

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS:
A STUDY GUIDE

Robert Rogland

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All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. *2 Timothy 3:16.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Author

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews is unknown. During the first few centuries of the Christian era most commentators attributed Hebrews to the Apostle Paul. Although from earliest days there have been some who disputed the Pauline authorship of the book, the view that Paul wrote Hebrews predominated up till the seventeenth century.¹ Nowadays most scholars deny that Paul wrote Hebrews, but a minority of commentators continues to hold that he was its author. Some commentators, ancient and modern, have suggested other candidates - Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, Clement of Rome, even Priscilla. They base their various opinions on the style of writing, on some personal references in the last chapter of the letter, and on other, more subjective bases.

Whoever the author was, he wrote before 70 AD. Hebrews describes the sacrificial system of the Jews, the duties of the High Priest, and the Day of Atonement, all still in place when he wrote. In 70 AD the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple and brought an end to Jewish worship.

The fact is that we do not know who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews. But that Hebrews is inspired Scripture, on a par with the other Old Testament and New Testament writings, has been the nearly unanimous opinion of the church since the fifth century, and remains the opinion of all Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and evangelical commentators today.

The Recipients of the Letter

The 1853 English translator of Calvin's commentary on Hebrews, sums up what I have to say about the matter of the original recipients of Hebrews:

It has been a subject learnedly discussed, to whom in particular the Epistle was sent, whether to dispersed Jews or to those in Palestine - whether to a particular Congregation, or to the Hebrews in general? Such questions are comparatively of very little importance; and to spend time and talent in discussing them, is a work frivolous and useless.

The Author's Purpose in Writing

Hebrews was written to strengthen Jewish believers in Christ who were in danger of abandoning the faith. The original intended readers seem not to have been undergoing persecution when the author wrote, but earlier persecution and the pressures of living in a wicked world weighed on them:

Because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. (Matthew 24:12)

No doubt family members and friends who rejected the gospel urged Jewish Christians to return to the faith of their fathers. Also, the old, familiar religion, with its tried and true works and ceremonies, may have seemed easier in retrospect than the challenges of following Christ. Their former religion had been given by God - couldn't one please God by being a pious Jew?

The author of Hebrews advances various arguments for the superiority of the Christian faith over Judaism, arguments we will take up in order as he raises them. As he unfolds his argument, the author emphasizes that faith in Christ is not primarily a doctrinal system, but rather personal reliance and trust in Christ himself and calls his readers to continue to exercise a living faith

1 The Reformed theologian John Calvin held that Paul did not write Hebrews. In his commentary on the book he points out that the author says that the gospel, "was attested to us by those who heard" it; something Paul would not have said. In Galatians Paul asserts rather, "For I did not receive [the gospel] from any man, nor was I taught it, but received through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12).

LESSON 1. HEBREWS 1:1-3

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who are “our fathers”? *v. 1*
2. Tell some of the ways God spoke to and by the prophets.
3. What are “these last days”? *v. 2*
4. How is God’s way of speaking nowadays superior to how he spoke “long ago”? *v. 2*.
5. To what position has God appointed his Son? *v. 2*
6. What work did the Son do in the beginning? *v. 2*
7. The Son is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” Does this mean that the Son himself is God?
8. What does it mean that the Son upholds the universe? *v. 3*
9. By what means does the Son uphold the universe? *v. 3*. By what means did he bring it into being? *Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26*
10. How did the Son make purification for sins? *v. 3*
11. Relate the end of v.3 to the phrase in v. 2, “who he appointed heir of all things.”

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who are “our fathers”? v. 1

The Jews of the Old Testament era. The author is writing as a Jew to Jews.

2. Tell some of the ways God spoke to and by the prophets.

Moses was the first prophet, Deuteronomy 18:15, Luke 24:27. God first spoke to him out of a burning bush, Exodus 3:1 ff.. He spoke to other prophets by angels, Judges 6, Acts 7:53; in visions, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1; and in dreams, Daniel 7. Often the prophets simply tell us, “Thus says the LORD” without specifying the means.

3. What are “these last days”? v. 2

“These last days” began with the ministry of John the Baptist. We have been living in the last days for some 2000 years now!

4. How is God’s way of speaking in the last days superior to how he spoke “long ago”? v. 2.

Before Christ came, God spoke through means; now he has spoken directly, through his own Son, who is very God himself.

5. To what position has God appointed his Son? v. 2

God has appointed him heir of all things.

6. What work did the Son do in the beginning? v. 2

He created the world, acting for God the Father.

7. The Son is the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” Does this mean that the Son himself is God?

Yes. God says, “My glory I will not give to another,” Isaiah 48:11, yet Jesus Christ shows his glory. See Matthew 17:1-8 and study note 3.

8. What does it mean that the Son upholds the universe? v. 3

The universe would cease to exist if the Son did not continuously will it to continue.

And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:12

9. By what means does the Son uphold the universe? By what means did he bring it into being?

He upholds it by his powerful Word, the same means by which he created it. Note in Genesis 1 that each act of creation begins, “And God said” Jesus himself is the Word of God. See also John 1:1-3

10. How did the Son make purification for sins? v. 3

He died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. Hebrews goes into this in detail later in the letter.

11. Relate the end of v.3 to the phrase in v. 2, “who he appointed heir of all things.”

The rightful place of the heir is at the right hand of the Father.

The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” Psalm 110:1.

STUDY NOTES

1. Are the Old Ways Obsolete?

Do verses 1:1-2 imply that the words of the prophets (and by logical extension, the whole Old Testament) have been superseded by the word of Christ? No. The author quotes the Old Testament extensively. The Old Testament bears witness to Christ, though the Jews could only see God and his Messiah partially in the words of the OT. To borrow a phrase of the Apostle Paul, they saw the fullness of God in a mirror dimly, 1 Corinthians 13:12. What these verses imply is that God's revelation of himself is complete only in Jesus Christ.

Now, the question at the head of this study note asks not if the former *revelation of God* in the writings of the prophets is no longer binding or relevant in any way, but rather it asks if the old *ways* are obsolete, and the answer to that question is *yes*. We are in the last days, including *the last days of the Jewish religious system*. The author will go on to argue that the sacrifices and rituals of Judaism were only temporary, pointing to the sacrifice and ministry of Jesus Christ. Now that Christ has come those ways are obsolete.

2. The Last Days.

See the answer to study question 3. The last days began some 2000 years ago. That is clearly what the authors of the New Testament believed:

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 1 John 2:18

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholly, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. 2 Timothy 3:1-5

The Last Day (singular) is the day the Lord returns (John 6:40), but we are in the last days (plural) prior to his return. In terms of the length of human history, beginning with Adam and Eve, the last 2000 years can certainly be considered the last days, the end of the age. (Matthew 24, especially v. 3). Also, as stated in study note 1, above, they are the last days of the Jewish religious system.

These days are also the last days in that no era will follow the Christian era. Various heretics have announced a new era, but the Scripture denies this.²

3. The Exact Imprint of His Nature

Christ is the radiance of God's glory:

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. Luke 9:28-29

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. John 17:4-5

² In the third century a professed Christian named Montanus claimed to be the embodiment of the Holy Spirit, heralding a new age. Two hundred years ago Joseph Smith founded the Mormon church, which calls itself the Church of Jesus Christ of *Latter Day* Saints. All such proclamations are worse than erroneous., they are heretical.

God said in Isaiah 48:11 that he would not give his glory to another (see the answer to study question 7), yet Christ shared that glory. That in itself indicates that Christ is divine, “very God,” as the Nicene Creed puts it. His divinity is also shown in the statement in 1:3 that he is the very imprint of His [God’s] nature. Another way to state that truth is that Christ is the image of God

the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2Corinthians 4:4

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” John 14:8-10

We need to recognize that the New Testament writers use the word God to refer to God the Father, particularly when a passage also mentions Jesus Christ. The New Testament writers do not mean to imply that Jesus Christ is not truly God. They make a distinction between the *persons* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but confess them to be one divine *substance*, one God. Consider, for example, Matthew 28: 19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .” *One* name, singular; but that one name denotes three persons. For more scripture spelling out the deity of Christ, who shows the exact imprint of His nature, see a Bible concordance.

LESSON 2. HEBREWS 1:4-14

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Verses 4-14 constitute the author's first argument for the superiority of Jesus Christ to Old Testament religion. Verse 4 proves that point from the Old Testament scriptures themselves. In one sentence, what is his point?
2. Verse 5 applies Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 to Jesus Christ. What do these verses tell us about Jesus?
3. What is the role of angels in God's creation? *vs. 6-7*
4. What point do vs. 8-9 make about Jesus Christ?
5. Verses 10-12 are a direct quotation of Psalm 105:25-27, where the psalmist is addressing Jehovah (or Yahweh) - see v. 1 of the psalm. Does the author mean to say that Jesus Christ is Jehovah Himself?
6. What are the respective positions of Jesus Christ and the angels as indicated in vs. 13-14?

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Verses 4-14 constitute the author's first argument for the superiority of Jesus Christ to Old Testament religion. Verse 4 proves that point from the Old Testament scriptures themselves. In one sentence, what is his point?

His very name shows that he is more excellent than the angels.

2. Verse 5 applies Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 to Jesus Christ. What do these verses tell us about Jesus?

He is God's Son

3. What is the role of angels in God's creation? vs. 6-7

Their role is to worship and serve Jesus Christ. See also the answer to study question 6.

4. What point do vs. 8-9 make about Jesus Christ

As God, he is king and ruler over all.

5. Verses. 10-12 are a direct quotation of Psalm 102:25-27, where the psalmist is addressing Jehovah (or Yahweh) - see v. 1 of the psalm. Does the author mean to say that Jesus Christ is Jehovah Himself?

Yes. The early Arian heretics denied that Jesus was Yahweh, eternal God, and Unitarians and Jehovah's witnesses deny it today. But if one claims to believe the Bible there can be no doubt that the author of Hebrews believed it. By applying an Old Testament passage about Yahweh to Jesus Christ he showed that Jesus is the same God, the one true God.

The New Testament writers often use the word *God* to denote God the Father, particularly in passages which refer also to Jesus. That does not mean that Jesus is not God. Hebrews 1 makes it clear that Jesus is fully divine. He is God the Son, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit constitute one God in three Persons, the Trinity.³ It took the Church three hundred years to spell that out in careful language that shuts out the various errors and heresies about the nature and person of Christ and of his relationship to the other persons of the Godhead.

6. What are the respective positions of Jesus Christ and the angels as indicated in vs. 13-14?

Jesus Christ reigns over all, even his enemies; that would include all angels, the holy angels as well as fallen angels. The role of angels is to serve men, women, and children who are predestined for salvation.

³ The word *Trinity* is not found in the Bible, though the concept is.

STUDY NOTES

1. Does Fulfilled Prophecy Create Faith in Christ?

All the authors of the New Testament quote directly or allude to the scriptures of the Old Testament.. Many of their quotations, such as those in Hebrews 1:5-14, are prophetic references to Jesus Christ. It is clear why New Testament authors included these references in books directed at Jews and Jewish Christians: both groups already acknowledged the Old Testament to be the authoritative word of God. The Book of Hebrews is clearly a book intended for Jewish Christians, though throughout the Christian era the Book of Hebrews has also served to strengthen the faith of Gentiles who have come to Christ.

But what about unbelievers who read Hebrews? Did these quotations persuade them that Jesus is Lord and Savior? Do they create faith in their hearts?

