So over the past few weeks we discussed in detail *verses 26-36* and explained the reasons why God, in His great mercy, brings real-time judgment into the lives of believers. We discovered that God uses the tool of judgment as a way to wage war against our *Old Sinful Nature* and teach us: 1) to hate our *Old Sinful Nature* and no longer trust ourselves to its direction and control over our lives and 2) why we should trust ourselves to Jesus knowing that He is always completely sufficient for every part of our lives.

If you were not here, I would encourage you to go back and listen to those teachings as they deal quite in-depth with the issue of our suffering and all that God has ever allowed in our lives.

So let me remind you of the context of our text. The Spirit is writing to believing Jews in Judea and Jerusalem who were under intense judgment which came to them by way of persecution from the hands of the Jewish community. So the Spirit encouraged these believers to endure, to hold fast, and to not throw away the confidence that they have in Jesus. Let's pick up in **10:37**.

Hebrews 10:37-39

Yet a little while, and the coming one 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." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

As with the passages in **2:1-4**, **6:4-8**, **10:26-30**, this final part of Chapter **10** has also caused a lot of confusion in the Christian community and has led people to wrongly conclude that a believer can lose their salvation. After all, the phrase "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls" is so ominous and seemingly threatening.

But we will find out that, like those other passages, this passage has nothing to do with the issue of our eternal salvation. It can't for the book of Hebrews provides a plethora of assurance and comfort with regard to our salvation, which is why it says in **10:19-22** that we can boldly enter heaven's most holy place because of the blood of Jesus—the way to the Father has been opened up for us.

In the same way that the "judgment" referred to in 10:26 (which was described as "a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries") was in the present tense and therefore did not deal with future events in eternity but with the real time judgment that God brings into the lives of believers, this passage also deals with a soon and coming judgment for those who might shrink back and return to Judaism as a way to avoid the persecution they were under. And as we will find out, that judgment was a fury of fire.

I would like to address some of the common reasons why people often come to errant conclusions about these passages. It seems that too often they skip over some of the fundamental rules for good and consistent Bible interpretation. For example, they fail to consider the full context of a passage which must be understood based on the audience and their cultural context. They often fail to dig in deep and understand the Greek tenses that are employed by the author which are so necessary due to the weakness of the English language. As we found

out, that made all the difference in our understanding of verses **26-30**. When we learned that judgment was in the <u>present active</u> tense we could rest knowing this passage could not be applied to the issue of our eternal salvation.

In addition, they often fail to follow one of the most important rules. Never interpret what is clear and easy to understand by what is difficult, but always interpret the difficult through the lens of what is clear and easy to understand. We should always use the simple to explain the difficult and not the other way around. In this specific instance, history provides for us the simple understanding of this passage.

If you remember from the overview, this letter was written sometime before the invasion of Jerusalem and Judea by the Romans, which started in 67 AD. We are not sure the exact date of this letter but because of the detail in which the Temple operations and the priesthood are discussed, we know it was before the Romans took over the city. For once the Romans completed the siege in 70 AD they completely destroyed the city, the temple, the priesthood and everything pertaining to the Jewish religion. It was completely abolished just as the Spirit said in 10:9 and in 8:13 where He said: "In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

When the Spirit said that it was ready to vanish away He was not joking; He was speaking literally. He let the believers know that judgment was soon coming and it was going to be so bad that the Levitical system, which had become obsolete by the cross, was going to literally vanish from the face of the earth.

So I believe that in **10:37**, when He says, "yet a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay," the Spirit is referring to Titus and his Roman legions who were to fulfill the prophesies regarding the judgment of the Jews and the abolition of the old covenant. The day was set, the time was certain, the clock was counting down; and it would happen without delay.

Just for your notes, the writer of Hebrews pulls this quote from *Habakkuk 2:3* which is a prophecy regarding a prior destruction of Jerusalem brought about by the hand of the Lord through the Babylonians. But with regard to the ensuing invasion by the Romans, Jesus had actually warned His followers that this was coming.

