

ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him the plan for the fullness of the times

**TO HEAD UP THE ALL THINGS IN THE CHRIST,
the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him...**

(Ephesians 1:8b-10)

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Article #2

Do Not Abandon the Hope

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Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging {one another} and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10.23-25 NASB)

This particular portion of scripture, without any doubt, is universally interpreted to mean that Christians must not forsake gathering together, typically in so-called "church meetings." Further, many pastors use this verse to exhort people to attend Sunday "worship services," often putting guilt on their consciences that if they do not attend, then something dreadful will happen to them.

Now, let me be perfectly clear that the gathering together of Christians is essential. After all, how can the body of Christ be built up in love if the joints and marrow are not relationally connected in practical, living ways? Every begotten from above believer in Jesus Christ is called out of the world, and all are joined together in the body of Christ. This is an undeniable truth based on the word of God. However, it is not the intent of this article to discuss the merits or means of Christian gatherings other than to say that the most basic and essential gathering together of Christians is when two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. When this occurs, the Lord is in their midst.

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matthew 18.20 NASB)

Is there anything greater than knowing that Jesus is in the midst of as few as two or three that, in sincerity of heart, have gathered together in His name? It doesn't take a building, a temple, a meeting place, a "worship center," or any such thing. All that is required is for two or three to be gathered together in His name. It is profoundly simple. Unfortunately, Christendom has made it profoundly complex, and in many cases, something that scripture does not teach.

Think about this: Christ is in each person who has been given the faith, Christ's faith, to believe in Him, and this life within also establishes a hope within. ***Christ in you, the hope of glory*** (Colossians 1.27). So, when two, as a minimum, gather together in His name, it is an acknowledgment that He is within each one and, on this basis, they can come into agreement.

Much could be written on this matter, but the purpose of this article is to challenge the traditional interpretation of the verse *not forsaking our own assembling together*. It is realized that the traditional interpretation of this verse is so ingrained in Christian thinking and even teaching that, most likely, many, out of hand, will reject what follows. It must be left to the spirit of God to reveal if what follows is true or not. The point to be made is that this verse deals with the great hope that is set before everyone who is truly begotten of God. It is proposed that the writer of Hebrews, who most likely was Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, encouraged the brethren who had come out of Judaism not to abandon their new-found hope in the return of the Lord, and their being snatched away to meet Him in air. This verse could be paraphrased as such:

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds [which is the proper result of our hope], ***not abandoning*** [the hope of] ***our own gathering together*** [unto the Lord when He comes a second time], ***as is the habit of some*** [who have given up this hope], ***but encouraging one another*** [with this hope], ***and all the more as you see the day*** [the day of Christ when He comes to meet His people] ***drawing near***.

Now, let us test this paraphrase according to scripture and not the traditions of men to see if this is the intent of Paul. [A case can be made that Paul or, perhaps, someone very close to Paul was the writer of Hebrews. However, going forward, the expression "the writer of Hebrews" or, simply, "writer" is used to avoid confusion or, for that matter, undo controversy.]

To test the writer's intent, we need to approach this verse from three views, that is, to understand: 1) the subject of the letter to the Hebrews; 2) the immediate context of this portion of scripture. [Does the context support the notion that it refers to the hope of the return of Christ?]; 3) the Greek word from which *gathering together* is derived and its relationship to other New Testament verses.

Subject of Hebrews

The writer left no doubt about the subject matter of the entire letter and, especially, the first two chapters. He pointed to a future day.

For not to messengers did He subject the coming world, concerning which we speak.
(Hebrews 2.5 YLT)

For he has not subjected to angels the habitable world which is to come, of which we speak.
(Hebrews 2.5 DNT)

Clearly, the writer was looking forward to a new day in which the government of the habitable world is changed. No longer will angels rule over the earth as they do today, but the one new man in Christ will be crowned with glory and honor, ruling as he was created to do but has been unable to do since the fall of Adam. This day speaks of the coming reign of Christ when Christ will ascend His own throne to rule over this earth and the devil is bound in the pit for 1,000 years (Revelation 20.1-3). The world to come commences at the conclusion of Man's day (6,000 years since Adam) when the great voices in heaven declare: ***"The kingdoms of the world did***

become [those] of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign to the ages of the ages!" (Revelation 11.15 YLT). It is the seventh day, a day fixed by the Father (Acts 1.7; Hebrews 4.4, 7). It is the day in which those who will reign with Christ will receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12.28) and will be spiritually perfected as New Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, the lasting city, the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11.10; 13.14).