Probably not initially. Most people come to faith in Christ by other means. Once a person is convinced that the Bible is the word of God, then seeing how those Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in Christ may be a means of contributing to true faith in Jesus; but I have not yet read any personal testimonies that messianic prophecies themselves were responsible for leading any non-Jews to Christ. Some Jews, yes, but not Gentiles. Evangelists recognize this fact. They don't point to prophecies; they make their appeal on other grounds.

The Apostle Paul recognized this. When he was in Athens he engaged in dialogue with the Greek philosophers. His aim, as always, was to bring his hearers to faith in Christ. His argument made no use of the Hebrew scriptures; rather, he appealed to universal principles that Gentiles acknowledged:

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live in all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.' Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:22-31

As Christians, we should become familiar with the Old Testament prophetic witness to Jesus. It will strengthen our faith. That, in fact, was the intent of the author of Hebrews. His readers were believers, but were in danger of turning back to Judaism. Hebrews quotes the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus to strengthen its readers' faith that in Christ they have the fulfillment of their old religion.

2. Man and the Angels.

Hebrews 1:4-14 tells us the place of angels with respect to God and Christ. Angels are God's servants (vs. 7, 14). Christ is greater than the angels, and they worship and serve him (vs. 5-13). But what about angels and ordinary human beings? What is their relationship?

Many people believe that angels are the spirits of human beings who have died.. Clarence, the angel in the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, is depicted as a man seeking to earn his angelic wings. This portrayal reinforces a very common idea of angels. As to church teaching, I believe only the Mormon church teaches that angels are exalted human beings, but the idea seems to be widespread beyond the bounds of the Mormon church. Nevertheless, this view, though popular, has no biblical support.

What does the Bible teach about angels?

Firstly, it suggests they were present at the creation of the heavens and earth. Angels existed before the human race.

Were you there when I laid the foundation of the earth? . . . when the morning stars [the angels] sang together and all the sons of God [in this context, also the angels] shouted for joy. Job 38:7

The Bible tells us that the angels are, in some way, a little greater than man. Speaking of man, Psalm 8 says: You [God] have made him [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings [angels];

Secondly, the angels are greater than man in several ways:

- a. They will never die. They are spirits without mortal bodies (although they can appear in human form).
- b. They behold the face of God (Matthew 18:10).
- c. They have great power, far beyond that of mortal man.

Thirdly, in spite of the angels' power and glory, man is more blessed than they.

a. Fallen man can repent and be forgiven. The fallen angels cannot repent, and so they cannot be saved. At present they are reserved in prison for eternal judgment (Jude 6).

b. The common idea that we have a guardian angel is true! Acts 12:15 indicates that Peter had one, and Matthew 18:10 tells us that children have one. These guardian angels protect God's people:

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone Psalm 91:11-12.

LESSON 3. HEBREWS 2:1-9

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. “Therefore” . . . therefore what? What should we conclude from Chapter 1? *vs. 1*
2. What danger did the readers of Hebrews face? *vs. 1, 3*
3. What was true of the message of the angels, the “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who were to inherit salvation,” 1:14, that makes that message a two-edged sword, so to speak? *vs. 2*
4. What reasons does the author give us to have confidence in the gospel message? *vs. 3-4*
5. Is the author writing about the Christian life in this present world? What is he writing about? *vs. 5*
6. The angels have great power and authority. Does their power and authority include rule over the world to come? If not, who will rule that world? *vs. 6-8*
7. What evidence does the author give for asserting that the son of man will rule everything? *vs. 6-8*
8. In what way(s) was Jesus Christ made a little lower than the angels?
9. The author did not see everything subject to Christ in his day, v. 8. We can say the same in our day. But Scripture assures us that he is already crowned with glory and honor.
 - a. What did Jesus do to merit being crowned with glory and honor? *vs. 9*
 - b. For whom did he suffer? *vs. 9*

c. Why did he suffer for everyone? n. 9

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. "Therefore" . . . therefore what? What should we conclude from Chapter 1? v.1

We must pay close attention to what we have heard.

2. What danger did the readers of Hebrews face? vs. 1, 3

Those who hear the gospel may be in danger of drifting away. Drifting is not an abrupt rejection of the gospel, but a slow loss of interest until it no longer stirs us or means anything to us. See study note 1.

3. What was true of the message of the angels, the "ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who were to inherit salvation", 1:14, that makes that message a two-edged sword, so to speak? v. 2

On the plus side, it was reliable and trustworthy. On the negative side, those who neglect it – that is, those who drift away or never pay attention to it - receive just retribution.

4. What reasons does the author give us to have confidence in the gospel message? vs. 3-4

Firstly, it was declared by the Lord Himself. Secondly, it was attested by the apostles as they went forth preaching. Thirdly, the words of the apostles were confirmed by signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit. See study note 2.

5. Is the author writing about the Christian life in this present world? What is he writing about? v. 5

He is writing about the world to come. See study note 3.

6. The angels have great power and authority. Does their power and authority include rule over the world to come? If not, who will rule that world? vs. 6-8

The angels will not rule over the world to come. That world will be subject to Christ. All things will be put under his feet.

7. What evidence does the author give for asserting that the son of man will rule everything? vs. 6-8

He quotes Psalm 8. See also Philippians 2:5-11.

8. In what way(s) was Jesus Christ made a little lower than the angels?

The eternal Son of God, Very God of Very God, took on flesh and became man. See Lesson 2, study note 4.

9. The author did not see everything subject to Christ in his day, v.8. We can say the same in our day. But Scripture assures us that he is already crowned with glory and honor.

a. What did Jesus do to merit being crowned with glory and honor? v. 9

He suffered death. See study note 4.

b. For whom did he suffer death? v. 9

He suffered death for everyone. See study note 5.

c. Why did he suffer death for everyone? v. 9

It was a matter of God's grace. Though we deserve the punishment of eternal death for our sins, God favored us with undeserved mercy - grace is undeserved mercy - by sending Jesus Christ to suffer death in our place, so atoning for our sins and giving us eternal life.

STUDY NOTES

1. Drifting Away.

We probably know people who once professed to be Christians but no longer give any evidence of Christian faith. Some of them may have openly turned away from Christ to other religions, to atheism or to no religion at all, but perhaps more people have simply lost interest in religion. They have drifted away from Christ.

The latter group stopped attending church, stopped reading the Bible, ceased to pray except, perhaps, in emergencies. The process was slow - that is what “drifting away” suggests..

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life wear down the conscience. For example, too many college students, away from home slough off the faith they were raised in to indulge in lusts they could not practice while living under the watchful gaze of their parents. Again, men and women in the business world may direct their thoughts and efforts to attaining professional and financial success, and the pursuit of godliness drops to second-best, then is relegated to a past well-nigh forgotten.

It is true enough that the elect will not drift away: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us,” 1 John 2:19. Biblical authors write as though it were possible for born-again believers to drift away in order to ensure that the elect will not abandon their faith. Their warnings are a means the Lord uses to preserve the elect.

2. Attested by Much Evidence.

The preaching of the gospel in apostolic times was attested to in various ways enumerated by the author.

Firstly, Jesus’ apostles reported what they had seen and heard.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 2 Peter. 1:16-18

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you. 1 John 1:1-3

Secondly, their eyewitness testimony was confirmed by signs and wonders, some of which are recounted in the Book of Acts:4

- tongues at Pentecost (ch. 2)
- Peter and John heal lame man (3:1-10)
- apostles heal many in Jerusalem (5:12-16)
- Philip in Samaria (8:4-7)

4 Paul was also an eyewitness of Jesus Christ, though not one of the original apostles (Acts 9).

- Peter heals Aeneas and Tabitha (9:32-45)
- Elymas the sorcerer struck blind (13:8-12)
- Paul and Barnabas in Iconium: signs and wonders (14:1-3)
- Paul and Barnabas in Lystra: cripple healed (14:8-13)
- Paul and Silas in Philippi: evil spirit cast out of slave girl (16:16-18ff.)
- Paul in Ephesus: the Holy Spirit falls on disciples of John the Baptist (19:1-6)
- Paul in Ephesus: many miracles (19:11-13)
- Paul in Troas: raises Eutychus from the dead (20:7-12)

We may wish God would accompany the preaching of the gospel with signs and wonders in our day, but apparently he does not do so. One hears of such signs and wonders, but they are always far away; we never see them ourselves. I think doubt is appropriate. Why doubt that the Holy Spirit gives such gifts in our day? Because by the end of the apostolic age the entire New Testament had been written and the Bible was complete. Nowadays the Holy Spirit creates conviction through his Word: “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ,” Romans 10:17.

3. The World to Come.

When the preaching of the gospel wanes in a church or nation it is often replaced by a false gospel of the here and now. A gospel of the here and now is a message centered on this life; it ignores eternity or reduces it to an afterthought.⁵

A gospel of the here and now may emphasize dos and don’ts. It preaches morality. It is superficially like the legalism that has opposed the gospel of grace from apostolic times. Unlike that legalism, however, moralistic preaching nowadays is not always intended to show how to earn a good standing with God. It is a this-world morality that urges one to live an upright, law-abiding life so as to be happy, to gain a good reputation with men, and to make this world a better place - good things, but of this world only.

A gospel of the here and now may take a different form. It may be a message promising personal wealth and prosperity. Such a message is known nowadays as the “prosperity gospel.” Sadly, the prosperity gospel is popular in circles that once professed evangelical Christianity. Some of its enthusiasts still give lip service to biblical truth, but the true gospel is adulterated with unbiblical teaching. The prosperity gospel has practically taken over evangelicalism in the third world, where the promise of freedom from poverty is so inviting.

Our life here is not unimportant, and the true gospel of Jesus Christ does have a lot to say about life in this world. But this world is not the final state. While life from birth to death has its joys and sadness, light and darkness, it is still but preparation for eternity. Hebrews will constantly remind us of this.

4. The Humiliation and Exaltation of Christ.

Theologians often refer to the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, his life on earth, and his death as the humiliation of Christ. They refer to his rising from the dead, his ascension into heaven, his being seated at the right hand of God, his coming again to judge the world and to rule over all things as his exaltation. The Nicene Creed says this about the humiliation and exaltation of Christ:

5 It is not really a gospel, for the word gospel means good news. It is better considered simply a religion, a way of life taught by a church.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism also summarizes Christ's humiliation and exaltation:

Q. 27. Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist? A. Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.

Q. 28. Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation? A. Christ's exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.

Are all things now subject to the exalted Christ? The author of Hebrews does not quite say that (neither do the Nicene Creed or the WSC)), and a passage in 1 Corinthians 15 suggests that the final subjection of all things awaits the resurrection:

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians. 15:23-28

5. Does Every One Mean Every Person?

A naive reading of 2:9 may suggest that all people will be saved, since Jesus Christ tasted death for everyone. We will see later that this cannot be the author's meaning (chapter 6:4-8 belies this notion.)

The naive reading is very attractive. To be sure, relatively few people think that even Adolf Hitler, child molesters, and other equally depraved characters will be let into heaven, but the belief that the great majority of humankind will be saved is widespread (atheists excepted), even in churches that teach otherwise. But what *does* it mean that Christ tasted death for everyone if everyone is not saved?

A familiar, favorite verse gives the answer: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life," John 3:16. God loved the world, and the death of Christ is *sufficient* to save all. But repentance and faith are required to receive this gift, which is available to all, and many do not repent of their sins or believe in Christ, rejecting his death for their sins.

(This is not the place to bring up election, predestination, and reprobation. It is important to know how those topics relate to the fact that Christ died for all, but Hebrews does not give us the materials to do so.)