Luke 19:41-44

When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. "For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

Luke 21:5-6

And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said, "As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down."

Real time present judgment; it was predicted in advanced and as with all things promised by the Lord, it happened exactly as described. When the walls were finally breached, the Temple was completely leveled and every stone was literally turned over. You see during the incursion into the city and all the mad chaos, the Roman troops inadvertently shot a flaming arrow through an upper window in the Temple which started a massive fire. It was so intense that all the gold and precious metals in the Temple melted and filled all the cracks and crevices between the stones of the temple (hence that reference to the judgment being a fury of fire). The greedy soldiers who wanted to be adequately paid for their annoying 3-year long siege tore everything apart searching for every last piece of gold that they could gather; thus, fulfilling the prophecies to the letter.

This judgment on the Jews was horrific. The Romans killed practically everyone they found, including the priests and the ruling elite. It was estimated that there were around 2,500,000 people present when the siege began, as the Jews had gathered in the city for the Passover. Approximately 1,000,000 perished in the siege, 347,000 perished in other places, 11,000 had starved to death as the Romans cut off the food supply, and 97,000 were carried off into captivity.

With no Temple, no priests, no implements for worship, the Levitical system—the old covenant—was completely brought to an end fulfilling the prophecy found in *8:13*. But do you want to know something absolutely amazing and

entirely miraculous. According to Eusebius and Epiphanius, both who were early church fathers and historians, <u>not</u> one believing Christian who held on to their faith and endured their time of suffering lost their life during this cataclysmic ordeal; <u>not one!</u>

Eusebius wrote: "The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella. Here, those that believed in Christ, having removed from Jerusalem, as if holy men had entirely abandoned the royal city itself, and the whole land of Judea; the divine justice, for their crimes against Christ and His apostles, finally overtook them, totally destroying the whole generation of these evildoers from the earth."

And Epiphanius wrote: "The Christians who dwelt in Jerusalem, being forewarned by Christ of the approaching siege, removed to Pella." He also wrote: "The disciples of Christ being warned by an angel, removed to Pella."

Pella was a city up in the Decapolis on the east side of the Sea of Galilee where they were able to hide and survive the invasion by the Romans. So you see God is so faithful to His own. This is why He wrote these believers and told them to hold on to their shield of faith and not shrink back. Those who held on were preserved; their souls were literally saved from destruction. Yet, those who did shrink back prior to the siege, those who took matters into their own hands and decided to bring an early end to their suffering by returning to Judaism, were destroyed

along with the rest of the unbelieving Jews. They chose poorly even though they were warned of the fearful expectation of judgment (10:27).

So in the simple and historical understanding of **10:37-38**, we find that it was literally and physically fulfilled in 70 AD. Those who did not hold to their faith lost their lives whereas those who did were preserved.

I want to also look carefully at verse **10:39** for the author suddenly addresses himself or herself and his/her surrounding community of believers and juxtaposes 2 realities. It's a bit complex but those of you who love language it will be like a tasty treat.

First of all, "are" is in the <u>present active indicative</u> tense and is the *only* verb in this sentence; "shrink back unto destruction" and "those who have faith and preserve their souls" are strings of nouns. This means that 2-equal statements of fact are presented as current realities. In other words, the "we" is defined by the fact that they are those who have faith and preserve their souls. It is what they are and has nothing to do with what they do. In the same way they are not those who shrink back unto destruction.

The author, I believe, is making the exact same statement made in *Chapter 3* where he/she was juxtaposing the 2 realities of the Israelites who had faith and entered the Promised Land and those who did not and wandered through the wilderness until they died. All were Israelites belonging to God, but one group entered God's rest and protection because they were defined by their faith. Whereas the other group died because they were defined by the fact that their hearts had always departed from God; it was just their present active reality.