From the very start, the epistle to the Hebrews proclaims that the world to come is centered on one thing—the Son of God returning to this earth a second time. However, instead of dying for the sin of the world, Christ is coming to rule over this world. He has suffered the shame of the cross, but when He returns, He will glory in His crown. God the Father will once again introduce His Son to the whole habitable world as the King who holds the scepter of the kingdom of the heavens. He is the Son of Man, and He will reign!

Moreover, when He brings the firstborn Son again into the habitable world, He says, Let all the angels of God worship Him. (Hebrews 1.6 AB)

All the angels will worship Him as He takes the reign over this earth and brings many sons to glory to rule with Him (Hebrews 2.10). No longer will man be a little lower than the angels, for those who have been given the faith to believe on Jesus and have been victorious (conquerors) will be like Him, crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2.5-10).

This is what this epistle calls ***so great a salvation***. It is not just about the salvation by grace through faith that we receive when we first believe but about the full salvation of being counted worthy to reign with Christ in His millennial kingdom of glory (1 Thessalonians 2.12). For this reason, we are warned not to neglect so great a salvation (Hebrews 2.3). In fact, we are to eagerly await the second coming of Christ, for this is our so great a salvation.

So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9.28 NASB)

Do you grasp the greatness of this hope? Jesus is coming a second time not to die for the sin of the world, nor to judge for all sin that has been brought under His blood. He is coming for those who are eagerly awaiting His arrival to this earth after having been gone a long time (Matthews 25.19; Luke 19.12-15). Today, the Son is seated at the right hand of God the Father until all His enemies are made a footstool for His feet (Hebrews 1.13; 10.11-13). But the time is almost up and very soon the Son will be given the command to leave the throne of His Father and come to this earth to ascend His own throne so that the nations know He is King and Lord of all (Revelation 3.21) with His kingdom no longer hidden but manifested for all to see.

This is the hope placed before every Christian. It is time to endure to the end, to hold fast to this hope. He will come, and He will not delay! This is our hope.

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will

not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. (Hebrews 10.36-38 NASB)

This epistle contains five sets of verses that encourage us in this hope, as well as exhort us not to lose this hope but to hold it fast, firm until the end.

Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ {was faithful} as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3.5-6 NASB)

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6.11-12 NASB)

In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a {hope} both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6.17-20 NASB)

For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (Hebrews 7.18-19 NASB)

This is the subject and hope of the epistle to the Hebrews. Naturally, this letter contains many truths, but our present purpose is not to expound on the entire content of the letter but to study one verse in the context of the letter. This leads to the last direct reference to our hope, and it is found immediately preceding the exhortation to not forsake the assembling or gathering together.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging {one another} and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10.23-25 NASB)

The Context

What is the context of these verses? The writer had previously unveiled the great truth that Christ is our High Priest ministering in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf (Hebrews 8.1-2). He is a high priest of the things to come and has entered the greater and more perfect tabernacle. Through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained *eonian* redemption (Hebrews 9.11-12). The good news is that because of His present priestly ministry, He is also able to save forever [to the uttermost] those who draw near to God through Him,

since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7.25). Because of His blood and His present ministry, everyone who has believed on Jesus has bold access to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4.16).

[Note: Literally, "to the end," which means to the end of the eon [age], at which time the Lord's priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary ends and He ascends His throne as the King-Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek.]

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10.19-22 NASB)

Because of the blood of Jesus, we have full confidence that we can enter into the presence of God today. We can enter into His presence in spirit with full assurance of faith. This is our present confidence of which we are fully assured because of the finished work of our beloved Lord Jesus. We have a new and living way, daily, into the presence of God.