LESSON 4. HEBREWS 2:10-18

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why was it fitting that Christ had to suffer? *vs. 10-11*
2. What is our common origin with Christ? *v. 11*
3. The author quotes the Old Testament in vs. 12-13 to show our brotherhood with Christ, Psalm 22:22, Isaiah 8:18, Isaiah 12:2. Why does he do that?
4. Why did the Son of God become flesh and blood, true man? *v. 14*
5. What did Christ as man accomplish? *v. 15*
6. Since Christ died to save men of all races, why does he mention the sons of Abraham in v. 16?
7. What office or role did becoming man fit Christ for? *v. 17*
8. How did being tempted like other men make Christ a fitting high priest? *v. 18*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why was it fitting that Christ had to suffer? vs. 10-11

Suffering made him a perfect man. He needed to experience everything man experiences, including suffering, in order to be a fit representative of humankind before God. See study note 1.

2. What is our common origin with Christ? v. 11

Christ was true man, a real human being. Like the rest of us, he was born of a woman.

3. The author quotes the Old Testament in vs. 12-13 to show our brotherhood with Christ, Psalm 22:22, Isaiah 8:18, Isaiah 12:2. Why does he do that?

Hebrew Christians acknowledged the that the Old Testament was God's Word. If any of them doubted that Christ was truly human and our brother, these scriptures should convince them.⁶

4. Why did the Son of God become flesh and blood, true man? v. 14

To destroy the devil. Satan could only be conquered and destroyed on our behalf by a true human being. By a man came death; only by another man could death be vanquished and the devil destroyed. See study note 2.

5. What did Christ as man accomplish? v. 15

He delivered all who were in bondage through fear of death. See study note 3.

6. Since Christ died to save men of all races, why does he mention the sons of Abraham in v. 16?

He is writing to Jewish Christians, descendants of Abraham and heirs of God's promises to Abraham.. However, v. 16 does not mean God is unconcerned with Gentiles. In mentioning the sons of Abraham the author is also pointing out (again) that the angels are not objects of salvation - see v. 5.

7. What office or role did becoming man fit Christ for? v. 17

The office of high priest, the one who makes propitiation for the sins of the people.

8. How did being tempted like other men make Christ a fitting high priest? v. 18

The high priest should be one who understands what it means to be tempted, so that he can aid those who are tempted (i.e., everyone).

⁶ It is worth mentioning that after his resurrection Christ called his disciples brothers, Matt. 28:10.

STUDY NOTES

1. Perfect through Suffering.

Jesus Christ lived a sinless life. He was morally perfect. How then can the author of Hebrews say that he was made perfect through suffering? The answer is found in v 17:

“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might be made a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

There is a difference between being morally perfect and being perfectly suited to carry out one's calling. Jesus' calling was to serve as a high priest, representing his people before God. For that purpose he had to be like them in every essential way. He had to suffer death for them to make propitiation for their sins. He also had to suffer prior to his death so that he could comfort and uphold them when they suffer. Suffering is a universal experience. For the same reason he had to be tempted as we are - temptation is a universal experience also.

2. The Second Adam

By suffering and being tempted, Jesus, our brother, entered into the full range of human experience. He was and is indeed human in all essential respects. More than being a full human being, he was the Representative Man, the Second Adam.

Adam was not only the first man, he was the Representative Man for all his descendants. Theologians say that he was the “federal head” of the human race. By that they mean that he acted on behalf of all those he represents, such that what he did is imputed or credited to them. When Adam sinned, his sin was imputed to us, such that we are reckoned sinners. This sin, his sin reckoned to us, is called *original sin*.

Our natural reaction is to cry out, “Unfair!” Even people who admit that they have sinned personally think that they should not be held responsible for the sins of someone else. That would be true of every “someone else” except for Adam, whom God made the first man, the father of all who would come after him, *and their representative*.

Furthermore, we are inconsistent if we object to Adam being our representative, for we are grateful that Another, Jesus Christ, became our Representative. His righteousness is imputed to us who repent and cling to him in faith. Christians see nothing wrong and everything right in letting the righteous deeds of Jesus Christ be reckoned to us. We thank God for our second Representative; we just don't like our first representative.

Jesus Christ is the Second Adam., a far better Adam than Adam the First.

3. Lifelong Slavery through the Fear of Death.

Is it not true that many men and women are afraid of death? Some people do not fear death: some unhappy or suffering people actually welcome death; but most people show by their actions that they fear death. Some not only fear death, they are morbidly obsessed with the prospect of dying.

We do not have to be very old to realize that we are going to die someday. Sometimes even little children are afraid of death. Nevertheless, when we are young, death may seem far away, and the fear of death may not be on our mind much - until we find ourselves in a life-threatening situation. If the captain of the plane announces that one of the engines has quit, or we discover the house is on fire, or we suffer sudden chest pains, then fear springs to life, not the fear of pain, but the fear we will die before our time.

The fear of death enslaves. Men and women, even misers, will spend all their money on medical treatments to prolong their lives. Men and women past their prime will give up smoking and drinking

though they enjoy them. They will adopt restricted diets they don't enjoy and exercise religiously, not to look young and feel fit, but to avoid premature death. In these and other ways people are in slavery to the fear of death.

Christ delivered us from slavery to the fear of death. To be sure, Christians may consciously avoid activities associated with shorter lifespans, and at times we fear death as well as unbelievers do. But we need not be obsessed and enslaved by the fear of death. Christ conquered death for us.

John Donne, an Anglican priest, wrote a famous poem that only a Christian, freed from slavery to the fear of death, could have written:

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

LESSON 5. HEBREWS 3:1-6

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Does the author think his readers have already drifted away from Christ and are now lost? *v. 1*
2. Look up the meaning of the word *apostle* and tell how Jesus can be called an apostle. *v. 2*
3. Christians confess Jesus to be their high priest. What did he do as our high priest? *2:17*
4. Who appointed Jesus Christ to be our high priest? *v. 2*
5. How was Jesus faithful to this calling? *v. 2*
6. In what way is Jesus greater than Moses? *vv. 3-5*
7. How was Moses faithful to his calling? *v. 5*
8. What made Jesus' faithfulness greater than the faithfulness of Moses? *v. 6*
9. Moses is likened to God's house in *v. 3*. We are likened to God's house in *v. 6*. What does it mean to be God's house?
10. What must we do to continue as God's house? *v. 6*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Does the author think his readers have already drifted away from Christ and are now lost? v. 1

No, not yet at least. He calls them holy brothers, and says they share in a heavenly calling.

2. Look up the meaning of the word apostle and tell how Jesus can be called an apostle. v. 2

An apostle is one sent on a mission. Jesus was sent from heaven to earth to save us.

4. Who appointed Jesus Christ to be our high priest? v. 2

God the Father.

5. How was Jesus faithful to this calling? v. 2.

The Son of God came to earth and was made man, incarnate of the Virgin Mary. Furthermore, in dying on the cross he carried out the duty of a high priest by making propitiation for the sins of his people.

6. In what way is Jesus greater than Moses? vs. 3-5

In the same way the builder of a house is greater than the house. See the answer to study question 1.

7. How was Moses faithful to his calling? v. 5

He was faithful as a servant, testifying to things that were to be spoken of later (that is, the gospel). See study note 2.

8. What made Jesus' faithfulness greater than the faithfulness of Moses? v. 6

He was faithful as a Son, he who is over the whole house..

9. Moses is likened to God's house in v. 3. We are likened to God's house in v. 6. What does it mean to be God's house?

We are God's house in that God dwells with and within us. See study note 3

10. What must we do to continue as God's house? v. 6

We must hold fast to our confidence and boasting in our hope, the hope of eternal life (2:5). See study note 4.

STUDY NOTES

1. Jesus Greater than Moses.

How was Moses great?

Firstly, God spoke directly to Moses, face to face (Exodus 33:11). He did not so speak to any of the later prophets or to King David.

Secondly, God gave Moses the Law, containing commandments and instructions for individual living and for the organization of Israel's worship and political structure. He was the human founder of the nation of Israel, the "builder of the house." It is only natural that the Jews revered Moses.

Yet Jesus, "great David's greater son," is greater than Moses.

Firstly, Jesus is God Himself. A number of Bible scholars believe that when Moses spoke with God he spoke with a *theophany* of Jesus Christ.⁷

And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD" Numbers. 12:6-8

Moses was greatly honored among men, but Jesus is greater than Moses in that he did not have to speak face to face with God; he was God.

Secondly, as the author of Hebrews writes, the Builder of the house is greater than the house. The house is the church of God.

2. The Things that Were To Be Spoken Later.

The Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) contain an account of things past: the creation, the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the exodus from Egypt, the wanderings in the wilderness, the giving of the Law. All those things were part of Israel's history. The books of Moses also testify to "the things that were to be spoken later." What are those things?

The things that were to be spoken later were prophecies of things to come. Moses was Israel's first prophet, and one of his prophecies was that God would raise up a prophet to succeed him.⁸

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like you from among you, from your brothers - it is to him you shall listen. Deuteronomy 18:15

In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 and 33 Moses prophesied the future blessings that God would shower on Israel if they remained faithful and the future curses he would bring upon them if they were unfaithful. These were things to come from the perspective of the Israelites who heard Moses pronounced them while they were still in the wilderness.

But it is not those things the author of Hebrews has in mind. What he has in mind are the extensive descriptions of Israel's worship, in particular the work of the high priest in offering sacrifice on the Day of Atonement for the sins of the people. The Pentateuch devotes many chapters to the work of the priests, especially the ritual of the Day of Atonement. Chapters 5 through 10 of Hebrews tell us how those rituals were a *type*, or prophetic picture, of the work of Christ in dying for the sins of his people. Those are the things of which Hebrews will speak later.

⁷ An Old Testament theophany of Jesus was not the appearance of the incarnate Son of God. The Son was not incarnate until he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

⁸ A number of prophets followed Moses, but Bible scholars recognize that he was prophesying about Jesus Christ.

3. We Are God's House, God's Building, God's Temple.

Jesus told his disciples that he and the Father would dwell within those who love him and keep his word (John 14:23). It is by the Holy Spirit that he and the Father dwell within them (John 14:17). Jesus' words in John 14 refer to God dwelling in individual believers.

The Bible also speaks of the church of Jesus Christ as God's dwelling place. The church is his house, his building, his temple:

... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:20-22

For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building . . . Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16-17

Moses was the first to establish God's people (at that time the tribes of Israel) as united entity, a body to serve as a dwelling place for God. God spoke this promise to the people through Moses:

I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. Leviticus 26:11-12

Moses was the first "builder" of the house, but it was built (and is being built) for Jesus Christ. It is his house, he is the owner and the one who dwells in it. And that house is Israel, yes, but it is spiritual Israel, comprised of all who are or will be in Christ. Believing Jews and Gentiles alike make up that house:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." Revelation 21:3

4. The Hope of Eternal Life.

What is the hope of which Hebrews speaks in v. 6?

It is not hope as twenty-first century America thinks of hope. Nowadays we use the word hope in reference to a desire for an outcome of which we have no real assurance. "My kitty is sick. I hope she gets well." "I hope I win the lottery." The odds may be against our desires; we have only "hope," not confidence. Hope as used in the Bible is quite different. It is faith in the future fulfillment of God's promises, confidence He will act in accordance with his loving nature. Consider these scriptures:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1-2

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:27

waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Titus 2:13

The hope Hebrews speaks of in 3:6 is the same hope promised in the above verses: the expectation that we will reign with Christ in glory when we are resurrected.