Therefore, in this one passage the author not only foreshadows the coming destruction of Jerusalem but also exhorts these believers to be heroes of faith (like the author)—heroes who would escape this judgment because they are people of faith whose souls are preserved. In *Chapter 11*, the author actually reaches back to the Jewish legacy of the heroes of faith to immediately reinforce this exhortation, but sometimes when we are suffering it is good to know that there are those, in the here and now, who live by faith.

Let's consider the statement: but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." This is still part of the quote from *Habakkuk 2 (verse 4)*. This phrase "no pleasure" is in the <u>present active indicative</u> tense, so again we know this passage is not dealing with the issue of eternity but with our here and now. It is in the indicative, meaning that there is no middle ground; there is no grey. God is not pleased with those who do not live by faith; this is an incontestable statement of fact.

To properly understand this we have to jump ahead a few verses to **11:6** which says: "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Yes, it says **impossible**.

This sets forth the second of 2-pillars of truth in the book of Hebrews. Let's review. The first pillar is that only God is good (*Mark 10:17-18*; *Matthew 19:17*) which is why Jesus had to come and do all that He did for us. We could not redeem ourselves, the angels could not do it, the prophets and priests could not do it, the Levitical system could not do it; but only God who is good could do it for us. We studied this exhaustively in the early chapters of Hebrews.

Consider; if only God is good, then it means that all else is not. I have often depicted this in this chart. You see most believers have swallowed the lie that as long as they are not doing anything bad or "evil" that they are in good standing with God. But that is simply not the truth. There is no middle ground of "goodness." Only God is good; thus, the only way we can be good like God is if what we do, what we think, what we say, and where we go all derives from God. If it derives from ourselves, no matter how we label it or try and make it sound good because we have "good" intentions, it is still just evil in disguise. This includes all the "good" things we try and do to please God and to serve Him.

Again, only God is good. Thus, only what comes from God can please God. For only what comes from God is righteous, holy, and true.

We can only make sense of this in our lives in light of the *new nature* which God gives to us. I'm going back to our familiar diagrams to make this point. "If anyone is in Christ he is given a new creation" (*2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15*). This chart depicts the basic construct of a believer; 2 natures in conflict. And *Ephesians 4:24* tells us that this *new nature* has been created in the image of God and is righteous, holy, and true; for it is the habitat of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives. It is because of this *new nature* that we are able to do anything that is truly good.

As believers, however, we have the choice to listen to the voice of God in our lives and live from the *New Creation*, and thereby produce from our lives what is good in the form of the fruits of the Spirit; or we can listen to the advice, counsel and direction of our *Old Sinful Nature* and produce all that is not good—which includes all our religious acts whereby we try and please God (*Galatians 5:17-22*).

Now, over the last few weeks we learned that there is a real war that is fought in our minds/soul between our *Old Sinful Nature* and our *New Creation* and *Galatians 5:17* says that our choices are never free from this conflict. Both are trying to convince us to follow; and it is this fulcrum of choice where either faith or sin is birthed.

You need to understand this. Despite what you may have been told, our sinful behaviors are not the problem; they are just the fruits of the sin that was birthed when we decided to trust in ourselves in some way, shape or form and not trust Jesus. That is why all our attempts to control "sinful" behavior have never worked and that is why religious people stay bound to this cycle of always fighting sin and never really gaining the victory. The problem is that they are engaged in the wrong battle and they do not even know it; but mark my word, this battle to control sin does not please God. It is a waste of time and effort.

Sin is birthed from our choice to not trust Jesus and not to live from our **New Creation**. The example we are given in this letter is that these believers were so stressed out by the persecution that they were under at the hands of the Jews, that they were considering shrinking back and rejoining Judaism in order to get the religious Jews off their backs.

Their situation was intense beyond measure. But to shrink back would have been a choice to take matters into their own hands and protect themselves; since they likely believed that Jesus was not doing a very good job of protecting them (at least not in the way they expected Him to protect them).

This would have been a choice to preserve their own lives since they felt that Jesus would allow them to be crushed under this persecution. This would have been a choice to let their emotions dictate their reality versus what they know to be true according to the Word of God. This would have been a choice to place a higher value in the things of this world (their safety, comfort, security, provision, and so on) than on the fact that they were spiritual beings sent into this world to do the will of God and not their own will.