Now, the writer exhorts us, with this present confidence, to hold fast the confession of our hope. Because of the present ministry of Jesus, we have full assurance of a great hope set before us, and the writer of this epistle does not want us to waver in our resolve to endure to the end by losing sight of this hope. Why? Because He who promised is faithful! The One who said that He will never desert us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13.5) will come again to receive us to Himself (John 14.3). When all of heaven opens up, Jesus will come riding on a white horse, and He will be called Faithful and True (Revelation 19.11).

Given this hope, we are then encouraged to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. When we have the hope of the coming of the Lord sealed in our hearts, it should be manifested in very practical expressions of love and good deeds for one another (see Hebrews 6.10-12). Of course, our hope, the hope of our Lord's return and our love for one another, springs forth from love for the One who first loved us (1 John 4.19).

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13.34-35 NASB)

In fact, this is exactly the heart that is seen in the early church that held to the hope of the second coming of Christ. Specifically, we see it in the believers who resided in Thessalonica and Colossae. The Thessalonians were waiting for the Son to come from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1.10); and as they waited, they were engaged in a labor of love (1 Thessalonians 1.3), and their love for one another grew greater. Consider Paul's words to the Thessalonians.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is {only} fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows {ever} greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your

perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. {This is} a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. (2 Thessalonians 1.3-5 NASB; also 1 Thessalonians 3.11-13)

Their faith, love, and perseverance in the midst of great trial were working gold into their lives that would count them worthy of the kingdom that is coming, the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Likewise, the Colossians had love and hope, and for this, Paul commended them.

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel.... (Colossians 1.3-5 NASB)

The hope laid up for them refers to the coming kingdom when Christ ascends His throne to manifestly rule over the nations. Thus, loving one another, even stimulating one another to love and good deeds, is the outcome of one's hope in the coming of our Lord. If we are eagerly waiting for the appearing of our Lord, we should love one another. However, there is a danger that as we do love one another, we might take our eyes off the hope set before us. As to this concern, the spirit of God exhorts us not to abandon the hope of our future gathering together to be with the Lord when He comes to be in air.

Not only are we to hold to this hope, but we are to be all the more diligent in holding fast to our hope, and all the more as we see the day approaching. This is quite significant, for in the verse we are studying, the writer brings us to the very heart of the matter, and that is *the day of Christ*. What day is this? It cannot refer to the present day in which Christ is ministering in the heavenly sanctuary. This is not an approaching day, for He has been interceding on behalf of His people, in fact, all of mankind, for 2,000 years. Clearly, it is a day that is set out in front of us. This day must have to do with the confession of our hope. What is our hope? It is that Christ will come again and raise from among the dead all the conquerors that have fallen asleep in Him and transfigure them into His likeness, along with His conquerors that are alive and remain on the earth. This is the glorious day of Christ (Philippians 1.6, 10; 2.16)! It will commence with the coming of the Lord in His *Parousia* during the fall feast of Tabernacles.

Now, this is the context in which we find this matter of assembling or gathering together. Admittedly, stimulating one another to love and good deeds is something that requires Christians to be with one another. However, is this the only way to view this verse? To answer this question, let us dig a little deeper and look at the Greek words from which our English words have been translated and compare their usage in other New Testament verses.

Gathering Together

Before looking at the verse in question, it is noteworthy to refer to the Lord's own words in which He laid out the essential principle of gathering together.

"For where two or three have gathered together [*sunago*] in My name, there I am in their midst." (Matthew 18.20 NASB)

The Greek word for "gathered together" is *sunago*, and its noun form is *sunagoge*. We derive the English noun *synagogue* from this word. *Sunago* is one of the more common verb forms meaning "to lead together, i.e., collect or convene, gather." *Sunagoge* means an "assemblage of persons." Both words come from the root word *sun*, which means "union, with or together."

According to the Lord's words, a gathering of His people occurs when any number of His people gathers together in His name. It is so simple.

Now, let us look more closely at the verse in question.