LESSON 6. HEBREWS 3:7-19

STUDY QUESTIONS

Verses 7-11 are a quotation of Psalm 95:7-11.

1. Had the Jewish Christians whom Hebrews addresses “heard his voice” as the Israelites had? *v. 7*

2. Compare v. 8 with v. 12. How is the warning in v. 8 one the readers of Hebrews need to heed?

3. What was God’s judgment on the Israelites who hardened their hearts and rebelled against him?
v. 11

4. Will the same judgment fall on those who harden their hearts and fall away from Christ? *vs. 12-14*

5. What makes hearts harden? *v. 13*

6. Is it true that “faith for a moment brings life for eternity? *v. 14*

7. The Israelites who fell in the wilderness were disobedient (v. 18). What command did they disobey? *v. 15*. See Numbers 14.

8. The faithless Israelites died in the wilderness and could not enter the rest of Canaan. What is the rest that those who fall away from Christ will never enter? *vs. 19, 14*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Had the Jewish Christians whom Hebrews addresses “heard his voice” as the Israelites had? v. 7

Yes. They heard it in the preaching of the gospel.

2. Compare v. 8 with v. 12. How is the warning in v. 8 one the readers of Hebrews need to heed?

They and we need to be wary of unbelief creeping into our hearts and leading us away from God. We need exhortation to believe the truth of the gospel so that our faith is strengthened against trials, difficulties, the arguments of unbelievers, and everything else that tempts us to neglect or reject the truth of Christ. See study note 1.

3. What was God’s judgment on the Israelites who hardened their hearts and rebelled against him? v. 11

They died in the wilderness and did not enter into the rest of the Promised Land. See Numbers 14:20-38 and study note 2.

4. Will the same judgment fall on those who harden their hearts and fall away from Christ? vs. 12-14

Those who fall away from Christ in unbelief will fail to enter the rest of heaven.

5. What makes hearts harden? v. 13

The deceitfulness of sin. See study note 3.

6. Is it true that “faith for a moment brings life for eternity? v. 14

No. We must persevere in faith. It is true that we gain eternal life the moment we believe (though many cannot point to that exact moment), but if that faith does not last then it was not saving faith. See study note 4.

7. The Israelites who fell in the wilderness were disobedient (v. 18). What command did they disobey? v. 15. See Numbers 14

They rebelled against God in refusing to obey his command to enter the land of Canaan and occupy it.

8. The faithless Israelites died in the wilderness and could not enter the rest of Canaan. What is the rest that those who fall away from Christ will never enter? vs. 19, 14

That rest is heaven, the world to come (2:5). See study note 5.

STUDY NOTES

1. How Not to Fall into Unbelief.

Hebrews 3:12 says that an evil, unbelieving heart can lead a professed Christian to fall away from God. What can we do to guard against developing that kind of heart? The author of Hebrews gives two ways to remain strong in a living faith.

The first way is to allow ourselves to be continually exhorted to keep believing and obeying the promises, commands, and warning of the scriptures. We can exhort ourselves by personal Bible reading. But there is more: we must hear the word preached by faithful preachers.

However, exhortation is not just the responsibility of preachers. Hebrews tells us to exhort each other daily. Personal encouragement, sharing the word with one another, urging one another to believe and obey the word - these practices are exhortation as much as the preaching of godly ministers. Later in the book the author makes this point:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24-25

Of course, Christian to Christian exhortation can only occur if we know one another well enough. If we go to church and leave without fellowshipping, speaking, and praying with one another, we pass by opportunities to exhort each other. And if we exhort a brother or sister while giving the impression that we are on a higher spiritual plane, that exhortation will fall flat.

The second way is to be ever on the look out for the lies and thoughts that make sin seem attractive or of no real importance. Sin is deceitful. If we let the media or friends tell us that modern people recognize that practices that used to be recognized as sinful are not really bad; if we think we can indulge in little sins without getting pulled down into greater depravity, we fool ourselves and are taken captive by the devil. For example, too many young adults give up whatever faith they have because they have come to accept fornication and other sins of the flesh as normal and desirable. Others think that if people with a reputation for being intellectual reject things supernatural, they should too if they don't want to be thought childish or naive. And it is not only young adults who are so deceived.

There are other things we can do to avoid falling away from God. One is reading the scriptures. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ," Romans 10:17.⁹ It's both puzzling and discouraging to me that only 2/3 of evangelicals read the Bible at least once a week. 45% of Americans seldom or never read the Bible. Only 1/3 of millennials, the age group which shows the greatest falling away from the faith they were raised in, read the Bible at least once a month.¹⁰ Yet some of those who don't read the Bible attend church. They can be exhorted, if the minister and caring Christians will only do so.

2. The Hebrews in the Wilderness.

Verses 7-11 are a quotation from Psalm 96, a passage the Jewish readers of Hebrews would find familiar. These words would call to mind the many acts of unbelief and rebellion of their ancestors after Moses led them out of Egypt. The particular incident referred to in Psalm 96 happened when Israel reached the borders of the land of Canaan, the land God promised to them. The men whom Moses sent to reconnoiter the country reported that it was a bountiful land but that its inhabitants

⁹ Perhaps the author of Hebrews does not mention the reading of the scriptures because the New Testament scriptures, the word of Christ, were just then being written and had not yet been made available to believers, much less collected into a single volume. Moreover few in that day could read; they had to *hear* the word of Christ.

¹⁰ Data from a 2021 study done by the Pew Research Center.

were fearsome. The people responded in unbelief:

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.” Numbers 14:1-4

The Lord pardoned the people once again, but proclaimed that those who had responded to his promise and command in unbelief would never enter Canaan:

Then the LORD said, “I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. . . . How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where swore that I would make you dwell.’”

Numbers 14:20-23, 27-30

The author of Hebrews warns his readers not to be like the unbelieving Israelites. They have experienced or anticipate undergoing hardship and suffering for being Christians. They may be tempted to forsake Christ and turn back to Judaism. If they do so they will never enter God’s heavenly rest, just as the faithless Israelites of old failed to enter the rest of the promised land.

The danger is as true for Christians faced with hardship, suffering, rejection, and ridicule today. I once knew a young man who apparently accepted Christ, but three months after starting college he gave up his faith. He reported to the Christian friend who led him to the Lord that being a Christian was just too hard. We can say that he never was truly saved, and that would be true; but we need to recognize that warnings and exhortations are means the Lord used to keep his elect in the faith.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 Paul makes a similar argument based on the same verses in Psalm 96, warning his readers that persisting in sin and grumbling against the Lord may cause them to fall. His conclusion is one all must take to heart.

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 1 Corinthians 10:11-12

3. The Deceitfulness of Sin.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sin as “any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.” Want of conformity and transgression can be due to ignorance, but the author of Hebrews points to another source: the deceitfulness of sin.

The very first sin was Eve’s eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When God confronted her with her sin, she replied, “The serpent deceived me and I ate.” Her sin well illustrates the deceitfulness of sin.

a. Sin is deceitful when we think it will have no serious consequences. Satan (the serpent) was a liar from the beginning when he persuaded Eve that she would not die if she ate of the fruit (Genesis 3:2-4).¹¹ We are deceived for the same reason: people don't believe their sin will have serious consequences either in this life or in the next. As to the things of this life, who would steal if he were convinced he would be caught and punished? Fornication would be reduced to almost nothing if the couple knew for certain it would result in pregnancy. As to eternal punishment, some people think God is too good to punish sin with eternal death and anguish.

b. Sin is deceitful when we think we know as much as God, that we can be our own god. Satan assured Eve that she would "know" good and evil in the sense that she could determine good and evil for herself. Here, too, people today deceive themselves. Some think there is no God and believe they can do what is right in their own eyes, since there is no higher moral authority. Others believe in God (however vaguely conceived), but think the Bible is an old, outdated book written by people long ago who simply did not know what modern man knows. We know more nowadays and can, indeed must, adopt a moral code that conforms to modern thought. . . and to our own desires - see point c, below.

c. Sin is deceitful when it appeals to our wants and desires. ". . . the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that it was to be desired to make one wise. . . ." Genesis 3:6. Our wants and desires are sometimes legitimate, but even then it is not always right to pursue them. The tenth commandment tells us not to covet our neighbor's wife, or house, or anything that is our neighbor's, but we not only covet what is not ours, but sometimes find a means to take and enjoy it.

4. Saving Faith Perseveres.

It is nothing less than a heresy to hold that faith for *only* a moment brings life for eternity. It's true that the moment one truly believes, he or she is born again and will enjoy eternal life for eternity, but that faith must and will persevere until the Lord calls one home. This truth raises the question, What is the difference between saving faith and temporary faith, other than duration?

The Westminster Confession of faith gives a definition of saving faith that I cannot improve on::

CHAPTER 14. Of Saving Faith

1. The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts; and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word: by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.
2. By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acteth differently, upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are, accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.
3. This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed and weakened, but gets the victory; growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

¹¹ God's warning would have been meaningless if Adam and Eve had not witnessed death prior to the Fall. Hence, we must conclude that when Paul tells us in Romans 6:15-21 that sin entered the world through Adam, he meant human death. Animal death was present before the Fall.

Scripture speaks in various places of temporary faith, of falling away due to trouble, persecution, love of the world, or listening to false teachers - see, for example, Matthew 13:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:6, 10. John tells us that apostates were never Christians from the beginning, no matter what they thought of themselves or what other thought of them (1 John 2:18-19).

5. Heaven Is Our Rest.

Hebrews quotes Psalm 96 to the effect that the Israelites could not enter God's rest because of unbelief, v. 19. The psalmist had in mind the land of Canaan, where Israel was to enjoy rest from their servitude in Egypt and their wandering in the wilderness. But the author of Hebrews, inspired by the Holy Spirit, applies that to Christians. We are freed from servitude to sin by Jesus Christ. He leads us through the wilderness of this life, with the promise of eternal rest in heaven.

Like all human beings, Christians seek rest from the labors and troubles of this life. But let us not forget that retirement, a vacation home, "just kicking back," and other temporal rests are not what we should strive for most of all. As Hebrews 2:5 reminds us, the book deals with the world to come. If we make any kind of earthly rest, relaxation, peace and tranquility the chief end of our labors, we do not really appreciate the promise of the gospel.

The nature of God's rest is the subject of Lesson 7.

LESSON 7. HEBREWS 4:1-13

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is it still possible for some to enter God's rest? *v. 1*
2. Should we fear lest we fail to enter his rest? *v. 1*
3. The Greek word translated *good news* in v. 2 is the same Greek word translated *gospel* elsewhere in the New Testament. Does that mean that Israel heard the gospel? *v.2*
4. Is the rest of which the author writes God's rest from the work of creation? The weekly Sabbath rest God commanded? The entry of Israel into the promised land under Joshua? Something else? *vs. 3-4, 8*
5. Have we who believed already entered God's rest? *v. 3*. Also *v. 10*.
6. What is the *day* the author refers to in v. 7
7. What is the ultimate Sabbath rest? *vs. 9-10*
8. Does the word *strive* in v. 11 refer to our good works? If not, to what does it refer?
9. What sort of disobedience caused the fall of the Israelites under Moses? *v. 11*. Also *3:18-19*.
10. To what function of the word of God do vs. 11-12 refer?
11. Why can't we fake our Christianity? *v. 13*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is it still possible for some to enter God's rest? v. 1

Yes.

2. Should we fear lest we fail to enter his rest? v. 1

Yes, the author tells us to fear lest we fail to enter his rest.