This would have been a choice that would have made a lot of practical sense and they could have easily justified it in their minds by saying that they were preserving the life of their children and being responsible husbands and fathers and so on. But regardless, it was not the will of God and therefore it was not good for they would have relied upon their own wisdom for their lives and not God's wisdom for their lives.

You see we do this sort of thing all the time. Think for just a moment of your family dynamic and all the ways you have learned to cope and protect yourself from harm. Think of all the fear that was birthed in your heart through all those years. Think of the ways you have learned to deal with others, ways which you picked up from your parents when you were just a child.

For some of you these reactions have been ingrained and almost indelibly impressed into your soul. When you live from your *Old Sinful Nature* you don't even seem to have a choice in the matter, you just react when you feel threatened or fearful. For example, if growing up your life was unstable, you probably try and control all things and all people around you. If your experience as a child was in any way hostile, you probably are extremely passive aggressive. If your parent's marriage was rocky, you probably live in a great amount of fear or

have become the arbitrator of family disputes. If your family split up, you probably filter everything through the lens of abandonment.

If your dad was emotionally disconnected, you probably are shut down to others and don't know really how to operate in the realm of emotion, or you have become the emotional care takers of others, but in a very unhealthy way (for instance, many of you have been your mothers' source of emotional support since her husband was emotionally absent). It is also likely that, if your dad was emotionally disconnected, you are insecure, don't like yourself, and have no real foundation of who you are.

The point is that all of these reactions which impact our daily moment-by-moment existence are not from faith; they do not derive from God. Thus, they are not good and do not please God. Our <u>choice</u> (whether its consciously made or not) to continue to live from these experiences produces all sorts of sinful behavior in our lives, but the root of our sin is still the choice that is made to not trust ourselves to Jesus in these areas of our life.

Sometimes that choice is made because the Spirit has not yet turned His light on that area of our lives and pressed us to believe that there is another way; sometimes it is because we have not learned His ways, but most often it is because we are stubborn and honestly don't want the other way. We are far too comfortable in how we do things; we know how to survive leveraging the years of experience that our *Old Sinful Nature* provides. It may not be good; but at least it is predictable. And this is exactly why God brings judgment into our lives so that this pattern is torn and we start to learn why we can trust ourselves to Him and

how to trust ourselves to Him in these deep, deep, recesses of our soul so we can make choices of faith and not of sin.

So this second pillar, that without faith it is impossible to please God, provides for us the answer as to "why God allows bad things to happen in our lives." Our *Old Sinful Nature* is an enemy of God—an adversary; always has been and always will be (*Romans 8:7-8; Galatians 5:17*). Thus, we have to choose to distance ourselves from this adversary.

Let me express this in another way. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior then you have received this *new nature*, which is wonderful and all; but that is not enough. You have to learn how to live from this *new nature* and let Jesus be the Lord of your life. You can no longer choose to live by all those ingrained patterns of dealing with people and life, and just cover them up by "religious" behavior. It does not matter if you witness, serve in the church, or try to "obey" God and do all you can to try and stop sinning if it comes from the religious part of your *Old Sinful Nature*; what matters is faith and faith alone—faith which expresses itself in God's agape love (*Galatians 5:6*).

Do you understand that these 2-pivotal truths (only God is good and without faith it is impossible to please God) are intended to keep back the natural tendency that we have to resurrect a system of law that has been abolished or to create a new law of Christian "do's and don'ts." As such, it is critical that you understand that "Christian" behavior does not matter to God; what matters is the source of your behavior.

Either what you do, what you think, what you say, and where you go derives from Jesus living in and through your New Creation, and is by definition pleasing

to God, or it doesn't and is <u>not</u> (regardless of your good intentions, sincere desires, and hard work)!

This is where you must decide to let the Word of God be authoritative over your lives. If not, you will never truly know and experience Jesus as a person and to you He will always be this amorphous God who is out there watching you, making sure you do things right.