Not forsaking our own assembling together [*episunagoge*], as is the habit of some.... (Hebrews 10.25 NASB)

In the Hebrews epistle, the "assembling together" comes from the Greek word *episunagoge*, which means "a complete collection." The prefix *epi* means "above or after," implying a more intensified meaning of the word; thus, it is a complete gathering, implying that it could be a rather large collection of people. The only other place in scripture that this intensified form is used in the noun form is in one of the few verses in all of scripture that directly refers to the snatching away of the believers of our present age in clouds to meet the Lord in air.

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together [*episunagoge*] to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (2 Thessalonians 2.1-2 NASB)

In 1 Thessalonians 4.13-17, Paul had written to the Thessalonians about the snatching away in clouds to meet the Lord in air, so that he did not have to repeat himself but merely remind them of this hope. The gathering together that Paul referenced is a complete gathering of the Lord's people, or, at least, a great gathering of conquerors. It is a full, complete, great gathering.

Further evidence that this sort of gathering is a full or complete gathering is also discovered by reviewing all the uses of the Greek word *episunago*, which is the verb form of the noun *episunagoge*.

The first reference is discovered when Jesus cried out over ancient Jerusalem. His heart's cry was that He longed to gather the entire house of Israel, to Himself; but at His first advent He could not do this, for they rejected Him.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather [*episunago*] your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling." (Matthew 23.37 NASB; also Luke 13.34)

The second reference, we could say, is the fulfillment of the Lord's heart cry when He will gather the true, *spiritual Israel*, all the elect, to Himself.

"And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together [episunago] His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." (Matthew 24.31 NASB; also Mark 13.27)

The angels will gather the elect from every corner of the world to which they have been dispersed as the four winds of heaven (Zechariah 2.6). This is a full and complete gathering. This is very similar to Paul's revelation of 1 Thessalonians 4.13-17. Perhaps, it is one and the same.

Finally, there are two other verses that relate to full, complete gatherings. One involved the complete gathering to Jesus of the city of Capernaum. The other involved a multitude or many thousands of people gathered to Jesus.

And the whole city had gathered [episunago] at the door. (Mark 1.33 NASB)

Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together [episunago] that they were stepping on one another.... (Luke 12.1 NASB)

Now, leaving out Hebrews 10.25 for a moment, all seven uses of this word (both the noun *episunagoge* and the verb *episunago*), refer to full, complete gatherings to the Lord Himself, and literally involve large numbers of people.

At this point, the challenge remains as to whether this matter of not forsaking our gathering together is a present reality (i.e., "church meetings"), or whether it, in fact, refers to the future gathering of a great host of believers to the Lord in the day of Christ.

To answer this challenge, let us begin by summarizing what has been presented to this point.

First, the subject of the epistle to the Hebrews is the world to come when Christ comes a second time, and the one new man in Christ reigns over this earth in the place of the angels. This is our hope. The fact of the matter is that if He does not come we have no hope, for there will be no resurrection and transfiguration into His image.

Second, the context of the verses immediately preceding and following the one in question refer to the hope we have, and this hope is summed up in the day that is coming, the day of Christ. The *not forsaking our gathering together* is nestled between the hope and the day.

Third, the exhortation in reference to the hope and the day is to love and good deeds. We must be faithful to our Master while He is gone for a long time to receive a kingdom. We are called to bear fruit that is commensurate with our hope of the coming kingdom of glory. The Thessalonians and the Colossians all held to the hope of the coming kingdom, and as they did, they fulfilled the Lord's command to love.

Fourth, the Lord never expressed a desire that we, as His people, should meet in very large gatherings while He is gone. On the contrary, He defined the true assembly of His people as those gathering in His name, even as few as two or three. Historically speaking, it is noteworthy that once the believers had shed their ties to Judaism, they often met in their homes (see Romans 16.5). The emphasis was not on buildings or great meeting places but on simply coming together to break bread, fellowship in the Lord, and pray together. It is true that in the very beginning there were large numbers gathered together, but as time went on, this changed. The large gatherings in great buildings took hold later when the church, sadly, became wed to the world rather than to her Lord. Outwardly, that which is called "the church" in our day has never recovered from being wed to the world.