3. The Greek word translated good news in v. 2 is the same Greek word translated gospel elsewhere in the New Testament. Does that mean that Israel heard the gospel? v.2

Yes they did, insofar as they were to respond in faith to God's promise of rest. In chapter 11 we read that Abraham realized that God's promised land was more than Canaan: Abraham looked forward to a heavenly country (11:8-10, 16). Israel also knew of a coming Messiah who would save them from sin. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament witnessed to that, as we will see later in the book. The Hebrews knew more than is apparent to us from a surface reading of the Old Testament. See study note 1.

4. Is the rest of which the author writes God's rest from the work of creation? The weekly Sabbath rest God commanded? The entry of Israel into the promised land under Joshua? Something else? vs. 3-4, 8

The events referred to in the question were rests of a sort, but the rest to which he refers here is the rest of heaven. As the author says in 2:5, he is speaking of the world to come.

5. Have we who believed already entered God's rest? v. 3. Also v. 10.

No. We enter that rest when we enter heaven. Verse 3 does not say that we who believe have already entered that rest. It says we do enter it, but it does not say when. Verse 11 tells us to strive to enter it. Striving implies that it is a goal to be pursued, not a present reality. Verse 10 says those who enter God's rest cease from their works. We have already ceased from depending on our works for salvation, but the works v. 10 refers to are our labors on earth, from which we cease when we die or when the Lord returns for us.

6. What is the day the author refers to in v. 7?

It is *today*, that is, *now*, the present hour. It is not tomorrow, it is not the day we die. Tomorrow is promised to no one. We must not harden our hearts today; it is today that we must trust in Christ and keep trusting him as long as it is called today.

7. What is the ultimate Sabbath rest? vs. 9-10

Heaven, where we rest from our labors.

8. Does the word strive in v. 11 refer to our good works? If not, to what does it refer?

The word strive refers to our spiritual effort to keep our faith alive and strong. It refers to resisting temptations to unbelief and to disobedience and sin.

9. What sort of disobedience caused the fall of the Israelites under Moses? v. 11. Also 3:18-19.

Their disobedience was unbelief. We are commanded to believe in Christ; to believe is to obey. In Romans 1:7 Paul writes of the "*obedience* of faith." The Philippian jailer was told, "Believe in the Lord

Jesus Christ, and you will be saved," Acts 16:3). Believe is a *command*¹²

10. To what function of the word of God does v. 11 refer?

The word of God, the Bible, reveals the deep, hidden thoughts and intents of our hearts.

11. Why can't we fake our Christianity? v. 13

Sometimes people try to fake their Christianity. They may live outwardly moral lives and be careful that no one sees their sin. They may hide their wicked thoughts and desires from their acquaintances (though probably not as well as they think). They may even hide them from themselves. However, God know our inmost being. Adam and Eve clothed themselves with fig leaves but could not hide their sin from God. Neither can we. Church attendance, pious words and prayers, generous charity - nothing can hide what we are from him. Moreover, as v. 12 indicates, the Bible cuts through our carefully laid defenses and exposes our sin and depravity to us - if we read it and if the Holy Spirit graciously open our eyes.

12

grammatical mode.

The Greek verb translated *believe* is in the imperative grammatical mode.

STUDY NOTE

The Gospel in the Old Testament.

Hebrews 4:2 says the good news came to us just as to the Israelites centuries before. The words *good news* are the English equivalent of one word, *euangelion*, in the Greek language of the original New Testament. Did the author of Hebrews mean that Israel heard the gospel of Christ?

I believe they did, not in all the detail and implications brought out in the New Testament, but in key respects:

- a. They knew that God would send them a king, born of the tribe of Judah, who would redeem them from their enemies, a king to whom the whole world would yield obedience (Genesis 49:10, Numbers 24:17). This king would later be known as the *Messiah* (Greek *Christ*).
- b. They knew the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Recall that the priest and elders in Jerusalem knew this, and were able to tell the wise men where to look for the child (Matthew 2).
- c. They knew the Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:15).
- d. They knew the Messiah would suffer and die for their sins (Isaiah 53).
- e. They knew they would be resurrected and would see their Redeemer in their flesh (Job 19:25-27).

They did not know who their Messiah-Redeemer would be, that is, that he would be Jesus of Nazareth. But godly Jews in Jesus' day looked forward to the Messiah's appearance. Luke tells us of one such Jew:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Luke 2:25-26

The unbelieving Jews who died in the wilderness and could not enter God's rest did not know all that was revealed to the Jews later by the prophets, but they had heard of the King who was to be their hope and deliverer (point 1, above); that promise was given in their own time. But they disbelieved the promises of God and turned to other gods.

LESSON 8. HEBREWS 4:14 - 5:10

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What reason does the author give for holding fast to our confession? *v. 4:14*
2. Where is our high priest now? *v. 4:14*
3. How is Jesus our high priest like us? *v. 4:15*
4. What should expect when we draw near to the throne of grace with confidence? *v. 4:16*
5. What is the role or duty of a high priest? *v. 5:1*
6. How is a high priest to deal with those he represents? What fits him to do so? *v. 5:2*
7. Verse 5:1 says that the high priest offers sacrifices for the sins of others. Who offers sacrifices for the sins of the high priest? *v. 5:3*
8. How does a man get to be a high priest? *v. 5:4*
9. Who made Jesus a high priest? *v. 5:5*
10. How was Jesus different from the high priests of Israel? *vs. 5:5-6, 10*
11. What showed Jesus to be a faithful man (not simply God)? *vs. 5:7-8*

12. What does it mean that the sinless Son of God became perfect? v.5:9

3. Once he was perfect, what did he become to all who obey him? v. 5:9

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What reason does the author give for holding fast to our confession? v. 4:14

We have a great high priest, Jesus Christ, to make intercession for us.

2. Where is our high priest now? v. 4:14

He is in heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father.

3. How is Jesus, our high priest, like us? v. 4:15

He was tempted in every way as we are, and so he can sympathize with our weaknesses. See study note 1.

4. What should expect when we draw near to the throne of grace with confidence? v. 4:16

We will receive mercy and grace to help in our time of need.

5. What is the role or duty of a high priest? v. 5:1

He acts on behalf of men in relation to God, particularly in offering sacrifices for sin.

6. How is a high priest to deal with those he represents? What fits him to do so? v. 5:2

He is to deal gently with them in their weakness since he too is beset with weakness.

7. Verse 5:1 says that the high priest offers sacrifices for the sins of others. v. 5:3

He offers sacrifices for his own sins. See study note 2.

8. How does a man get to be a high priest? v. 5:4

He must be called by God.

9. Who made Jesus a high priest? v. 5:5

God the Father.

10. How was Jesus different from the high priests of Israel? vs. 5:5-6, 10

- a. He was the Son of God as well as man.
- b. He was not a priest of the line of Levi, but a priest after the order of Melchizedek. See study note 3.

11. What showed Jesus to be a faithful man (not simply God)? vs. 5:7-8

- a. He offered up prayers and supplications with loud tears. This is what faithful people do.
- b. He learned obedience through what he suffered.

12. What does it mean that the sinless Son of God became perfect? v.5:9

Perfect in this context does not mean morally perfect; Jesus Christ was already morally perfect. Perfect in this context means perfectly fitted to be a priest acting for men in relation to God.

13. Once he was perfect, what did he become to all who obey him? v. 5:9

The source of eternal salvation.

STUDY NOTES

1. Tempted in Every Respect as We Are.

Was Jesus tempted to cheat on a test or to lie on a job application? Was he tempted to cheat on his income tax form? Was he tempted to rob a bank? No, he was not tempted to do any of those things; there were no tests, job applications, 1040 tax forms, or banks in his day. How then was he tempted in every respect as we are?

He was tempted in every respect that we are in that he was tempted to break all of God's commandments. All the examples of temptation mentioned in the first paragraph are temptations to break one of the commandments: cheating on a test and lying on a job application are violations of the commandment to not bear false witness; not paying legitimate taxes and robbing a bank are violations of the commandment to not steal.

Consider the temptations the Lord experienced in the wilderness (Matt. 4, Luke 4). The temptation to fall down and worship Satan in exchange for all the kingdoms of the world was a clear call to break the first commandment. The other two were more subtle violations of the first commandment. The temptation to command the stones to be made bread was a call to give up complete dependence and reliance on God, The temptation to throw himself down from the temple was a temptation to put God to the test.

Jesus experienced temptation also in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was tempted to not carry through the will of God for our salvation. God be thanked that Jesus did not yield to those temptations although he was tempted in every respect as we are!

2. The High Priest Sacrifices for His Own Sin.

The Law of Moses specified the various sacrifices the priests were to offer on behalf of the people. But the Law specified that that priests, including the high priest, had to offer sacrifice for their own sins before they could offer sacrifices for the sins of others. Chapters 8 and 9 of Leviticus relate how Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. After dressing them in their priestly clothes. they offered sacrifice, for themselves first and then for the people:

And they brought what Moses commanded in front of the tent of meeting, and all the congregation drew near and stood before the LORD. And Moses said, "This is the thing that the LORD commanded you to do, that the glory of the LORD may appear to you." Then Moses said to Aaron, "Draw near to the altar and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and for the people, and bring the offering of the people and make atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded." Leviticus 9:5-7

This procedure was followed every time the priest offered a sin offering.

Jesus, being sinless, did not have to offer anything for his own sin. This is one of many ways he is a better high priest, as the author of Hebrews will explain.

3. A Priest after the Order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek was the priest-king of Jerusalem in the time of the patriarch Abraham. Genesis 14:17-20 tells us all we know about Melchizedek apart from the Book of Hebrews.. Hebrews 7:1-10 expounds on how Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek; we will take up the matter then.

LESSON 9. HEBREWS 5:11-6:8

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why did the author of Hebrews find it hard to explain things to his readers? *v. 5:11*
2. Had the readers of Hebrews had sufficient time as Christians to attain a mature understanding of the faith? *v. 5:12*
3. How little had those readers progressed in their knowledge of the faith? What did they need? *v. 12*
4. What do those who have a mature faith know? *v. 14*
5. What are the elementary principles of the faith as Hebrews lists them? *vs. 6:1-2*
6. What is meant by “repentance from dead works”? What are those dead works? *v. 6:1*
7. What *washings* does the author have in mind? What is *laying on of hands*? *v. 6:2*
8. What does the author mean in v. 6:3, “if God permits”?
9. Who are those described in vs. 6:4-6?
10. Can an apostate repent and turn to Christ again? *v. 6:6*.
11. Why does the author paint such a fearful picture in vs. 6:4-9?

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why did the author of Hebrews find it hard to explain things to his readers? v. 5:11

They had become dull of hearing.

2. Had the readers of Hebrews had sufficient time as Christians to attain a mature understanding of the faith? v. 5:12

Yes. It takes time to go from a newborn in the faith to maturity, but the author says they should have attained maturity by the time he wrote.

3. How little had those readers progressed in their knowledge of the faith? What did they need? v.5:12

They had not progressed at all. They needed to go back and learn the basics all over again.

4. What do those who have a mature faith know? v. 5:14

They know how to distinguish between good and evil.

6. What are the elementary principles of the faith as Hebrews lists them? vs. 6:1-2

- a. repentance from dead works.
- b. faith towards God
- c. instructions about washings
- d. instructions about laying on of hands
- e. the resurrection of the dead
- f. eternal judgment

7. What is meant by “repentance from dead works”? What are those dead works? v. 6:1

Considering the Jewish background of his readers, the author probably means turning from trust in the works of the Law as a means of salvation. See study note 1.