Our life from beginning to end is to be defined by faith. *Romans 1:17* says, "This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."" Every part of our life is to be bound by faith. This is why Paul tells us that as we have received Christ Jesus as Lord, so should we walk in Him (*Colossians 2:6*); for we walk by faith and not by sight (*2 Corinthians 5:7*).

The pathway of faith is completely foreign to our *Old Sinful Nature* who is hardwired to live by the tangible: what we see, hear, feel and think we can control; which explains why the "religion of Christianity" focuses on behavior. But we did not come to God on the basis of behavior and good works; we came to God when we were dead in our sins (*Romans 5:8*). We came to God on the basis of what He did for us. We came to God on the basis of who He is. We came to God on the basis of faith. And this is how we are to live.

When we look to any sort of behavior as a means of being accepted, finding favor, obtaining blessing, or being approved of God, according to Paul we have alienated ourselves from fellowship with Christ and have in effect abandoned grace. Paul even goes so far as to say that we have been cut off from Christ (*Galatians 5:4*) or as Jesus said, our branch has been severed from the vine (*John*

15:6). Both of which are just pictorial ways of saying that without faith it is **impossible** to please God.

Remember, the work that God has asked of us is to merely believe in the one He has sent (*John 6:28-29*). Those are Jesus' words and not mine. If you have faith, as we discussed last week, Jesus will do His work in and through your life so don't worry about the work. Your job is to choose Him and He will do the rest through you.

John 6:29 explains why Hebrews 11:6 says that we must believe that He is and He rewards those who seek Him. This notion that "He is" comes from the concept that He is the I Am (it's the same root word); thus, He is everything that we will ever need for every circumstance in which we will ever find ourselves. The notion that "He rewards those who seek Him" makes this practical; it means that we must believe that He not only is the I Am but will be our I Am.

We must believe and therefore bet our lives on that God has said about Himself and all that God has said about us. We must let our minds be renewed (as we discussed last week) so we no longer make our choices according to those ingrained patterns of thinking relying upon our *Old Sinful Nature*; rather, we must make our choices according to the truth that Jesus is our I Am believing that He will provide everything we need.

And, by the way, we must not forget that whatever is not of faith is sin (*Romans 14:23; James 4:17*). See, there is no middle ground of "goodness"—I wasn't lying. We either choose to believe the truth and live in the truth or we choose to believe a lie and live in a lie.

So what does it mean to please God? In **11:6**, the Greek word translated "please" (*euarestos*) comes from the idea of being agreeable or in alignment. Therefore, Hebrews **11:6** could be worded as follows: "Without faith, it is impossible to be fully agreeable with God," or "Without faith, it is impossible to be in alignment with God."

I wanted to make this clarification so you don't walk out of here thinking that God is mad or angry at you if you don't make a choice of faith (which is what most people take away when they think that they are not pleasing God). As we discussed over the last 2-weeks, God cannot be angry with us for the Father already poured out all His anger on Jesus during His passion. And according to *Romans 3:25* and *Romans 5:1*, it perfectly satisfied God's anger against us.

So relationally, this stuff about faith is not about disappointing God, failing God, or anything like that. It is about driving into our thick skulls that there is no middle ground of goodness. No matter how much we are convinced that we are good and can do good and pleasing things for God, we can't; only He can do them through us, for only God is good. That is why we must live by faith.

Thus, it is only when we are in alignment with Him through faith (our body, our mind/soul/emotions, and the *New Creation*) that we have free flowing access to the things of the Spirit and our life can produce His agape love—which is the ultimate form of obedience and fulfills every command that we have ever been given (*Galatians 5:5-6* and *John 15:12-17*).

The Spirit of God is practically released into our lives by faith—by our willingness to <u>trust</u> that Jesus is the "I Am" and our <u>choice</u> to live as if He is our "I Am." You see many, many people say they believe that Jesus is our I Am, but so

few people actually live as if He is their I Am. Claiming you believe gives you no big bragging right, for even the demons believe and shudder (*James 2:19*). Your faith must be proven through your choices. Without this kind of faith, the Spirit within us is grieved and our *Old Sinful Nature* takes unlawful authority in our lives and disrupts the free flowing move of the Spirit through our bodies.