Fifth, other, less intensified Greek words, such as *sunago* and *sunagoge*, are used in scripture to describe most other types or acts of gathering, including the Lord's heart for where two or three are gathered together in His name. In other words, these Greek words are used for gatherings in general and often for small gatherings, not the gatherings of the multitude.

Sixth, all uses of the words *episunagoge* and *episunago* refer to full, complete gatherings to the *Lord Himself*, that is, actually being in His presence (not some mystical or spiritual experience). Two uses refer to large numbers of people gathering to the Lord when He first walked on this earth. Two uses speak of the heart of the Lord Jesus to gather the true, spiritual Israel to Himself. Three uses refer to the actual gathering of the elect to Himself at the end of Man's day.

Seventh, if seven out of the eight uses of the words *episunagoge* and *episunago* refer to actually gathering in the presence of the Lord, then why would the Holy Spirit change the meaning in this one epistle? Some might argue that today Christians meet with the Lord in the spiritual sense and that Hebrews 10.25 is merely a call for Christians to gather for worship. Few, if any, of the Lord's people would question that we are not to gather together. However, the question is whether Hebrews 10.25 deals with our gathering in this day or with a future gathering at the coming of the Lord? Why didn't the writer use the more simplified word for the gathering of two or three that the Lord had used in Matthew 18.20? Surely, it makes more sense to use the simplified form of the Greek word to encourage the brethren to gather, no matter how many there might be.

Contextually, the writer of Hebrews makes no other reference to this matter of gathering together in this day. However, the epistle clearly focuses on our future hope, which is focused on believers being gathered together with the Lord. Based on their background, the Hebrews who were reading this letter must have known something about a future gathering together. Christians were being scattered in that day, making it difficult to meet in large gatherings. Why would the spirit of God exhort them to maintain large meetings that could not possibly be held in a time of persecution? Further, why call for large meetings when persecution and scattering would be an ongoing reality for some of the Lord's people until Christ comes a second time?

Was this a prophetic word that looked forward 2,000 years to the mega-church of our day? Thousands are packed into buildings that are erroneously called "the church," places in which they have all sorts of entertainment that looks no different than the world from which we have been saved. The single pastor that stands in the man-exalted pulpit every Sunday has little, if

any, relationship with the masses that listen to him every week. (The solo pastor is a concept that cannot be supported through scripture.) How can 10,000 people be a daily stimulant to one another to love and good deeds when, at best, they can be in relationship with only a handful of people? In these mega-churches, people are at best acquaintances. How can they be vitally and practically related to one another? Further, how could the Spirit exhort us to large gatherings when it goes against the very heart of our gathering together?

The only satisfactory resolution to this matter is based on the Greek word itself and the contextual uses of it in Hebrews and in other New Testament verses. Just because the traditions of men state that this must refer to today's gatherings does not make it correct. These are the same people who often hold to the traditions of the single pastor, the strong pulpit, and many other things that are held by Christendom but which cannot be supported by scripture. Much of what has been adopted by Christendom today can be traced to pagan customs and practices and not to God's word.

[For an interesting study of this matter: *Pagan Christianity—The Origins of Our Modern Church Practices* by Frank Viola, Present Testimony Ministry.]

It is recognized that early in the history of Christ's ecclesia on earth, some were deserting the hope of the second coming of our Lord. We know that the assembly at Ephesus, merely 50-60 years after Pentecost, had fallen from her first love (Revelation 2.4), a love for the Lord and His return. They were doing many good things, but they were no longer motivated by the hope laid up for them in heaven. They had become earthly minded, even in their good deeds. Simply, they had lost sight of their destiny in Christ, and their intimate love for Him had waxed cold. If falling away from this hope could happen to an assembly that had such a rich history and teaching from the beloved Paul, and later, the beloved John, then surely this is something about which the Holy Spirit would continue to warn the Lord's people.