8. What washings does the author have in mind? What laying on of hands? v. 6:2

Most likely washings refers to baptism. Jesus commanded his apostles to make disciples, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew28: 18-20). As for the laying on of hands, that may refer to receiving the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands by elders. See study notes 2 and 3.

9. What does the author mean in v. 6:3, “if God permits”?

He may mean that he hopes God will free him to visit them some day or to write another letter instructing them more deeply in these things. He may also mean that he will so instruct them if God allows it. God may not allow it if they cannot be restored to repentance. See the following verses.

10. Who are those described in vs. 6:4-6?

They are those who have fallen away from Christ after being once enlightened, after having tasted the promise of eternal life, having experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and having tasted of the goodness of the word of God and the promise of the age to come. See study note 4.

11. Can an apostate repent and turn to Christ again? v. 6:6.

The author says that it is impossible to renew an apostate to repentance. See study note 5.

12. Why does the author paint such a fearful picture in vs. 6:4-9?

He seeks to keep his Jewish Christian readers from turning away from Christ after having embraced the gospel. That is his chief purpose in writing this letter..

STUDY NOTES

1. Repentance from Dead Works.

The word repentance does not mean merely feeling sorry for something one did. Repentance means turning away from something, reversing one's course of conduct. As stated in the answer to study question 1, repentance from dead works likely refers to turning away from the works of the Law of Moses as a means of earning acceptance with God. Those works included both moral and ceremonial commandments. This would not have been a basic element of the faith for Gentiles, who had never tried to please God by keeping the Law of Moses

Repentance from dead works may also refer to repenting from our sinful works that bring death: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). This kind of repentance is a fundamental of the Christian faith for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike.

2. Washings.

After one has repented and cast himself or herself on Christ in faith for the forgiveness of sins, it was and continues to be the practice of the church to baptize converts. Christ Jesus himself commanded the church to baptize new disciples (Matthew 28:19).

3. The Laying on of Hands.

The laying on of hands is never commanded for ordinary Christians. The New Testament mentions only two incidents of the practice. We read in Acts 8:14-17:

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

This seems to be a special case. The Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Spirit, unlike the converts in Judea. The laying on of hands both symbolized and effected their receiving the Spirit.

The second instance is similar to the first. Acts 19:1-7 tells us that Paul laid his hands on new Christians in Ephesus. They were disciples who had received only the baptism of John the Baptist. They had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Paul baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus and laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament does mention the laying on of hands in the ordination of men to be elders and ministers: .

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. 1 Timothy 4:14

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands. 1 Timothy 5:22

It isn't clear why the author of Hebrews mentions this as a foundational truth. Perhaps it is foundational in that Christians should heed only those whose ministry has been recognized by the church.

4. Can a Genuine Christian Abandon the Faith?

Jesus made it clear that his sheep will always follow him and that they will never perish. They are in the Father's hand, and no one can snatch them from his hand (John 10:27-30). Jesus prayed that his Father would keep those he had given to his Son so that none of them would be lost:

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. . . .I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” John 17:11, 15

We can be sure that the Father answers the prayers of his beloved Son. How can we reconcile the assurance Jesus gives with the description of the apostates in Hebrews 6:4-6?

Appearances can be deceiving. Our Lord describes such people in the parable of the sower. Matthew 13:5-6 gives the relevant part of the parable and Matthew 13:20-21 gives the interpretation.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

Jesus declares that some receive the word with joy, but have no root in themselves. They are “temporaries” (another meaning of the Greek word translated “endures for a while” in the ESV). True faith is the root they do not have. They have a kind of faith, but so do the demons (James 2:19).

But how shall we understand the description given in Hebrews 6:4-6? Clearly, people described there have heard the word of Christ and were enlightened in their understanding; they have heard the promise of eternal life in the age to come, have been moved by the Holy Spirit,¹³ and have rejoiced in what they heard. They feel for a time that they are Christians. But the fact they fall away indicates they have no true faith. If they had true faith and had become one of Christ’s sheep they would have persevered. The fact that they turn away from Christ indicates that they were never born again. 1 John 2:19 speaks of such people:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

Sadly, many who start off on the Christian life today also give it up when they encounter opposition or trouble or become entangled in the affairs of this life. It is incumbent on preachers and teachers to continue to teach the basics of the gospel and to warn their hearers of the temptations that war against their souls.

5. When Repentance is Impossible.

Hebrews 6:6-8 warn that some turning away from Christ can never be remedied. Repentance is impossible for them. When a person’s turning away is so complete that he or she despises and rejects Christ, essentially agreeing with his crucifixion and holding him in contempt, there can be no repentance. They are hardened beyond remedy. John writes of a sin unto death:

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death There is sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is

13 There are sins that lead to physical death, and John likely had those in mind in the quoted passage. but the sin of turning away from Christ, despising and mocking him, surely is a sin unto spiritual death.

sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. 1 John 5:16-17

Some instances of denying Christ may be repented of. Peter denied the Lord three times on the night of his crucifixion. It is denying him and mocking him, of despising him and his work, that Hebrews speaks of. If you, dear reader, are afraid that you have drifted away so far that you cannot come back, take heart: anyone who *wants* to repent can turn again to Christ and be forgiven. The desire to come back to the Savior is proof that you have not passed the point of no return.

LESSON 10. HEBREWS 6:9-19

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How fearful is the author that his readers will fall away from Christ? *v. 9*
2. Why is he confident that they will remain faithful to Christ? *v. 10*
3. Why such a dire warning in vs. 4-8 if he is sure of better things for his readers? See study note 1.
4. What had the author's readers done to show their love for the Lord? *v. 10*
5. Being confident his readers will remain faithful, what does the author want them to do? *vs. 11-12*
6. What common word makes the connection between vs. 11 and 12?
7. What was the greatest guarantee that he would fulfill his promise that God could give Abraham? *v. 13*
8. What was God's promise to Abraham? *v. 14*
9. How did Abraham deal with the delay between God's promise and its fulfillment in Isaac's birth? *v. 15*
10. Who are the present heirs of the promise? What surety has God given them? *vs. 16-17*
11. What are the "two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie"? *v. 18* See study note 2.

12. What is the hope set before us? v. 18

13. What is the “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” referred to in v. 19?

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How fearful is the author that his readers will fall away from Christ? v. 9

He is not afraid at all they will fall away. He feels sure of better things for them.

2. Why is he confident that they will remain faithful to Christ? v. 10

God is not unjust. He will not forget their labor of love in serving the saints. He will keep them from falling..

3. Why such a dire warning in vs. 4-8 if he is sure of better things for his readers? See study note 1.

He expects his warning will be a means God uses to keep his readers in the faith.

4. What had the author's readers done to show their love for the Lord? v. 10

They served the saints, that is, they helped meet the needs of their fellow Christians.

5. Confident his readers will remain faithful, what does the author want them to do? vs. 11-12

He wants them to imitate past generations who held on to God's promises and waited patiently in faith for God to fulfill them. In chapter 11 he will cite many examples of such faith in the history of God's people.

6. What common word makes the connection between vs. 11 and 12?

Promise. Verse 11 speaks of inheriting God's promises and v. 12 speaks of God's promise to Abraham.

7. What was the greatest guarantee that he would fulfill his promise that God could give Abraham? v. 13

God guaranteed his promise by an oath. Men swear by God - "So help me God!" God swore by Himself.

8. What was God's promise to Abraham? v. 14

He promised him a son, from whom would spring a nation too numerous to count, Genesis 17:15-16.

9. How did Abraham deal with the delay between God's promise and its fulfillment in Isaac's birth? v. 15

He waited patiently in faith.

10. Who are the present heirs of the promise? What surety has God given them? vs. 16-17

We who belong to Christ are the heirs of the promise (Romans 8:16-17, Ephesians 1:11 and 14). God provided even more surety by an oath, which he swore by himself. .

11. What are the "two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie"? v. 18

See study note 2.

12. What is the hope set before us? v. 18

It is eternal life, heaven. Re-read 4:1, 9-11 and Lesson 7, answers to study questions 4, 5, and 7

13. What is the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" referred to in v. 19?

It is God's promise, secured with an oath.

STUDY NOTES

1. The Purpose of Warnings in the Bible.

The purpose of warnings in the Bible is to bring people to repentance so that God will not carry out the threatened action. Perhaps the classic example of this is found in the Book of Jonah. The Lord sent Jonah to Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire, to announce judgment on the city:

Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Jonah 3:4

But Nineveh repented:

And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Jonah 3:5-6

The warning had its desired effect:

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. Jonah 3:10

Jonah was greatly displeased that God spared the city, as he had feared God would do:

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? . . . I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster." Jonah 4:1-2

Both the Old and New Testaments contain threats of dire things to come. Their intended end is repentance on the part of those threatened so that God will not carry them out. Threats are meant as warnings, much as the words "Harmful if swallowed" on the label of a bottle is meant to warn people not to ingest the contents.

Some biblical threats are not warnings, but rather statements of what God will do, without the possibility of him changing his mind. The Lord's words to Saul were of this sort:

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue." 1 Samuel 13:13-14

The threats in Hebrews 6 were intended to keep the readers from following away. But if some did fall away, the threat that they could not be renewed to repentance would come to pass.

2. "Two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie."

The two "unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie" are his *promise* and his *oath*. God never goes back on a promise. A promise does not need to be confirmed by an oath, but God confirmed his promise with an oath, which he swore by himself. No greater guarantee can be given or even conceived of. And the promise to Abraham is for us, Abraham's heirs!

LESSON 11. HEBREWS 6:19-7:10

Chapters 6:19-10:18 constitute a long discourse on the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the hope that enters into the inner place behind the veil, *v. 6:19*
2. Read Leviticus 16, especially v. 15. then tell what the high priest did in the inner place, the Holy of Holies behind the curtain. See the study note.

Read Genesis 14 to learn about Melchizedek in order to understand Hebrews 7:1-10.

3. What was Melchizedek's relationship to the city of Salem, later called Jerusalem. Note: The word *salem* is derived from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means peace. *v. 7:1*

4. The Hebrew word *melki* means *my king*. The Hebrew word *zedek* means *righteousness*. What does the combination *melki-zedek* mean? *v. 7:2*

5. In addition to being a king, what other role did Melchizedek perform? *v. 7:1*

6. How can the author of Hebrews say that Melchizedek had no father or mother or beginning of days or end of days? *v. 7:3*

7. A type is a representation of one thing (or person) by another. How is Melchizedek a *type* of Jesus Christ? The question may be re-worded, How does Melchizedek represent Jesus Christ? In what respects did he prefigure Jesus Christ?

8. What shows that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham? *vs. 2, 4, 7*

9. How can the author reason that Melchizedek was a superior priest to the levitical or Aaronic priests of Judaism? *vs. 5-9*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the hope that enters into the inner place behind the veil, v. 6:19

Jesus Christ is our hope. It is he who enters into the inner place behind the curtain. See the answer to study question 2, below.

2. Read Leviticus 16, especially v. 15, then tell what the high priest did in the inner place, the Holy of Holies, behind the curtain. See the study note.

Once a year the high priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people. He sprinkled the blood of the atoning sacrifice on the mercy seat kept in the Holy of Holies. Jesus shed his own blood and offered it to God for our sins.

3. What was Melchizedek's relationship to the city of Salem, later called Jerusalem. Note: The word salem is derived from the Hebrew word shalom, which means peace.

He was king of the city.

4. The Hebrew word melki means my king. The Hebrew word zedek means righteousness. What does the combination melki-zedek mean? v. 7:2

King of Righteousness.

