image of a metal smith separating the precious metal from the dross—only that which is precious remains.

<sup>77</sup> c.f. Deuteronomy 32:36 and Psalm 135:14.

<sup>78</sup> c.f. Isaiah 26:20, Habakkuk 2:3.

<sup>79</sup> c.f. Habakkuk 2:4.

<sup>80</sup> English translations say Sarah "considered God faithful." The Greek word used that is usually translated as "considered" or "of the opinion," is *begomai*, which can mean these English phrases but links linguistically to *hegemon* which conveys one who is a thought leader or who leads the opinions of others (often used of government officials). It seems to me the author of Hebrews isn't merely conveying the notion that Sarah had a particular opinion but that her trusting The Name was particularly powerful and has led others to trust as well.

<sup>81</sup> The passage shifts in focus from stories of success, faithfulness, and blessing to stories of trust in the midst of hardship.

<sup>82</sup> The Greek word used in this verse is *agon*, from which we derive the English "agony." The author is exhorting listeners to accept discomfort and embrace difficulty for the sake of growing into our true self.

<sup>83</sup> Seven times in this passage the author uses a form of *paideia*, translated by the NIV as "discipline." However, *paideia* is also the word from which we get the noun *paidagogos* (c.f. Galatians 3:24). In Greek culture, a *paidagogos* refers to a tutor or mentor for the children of a first-century Hellenistic family. Technically, the *paidagogos* was responsible for moral and educational training. The author is wrestling with the issue that has often perplexed people of faith: What is the purpose of suffering and why does God allow it? I have chosen to frame my interpretive paraphrase using the context of the cruciform ethics and spirituality of Jesus' example.

<sup>84</sup> c.f. Proverbs 3:11-12.

<sup>85</sup> c.f. note 83 regarding the author of Hebrews' use of *paideia*.

<sup>86</sup> c.f. Proverbs 4:26.

<sup>87</sup> c.f. Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 9.

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<sup>88</sup> This passage and the next repeatedly use the Greek word *meine*, and its variants. *Meine* can be translated as “abide, remain, or stay with,” (compare similar usage in John 4:40 and 15:4ff).

<sup>89</sup> c.f. Deuteronomy 4:24 for the direct quote. However, c.f. also Malachi 3:3 (the penultimate chapter in the Hebrew Bible) for an example of the biblical concept of the “Redeemer’s Fire.” Rather than Dante’s “fire as punishment,” the biblical metaphor for fire is as a cleansing, purifying agent that destroys that which is dross and leaves that which is precious.

<sup>90</sup> c.f. Psalm 46:1, 3, with slight revisions.

<sup>91</sup> The Greek word used is *philos*, meaning “brotherly or sisterly love,” and from which we get Philadelphia, the “City of Brotherly Love.”

<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, the Greek work *kakuceo* is used twice in this sentence and can be translate as “tortured” or “mistreated,” which seems like a fairly large gap in terms of how one suffers. I have chosen to use both in the paraphrase.

<sup>93</sup> c.f. Deuteronomy 31:6.

<sup>94</sup> c.f. Psalm 118:6-7.

<sup>95</sup> The author returns to the Greek word *meine* (“remain, stay, or abide,” see note 89) to convey the sense of permanence of the city to which The Name sends us.

<sup>96</sup> The NIV translates this passage as “doing good and sharing with others.” However, the Greek word used here is *koinonias*. The

Greek word *koinonia* translates as “fellowship” and also conveys a deep sense of spiritual and social kinship. *Koinonia* was a hallmark of early Christian communities and a cause for Roman suspicion of their motives—the Romans assuming something political must be the source of the Christian community. The author, therefore, expresses a sense of what today we call “missional theology” in that the author calls for us not merely to do good for people but to do it in partnership and spiritual fellowship with those whom we seek to serve.

<sup>97</sup> This paragraph has a homiletic quality to it, so I have crafted a version for use when speaking the text publicly. As I imagine the text as spoken Word, I hear the phrases within each paragraph expand upon what comes before to build toward a crescendo.

The Name’s peace rest upon you. The Name’s power work through you. The Name’s purpose inspire your vision and direct your service.

The Name who spoke a sacred promise. The same Name who raised Jesus from the dead. The Name who designated Jesus to be the Good Shepherd of her sheep.

May The Name equip you for all you will do. May The Name empower all your doing. May The Name be pleased by all you have done, through Jesus the Anointed, to whom all doxology is sung today and into all tomorrows. Amen.