On a personal note, some years ago, I regularly met with an elderly brother in Christ. This brother was very active in building churches and encouraging brothers. You could say that he was quite proud of his work, perhaps, rightly so. However, one day I was shocked by his response to me as I shared my heart with him about the coming of the Lord and how I longed to see Jesus. He responded that he had no interest in the coming of the Lord, didn't care if He comes, and had no interest in seeing Him. I was speechless. How could one help the Lord's people and express love to one another and not have a love for His appearing?

There is one other key that might help to unlock this verse for some as found in the phrase *our own gathering together*. Hebrews 8.8-12 reminds us of the new covenant.

"Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.... For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." (Hebrews 8.8-12 NASB)

Portions of these verses are repeated in Hebrews 10.16-17, right before the exhortation about gathering together (Hebrews 10.16-17). Surely, as Paul wrote to the Romans, the Hebrews must have known that a partial hardening had come to Israel until the fullness of the nations [*ethnos*] has come in, and thus all Israel will be saved (Romans 11.25-26).

Could it be that this remnant of Hebrews was being reminded that they too would be gathered to the Lord, as Paul had written to the Thessalonians? After all, the Hebrews still had roots in Judaism and needed to be reminded of the gathering of the Lord's people. Relatively speaking, not much time had passed since Calvary, and the great hope of Christ's return held by the early church was beginning to wane. Some had given up hope of the coming of the Lord. Many days had come and gone since Calvary, and yet they were encouraged not to follow the habit of others who had lost this hope but to hold to it, and all the more as they saw the day approaching.

Of course, we need to be reminded that the new covenant is not based on genealogy or bloodline but on God who has mercy. All who believe, Hebrew or non-Hebrew, are included in the promises of the new covenant. Based on the Lord's own words in Matthew 24.31, the elect of the new covenant will be gathered together at the commencement of the millennial kingdom of Christ.

Given what has been presented, it is possible that the exhortation to *not forsake our gathering together (episunagoge)* refers to our gathering together to be with the Lord as a future hope. If this exhortation were a call today for large meetings, actually full, complete meetings of all the Lord's people, it seems that it is a contradiction to all the other uses of this word, as well as a contradiction to the Lord's heart for the two or three. Actually, it is literally impossible for all of the Lord's people, either dead or alive, to be gathered together. It is only possible when the Lord comes to gather His people to Himself. It also would be quite difficult, if not impossible, for all the believers in large cities of our day to meet together.

The following rendering of this portion of scripture is proposed to the reader.

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, which is the proper result of our holding fast the confession of hope as we await our Lord, not abandoning the hope of our own, unique gathering together unto the Lord [when He returns to establish His kingdom over this earth], as is the habit of some who have given up this hope, but encouraging one another all the more as you see the day of Christ drawing near.

Before concluding, there is one other observation to be made regarding these verses. It is rather curious that it ends with *as you see the day*, when in all the preceding verses the writer referred to *our* and *us*—let us, our hope, our own. Why doesn't it end by stating *as we see the day*? Could it be that *as you see the day* is for the Lord's people who will be on the earth when the Lord returns? Perhaps this is a prophetic word to the transfiguration generation!

Nearly two millennia have passed since these words were first penned. Surely, we are closer to the day, even at the very cusp of the day. The six days are nearly over (or, perhaps have been completed and we are in a transitional period) and the seventh day is set before (or, upon) this

very generation in which we live. The time is almost up! This word is more vital to the generation that will be alive and remain when He comes than to the original recipients. We are in that generation! We are the ones seeing the day drawing near.

Oh, do you see the greatness of our hope? Do you see the day approaching? In our day, many have abandoned the hope of our gathering together to meet the Lord in air. Others have never been introduced to this great hope. And yet, others are growing weary waiting. Let us not grow weary, but let us encourage one another that there is a gathering unto the Lord that is uniquely for the conquerors of Christ and that this gathering is closer than we realize.

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. (Hebrews 10.36-37 NASB)

It is time to wake up and to look up, for our Redeemer is coming very soon. The day is drawing near! Let us not abandon the hope of our own gathering together with the Lord when He comes.

If what has been presented is still difficult to accept, then may your heart love the thought of the appearing of our Lord in the day that is coming.

From this time onward there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who love the thought of His Appearing. (2 Timothy 4.8 WNT)

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