5. In addition to being a king, what other role did Melchizedek perform? v. 7:1

He was also high priest of Salem.

6. How can the author of Hebrews say that Melchizedek had no father or mother or beginning of days or end of days? v. 7:3

Genesis makes no mention of his family, birth, or death. We should not think the author of Hebrews thought those things literally of Melchizedek. The fact they are not mentioned is because Melchizedek was a figure of the eternal second person of the Trinity, who had no earthly parents and no beginning in time. (The author is *not* suggesting that Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, had no human mother and no ordinary human birth.)

7. A type is a representation of one thing (or person) by another. How is Melchizedek a type of Jesus Christ? The question may be re-worded, How does Melchizedek represent Jesus Christ? In what respects did he prefigure Jesus Christ?

See the answer to study question 6, above. Also, Christ is the true King of Righteousness and Peace, and our high priest.

8. What shows that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham? vs. 2, 4, 7

The superior blesses the inferior, and Melchizedek blessed Abraham. Also, Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek.

9. How can the author reason that Melchizedek was a superior priest to the levitical or Aaronic priests of Judaism? vs. 5-9

Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchizedek blessed Abraham and received tithes from him. In that sense Levi was blessed by Melchizedek and paid tithes to him.

STUDY NOTE

Behind the Curtain.

The Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle), where the priests conducted Israelite worship, was divided into two sections: an outer section, the Holy Place, and an inner section, the Most Holy Place, or Holy of Holies. The two sections were separated by a curtain.

In the Holy Place the priests supervised and carried out the various offerings prescribed by the Law of Moses every day of the year.

The Holy of Holies contained only the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of the Law, Aaron's rod, and a pot of manna.¹⁴ None of the priests except the High Priest was allowed enter the Holy of Holies, and the High Priest was to enter it only on the Day of Atonement. On that day the High Priest went behind the curtain into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people.

The author of Hebrews wants his readers to know that Jesus, a priest after the order of Melchizekek, is a better priest than the levitical priests established when God gave the law to Moses, for Christ has entered into the heavenly sanctuary to present his blood as an atonement for the sins of his people. Hebrews goes into more detail on this point in Chapter 9, and we will return to it then.

Charite Lees Bancroft stated the personal application for us perfectly in her hymn, "Before the Throne of God Above":

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea
A great High Priest, whose name is Love
Who ever lives and pleads for me

My name is graven on His hands
My name is written on His heart
I know that while in heaven He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart
No tongue can bid me thence depart

¹⁴ The Mercy Seat lay on top of the Ark of the Covenant.

LESSON 12. HEBREWS 7:11-28

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What proves that the Aaronic priesthood was not perfect? *v. 1*
2. How was the priesthood changed when our Lord became a priest? *vs. 12-14*
3. The Aaronic priests were priests because of their legal descent from Aaron, of the tribe of Levi .On what better basis was Christ a priest? How is this basis related to Christ being a priest after the order of Melchizedek? *vs. 15-17*
4. How was the Law weak and useless? *v. 18*
5. What is the “better hope by which we draw near to God”? *v. 19*
6. What makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant? *vs. 20-22* See also Lesson 10, study note 2.
7. Why is Jesus “able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him”? *vs. 23-25*
8. Verses 26-28 sum up what makes Jesus a more fitting high priest than the levitical priests. What are the reasons the author gives? *vs. 26-28*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What proves that the Aaronic priesthood was not perfect? v. 11

There was need for another priest, one after the order of Melchizedek.

2. How was the priesthood changed when our Lord became a priest? vs. 12-14

God established a new law, one where the priest would be of the order of Melchizedek rather than of the Aaronic order. Jesus, a priest after the order of Melchizedek, came from the tribe of Judah, whereas the Aaronic priests came from the tribe of Levi

3. The Aaronic priests were priests because of their legal descent from Aaron, of the tribe of Levi. On what better basis was Christ a priest? How is this basis related to Christ being a priest after the order of Melchizedek? vs. 15-17

Christ was proved a better priest in that he has an indestructible life. He is alive, nevermore to die. The Aaronic priests all died.

4. How was the Law weak and useless? v. 18

It made nothing perfect.

5. What is the “better hope by which we draw near to God”? v. 19

We have a perfect high priest who makes intercession for us. His sacrifice and intercession are our hope of heaven.

6. What makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant? vs. 20-22 See also Lesson 10, study note 2.

God swore an oath by himself that Christ would be a priest forever. That oath makes the new covenant better than the old covenant.

7. Why is Jesus “able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him”? vs. 23-25

He continues as a high priest forever, making never-ending intercession for those who draw near to God through him.

8. Verses 26-28 sum up what makes Jesus a more fitting high priest than the Levitical priests. What are the reasons the author gives? vs. 26-28

- a. He is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners. He has no need to offer sacrifices for his own sin, for he has no sin.
- b. He is exalted above the heavens.
- c. He offered up himself once as a sacrifice for our sins. He does not have to offer sacrifices daily for sins.
- d. He was constituted a priest by an oath, one God swore by Himself.
- e. Unlike the levitical priests, who were weak and sinful, Jesus Christ is perfect.

STUDY NOTES

1. The Law Made Nothing Perfect.

The Law made nothing perfect.

Firstly, as Paul makes clear in his letters, no one can be righteous in God's sight by keeping the Law:

For by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Romans 2:20

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." Galatians 3:10-12

Secondly, the sacrificial system ordained in the Law of Moses provided a means of obtaining forgiveness for sin, but Hebrews points out was imperfect in a number of ways. Indeed, Hebrews will go on to tell how that system was but "a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities," 10:1. See also 8:1-2 in Lesson 13.

2. Guarantor of a Better Covenant.

Verse 22 says Jesus Christ is the guarantor of a better covenant. The author expounds on that better covenant in the Lesson 13, which covers Chapter 8.

LESSON 13. HEBREWS 8:1-13

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The author summarizes the main points of chapter 7 in 8:1-2. What are those points?
2. Christ as our priest did not offer gifts according to the Law. What did he offer? *v. 3*
3. The Tent of Meeting was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. How did Moses know how to construct the earthly tent? *v. 5*
4. Christ's ministry is more excellent than the old Aaronic ministry. What else is more excellent? *v. 6*
5. Why is the new covenant more excellent than the old covenant? *v. 6*
6. What was faulty about the old covenant? *vs. 8-9*
7. The new covenant is better than the old one in that it is enacted on better promises (see the answer to 5, above). What are those better promises? *vs. 10-12*
8. What is happening/has happened to the old covenant? *v. 13*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The author summarizes the main points of chapter 7 in 8:1-2. What are those points?

- a. Jesus is our high priest. He is a greater high priest than the Aaronic high priests.
- b. Jesus is holy, innocent, unstained, and separated from sinners, unlike the Aaronic high priests.
- c. Jesus does not have to offer up sacrifices for sins daily, nor for his own sin. He offered up his blood once for sinners.
- d. Jesus is seated in the heavens at the right hand of God, where he ever lives to minister and to make intercession for us.

2. Christ as our priest did not offer gifts according to the Law. What did he offer? v. 3

He offered his own blood.

3. The Tent of Meeting was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. How did Moses know how to construct the earthly tent? v. 5

God showed it to him on Mount Sinai.

4. Christ's ministry is more excellent than the old Aaronic ministry. What else is more excellent? v. 6

The covenant he mediates is more excellent than the old covenant.

5. Why is the new covenant more excellent than the old covenant? v. 6

It is enacted on better promises..

6. What was faulty about the old covenant? vs. 8-9

The house of Israel did not continue in faithfulness to the covenant, so God showed no concern for them. See study note 1.

7. The new covenant is better than the old one in that it is enacted on better promises (see the answer to 5, above). What are those better promises? vs. 10-12

God will put his laws in the minds and write them on the hearts of his people. He will ensure that they know him and are faithful to him. He will be merciful to them and remember their sins no more. See study note 2.

8. What is happening/has happened to the old covenant? v. 13

It is becoming obsolete and is vanishing away. See study note 3.

STUDY NOTES

1. The Old Covenant's Failings.

God established the Old Covenant with Israel under Moses. God did not negotiate the terms; he declared them unilaterally. God's ways are perfect. Jews and Hebrew Christians might well ask, then, how there could be anything wrong with it

Hebrews 8:9 gives us the answer. The fault lay not in what God established, but in the Israelites, who were bound by it but disobeyed it. They forsook their covenant-making God and worshiped and served other gods. The fault of the Old Covenant was that it did not guarantee the faithfulness of the people of Israel.

Some Christians may say that God risked that when he granted man free will. Adam and Eve had the ability not to sin, but they chose to disobey God. So do we all, say the advocates of free will. But that reasoning fails to recognize that Adam and Eve were the first and only human beings who were constitutionally able not to sin. Since Adam and Eve, their descendants have free will only in the sense that they are sometimes free to follow their nature - which is depraved.

The Israelites, with a sinful nature like the rest of us, were unable to keep the Old Covenant, spelled out in the Law. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin," Romans 3:20. The Old Testament scriptures quoted in 8:9 say the same thing in other words.

2. Why the New Covenant is Better.

The New Covenant is better because it is enacted on God's promise to write it on the hearts of his people so that they know and do what God requires. It is not their fulfillment of the righteousness God demands that ensures God will keep his end of the bargain. God's people remain in need of his mercy and the forgiveness of their sins. But the Lord will so keep their hearts and minds that they remain faithful and grow in sanctification. In other words, under the New Covenant God guarantees that his people will be faithful to Him.

We read assurances of God's keeping his people elsewhere in the New Testament:

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. John 6:39

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. John 10:28-29

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

The New Testament tells us again and again that it is not we who keep hold on God, but that God keeps hold on us so that we do not lose faith and fall away. This is why the New Covenant is better.

3. Obsolete and Vanishing Away.

In the first few years of the apostolic era some Jewish believers continued to observe practices prescribed in the Law of Moses. Some continued to observe the dietary restrictions of the Law. Others continued to circumcise infant males. Many of those living in Jerusalem continued to go to the temple to pray.

Some Jewish Christians demanded that Gentile converts to Christ observe the Mosaic Law. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) declared that Gentiles did not have to observe the Law of Moses, but apparently left Jewish Christians free to do so. Paul and Barnabas, who preached the gospel to Gentiles as well as Jews, seem not to have objected to Jews continuing such practices as long as it was clear that we are saved through faith in Christ alone and not by observing the Law..

The Christian church continued to grow after the Council of Jerusalem, especially as Gentiles came to faith in increasing numbers. The church was becoming more Gentile, less Jewish.. Observance of the Old Covenant was indeed proving obsolete and was vanishing away.¹⁵

15 In 70 AD the Romans overcame a Jewish rebellion in Palestine, captured Jerusalem, burned the temple and razed it to the ground. It was then impossible to observe the priestly rituals carried out in the temple. The Book of Hebrews was written before that happened. If the temple had ceased to exist prior to the writing of Hebrews, the extensive discussion of Jesus being a better high priest and offering a better sacrifice for sin would have been unnecessary. After the destruction of the temple, the Old Covenant would not be vanishing, it would have vanished already.

LESSON 14. HEBREWS 9:1-14

INTRODUCTION

Verses 1-5 provide a brief description of the Tent of Meeting, its sections and the contents of each section. The author of Hebrews said he could not go into more detail about the Tent. For more details about the Tent, see Exodus 25-27.

The work of the regular Aaronic priests was all done in the outer section of the Tent and in the outer courtyard. That work included offering the prescribed daily and monthly sacrifices and also the yearly sacrifices of the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, and the Feast of Booths. For more details about the work of the Aaronic priests, see Leviticus 1- 7. As to the special work of the high priest, for more details see Leviticus 16.