Let's take a moment and bring a solid definition to this word "faith" since obviously it is the lynch pin for our relationship with God.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Young's literal translation says it this way: "And faith is of things hoped for a confidence, of matters not seen a conviction" The Greek word we have translated as "hope" (*elpizo*) does not mean that we are crossing our fingers wishing these things to be true; rather, it means that we have full expectation that all that God has said about Himself and about us is true.

The word "assurance" or "confidence" is a verb and is in the <u>present active</u> indicative tense. Thus, true faith says that we are convinced that all that God has said about Himself and about us is true and unalterable right now in our every moment of our existence. This is faith.

The word "conviction," on the other hand, is a noun and can also be translated as evidence. Our faith is the evidence that God exists. Our faith is the evidence

that this seemingly intangible and mysterious God is in fact quite tangible, personal, and has revealed Himself to us.

This is why Biblical faith is differentiated from our English word "believe," for it contains a living aspect to it. People can "believe" all sorts of things, but what matters is how they live. Others can't see our belief, but they can see how we live.

Thus, if we have faith, we become the very embodiment of God's existence here on earth which explains why Paul said: "it is no longer I who live but Christ that lives in me; and this life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave Himself for me" (*Galatians 2:20*). Paul lived no longer controlled by his *Old Sinful Nature*; but through faith every aspect of his being was in alignment with God (his body, mind/soul/emotions with the *New Creation*). As such he was a living testament to the truth that Jesus is the I Am. His conviction was the evidence for all to see. He believed that Jesus was the I Am and he lived with full conviction that Jesus was His I Am and to others it was undeniable.

So going back to **10:37-39**, do you now understand what it means when God says that He takes no pleasure in the person that shrinks back—the person that returns to living according to the dictates of their *Old Sinful Nature* instead of by faith?

The Spirit spoke so loudly to this community of believers. He said that their time of testing (their time of judgment or purification) would pass; thus, they must hold on, not waiver, not back down, not withdraw, and not retreat. God was going to care for them; God was going to prove that He was their I Am. They just needed to hold fast to their confidence of hope which had a great reward (10:35);

and, in this instance, that reward was the real time preservation of their lives and rescue from the persecution they were suffering.

I love that about God; everything, even great suffering, has its time and its purpose. That is why I love that verse we read 2 weeks ago in 1 Peter:

1 Peter 5:10

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

I know that many of you are now going through all sorts of suffering. It may not be hard-core persecution as with these believers, but it is suffering none the less as God's purposes in your life is to teach you to stop trusting in your old patterns of thinking and reacting submitted to the direction and control of your *Old Sinful Nature*. And that hurts. It's like a peeling away of your flesh from your body and that is exactly what is going on in the spiritual part of you.

But please, I want you to take away that this judgment or time of testing is only temporary; it will last only as long as it takes for God to accomplish His purposes in your life. That's it. Then He Himself will perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. And like Paul you will be able to declare that you no longer live, but it is Christ that lives in you. You will find yourself in alignment with God and your *New Creation* will dominate your daily practical life.

Hebrews 10:37-39; 11:1 and 6

I encourage you to not be like those who shrink back because they can't take it

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or handle it any more. But look to Jesus and know that He is your "I Am" and

during this suffering learn to let Him be your "I Am." Stop fighting Him. Stop trying

to control everything and stop managing all the trouble in your life. Stop trying to

dictate how things "should be" according to your wisdom for your life and your

definitions of good.

Let God be your God; let Him do His work. Learn to love His wisdom for your

life. And know, yes know, that when it is done you will be a living testament, the

living proof that Jesus is God. Then, nothing will move you. You will be the living

miracle that proves God alone is good.

Let's Pray

See Diagrams below

