There are no study questions for vs.1-6. The study questions below cover vs 7-14.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *Who* was allowed to go behind the curtain into the inner section of the Tent? v. 7

2. *When* did the high priest enter the inner section of the Tent? v. 7

3. *What* did he do there? v. 7

4. What was the significance of the facts stated in v. 7?

5. What did the outer section of the Tent symbolically represent? v. vs. 8-9

6. What did the offerings, washings, and regulations of the Old Covenant fail to do? v. 9

7. What were the offerings, washings, and regulations of the Old Covenant good for? v. 10

8. What word does the author use to describe the end of the offerings, washings, and regulations of the Old Covenant? v. 10

9. How does v. 9:10 relate to v. 8:13?

10. Where is Christ now? What is his role there? *vs. 11-12*

11. What has Christ accomplished there? *vs. 13-14*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who was allowed to go behind the curtain into the inner section of the Tent? v.7

Only the High Priest.

2. When did the High Priest enter the inner section of the Tent? v. 7

He entered the Holy of Holies only on the Day of Atonement.

3. What did he do there? v. 7

He offered the blood of the sacrifice for his own sin and the sins of the people.

4. What was the significance of the facts stated in v. 7?

The way into the Most Holy Place, i.e., the way into God's presence, was not open as long as the first section of the tent was still standing. See study note 1.

5. What did the outer section of the Tent symbolically represent? v. vs. 8-9

It represented the present age. See study note 2.

6. What did the offerings, washings, and regulations of the Old Covenant fail to do? v. 9

They could not give the worshiper a clear conscience. See study note 2.

7. What were the offerings, washings, and regulations of the Old Covenant good for? v. 10

They were good only for life in our present bodies, that is, life in the present age. See study note 2.

8. What word does the author use to describe the end of the offerings, washings, and regulations of the Old Covenant? v. 10

He says the abolition of those things is a reformation. See study note 3

9. How does v. 9:10 relate to v. 8:13?

The food, drink, washings, and regulations referred to in 9:10 will be done away with the obsolete Old Covenant. They must vanish away for the New Covenant to come into full force.

10. Where is Christ now? What is his role there? vs. 11-12

He is in the greater, more perfect Tent of Meeting, in heaven. He serves as a high priest of the good things that have come. See study note 4.

11. What has Christ accomplished there? vs. 13-14

He has secured for us an eternal redemption by offering himself for our sins. This purifies our conscience from dead works so that we can serve the living God.

STUDY NOTES

1. Access to God's Presence.

The only person who could enter God's presence was the High Priest. Jesus is our High Priest. He is the only human being who can come into the presence of God the Father. That will be true until the present world is replaced by a new heaven and earth. Then his people will have access to the Father, for he will dwell with them:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." Revelation 21:3

2. The Present Age with Its Rules and Regulations.

In the outer tent the priests carried out ceremonies dealing with "food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body until the time of reformation." Those were meant for God's people during the time of their earthly life.

The author emphasizes that those rites and regulations will not carry over to heaven. Moreover, observing them in this life cannot give the worshiper a clear conscience, and even if they could, they will not be available to assuage the guilty conscience once one has died.

3. The Time of Reformation.

When is the time of reformation? Does it begin at the Second Coming, that is, at the return of Christ? the final defeat of Satan? the Last Judgment? the inauguration of the new heaven and new earth? All of those events are elements of the great reformation, but it began when Christ entered into the Most Holy Place to offer his own blood for the sins of his people. At that time the Law with its rules and regulations was abolished as a means of salvation. That is the subject of the next lesson.

4. The Good Things That Have Come.

The most commonly used English versions of the Bible are divided with respect to the translation of v. 11. Some have "the good things that have come," the reading preferred by the ESV translators; others have "the good things to come," which is footnoted in the ESV. The NASB translators preferred the former reading, the KJV translators preferred the latter reading. The NIV has "the good things that now are already here." Some early Greek manuscripts of Hebrews contain the one reading and some the other. Apparently both readings have good manuscript support; the different English renderings are based on the differing judgments of the translators as to which reading was probably original.

Fortunately for us, any of these readings makes good sense. The good things Christ has secured for us have come already, and will be enjoyed in full measure in eternity.

LESSON 15. HEBREWS 9:15-28

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who is to receive the promised inheritance? *v. 15*
2. What redeemed those who will receive the inheritance from their transgressions? *v. 15*
3. The promise was made in a *will*. ¹⁶What must occur before a will goes into effect? *vs. 16-17*
4. Christ shed his blood to put the New Covenant into effect. What blood put the Old Covenant of Moses into effect? *vs. 8-22*
5. How do the sacrifices of the Old Covenant relate to the sacrifice of the New Covenant? *v. 23*
6. The holy place of the Old Covenant was first the Tent of Meeting, then the temple in Jerusalem. What is the holy place of the New Covenant? *v. 25*
7. How many times were the sacrifices of the Old Covenant offered? How many times was the sacrifice of the New Covenant offered? What was that sacrifice? *vs. 25-26*
8. How many times will a man die? What comes after death? *v. 27*
9. All will experience judgment after death. What do God's people look forward to when Christ returns a second time? *v. 28*

¹⁶ The Greek word *diatheke* means both *will* and *covenant*. The words *will* and *covenant* mean the same thing in Greek.

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who is to receive the promised inheritance? v. 15

Those who are called. See study note 2.

2. What redeemed those who will receive the inheritance from their transgressions? v. 15

The death of Christ redeemed them..

3. The promise was made in a will. What must occur before a will goes into effect? v.s 16-17

The death of the one who made the will. The New Covenant (i.e., the will - see footnote on p. 67) was put into effect by the death of Christ.

4. Christ shed his blood to put the New Covenant into effect. What blood put the Old Covenant of Moses into effect? vs. 8-22

The blood of calves and goats

5. How do the sacrifices of the Old Covenant relate to the sacrifice of the New Covenant? v. 23

They were but copies of the heavenly things, See study note 3..

6. The holy place of the Old Covenant was first the Tent of Meeting, then the temple in Jerusalem. What is the holy place of the New Covenant? v. 25

Heaven itself. The presence of God resided in one sense in the Holy of Holies in the temple, but heaven is where God is and will be present in the fullest sense, yesterday, today, and forever.

7. How many times were the sacrifices of the Old Covenant offered? How many times was the sacrifice of the New Covenant offered? What was that sacrifice? vs. 25-26

The Mosaic Law called for sacrifices to be offered repeatedly, but the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, needed to be offered only once.

8. How many times will a man die? What comes after death? v. 27

Man will die but once; after that comes judgment. See study note 4..

9. All will experience judgment after death. What do God's people look forward to when Christ returns a second time? v. 28

We look forward to complete salvation: our sinful human nature will be permanently done away with and we will be wholly sanctified We will be acquitted in the judgment, since our sins are forgiven and we are righteous in Christ.

STUDY NOTES

1. The New Covenant Is Better than The Old.

These verses continue to drive home the author's argument that the gospel of Jesus Christ is better than the Jewish religion. In Chapters 1 and 2 he showed how Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is greater than the angels, and that all things, including all heavenly powers, are subject to him. In Chapters 3 and 4 he showed that Jesus Christ is greater than Moses. The people could not enter God's promised rest under Moses but that the promise of entering his rest remains for those who have faith in Jesus.

Beginning in Chapter 5 and continuing through Chapter 10, the author argues that Jesus is a great high priest after the order of Melchizedek, a priest forever unlike the Aaronic priests who lived and died before him. Moreover, Christ did not have to offer sacrifice first for his own sins, like the Aaronic priests; he offered himself once and for all as a sacrifice for his people, doing away with the animal sacrifices which were but copies or types of Christ's sacrifice of himself. Again, the Aaronic priests offered their sacrifices in a copy of the heavenly sanctuary, but Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary to represent us before the Father..

In light of all these things, the New Covenant is better in every way than the old, which is now obsolete and is being done away with. The author's sustained argument is meant to persuade Jewish Christians who are tempted to return to Judaism to remain Christians.

2. Who Are The Called?

The word *called* is used in two senses in Scripture. When people hear the gospel message, including the command to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they have heard an external call. When the Holy Spirit convinces them of their sin and need of a Savior and gives them faith to believe in Jesus Christ they have an inner call. The outer call may be ignored or resisted; the inner call is irresistible.

Those called in the second sense of the word are the elect of God, those chosen and predestined before the beginning of the world to belong to Jesus Christ. Christ summed up his parable of the wedding feast with the words, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). The many who are called are those who hear the external call of the gospel; the chosen are those who are enlivened by the Holy Spirit to respond in faith.

Hebrews doesn't contain teaching on the doctrine of election. The author simply assumes it. As stated in Lesson 3, this study is not the place to explain and argue for the truth of divine election. If election interests you, puzzles you, or bothers you, the best place to see the doctrine explained and defended is chapters 9-11 of the Paul's letter to the Romans..

3. What About Reincarnation?

Since it is appointed to man once to die, and after that the judgment (v. 28), reincarnation is ruled out, as is the notion that one gets a second chance to repent or live a better life. Hence we read, "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation," (2 Corinthians 6:2). No Christian should believe in reincarnation or in a second chance to believe beyond this life.

LESSON 16. HEBREWS 10:1-18

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What was the key failing of the Mosaic sacrificial system? *vs. 1-4*
2. What did Christ have to offer in place of the sacrifices and offerings of the Old Covenant? *vs. 5-7*
3. How did Christ fulfill the Father's will? *vs 7-10*
4. What did Christ accomplish for us by doing the Father's will? *v. 10*
5. Verses 11-14 summarize verses 1-10. Summarize the author's point in your own words.
6. Verses 16-17 quote Jeremiah 31:33.
 - a. What point does the first part of the quotation make? *v. 16*
 - b. What point does the second part of the quotation make? *v. 17*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What was the key failing of the Mosaic sacrificial system? vs. 1-4

It could never make the worshipers perfect, for the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins.

2. What did Christ have to offer in place of the sacrifices and offerings of the Old Covenant? vs. 5-7

His own body and blood.

3. How did Christ fulfill the Father's will? vs 7-10

It was the Father's will that Jesus offer his body and blood as a sacrifice for sin, and that is what he did.

4. What did Christ accomplish for us by doing the Father's will? v. 10

He sanctified his people once and for all.

5. Verses 11-14 summarize verses 1-10. Summarize the author's point in your own words.

Two classic hymns summarize the author's point better than I can:.

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.

--Isaac Watts, Not all the Blood of Beasts

Jesus, my great High Priest,
offered his blood and died;
my guilty conscience seeks
no sacrifice beside.
His pow'rful blood did once atone,
and now it pleads before the throne.

--Isaac Watts, Jesus My Great High Priest

6. Verses 16-17 quote Jeremiah 31:33.

a. What point does the first part of the quotation make? v. 16

In the New Covenant, God writes his laws on the hearts and minds of his people.

b. What point does the second part of the quotation make? v. 17

In the New Covenant, God no longer remembers the former sins of his people.

STUDY NOTES

1. The New Covenant Is Better than The Old, Concluding Remarks.

Chapters 1 through the first part of chapter 10 constitute one long argument that the gospel of Jesus Christ is better than the Jewish religion out of which his readers came. He began in chapters 1 and 2 by showing how Jesus Christ is greater than the angels. In chapters 4 and 5 he shows that Jesus is our high priest, greater in every way than the Aaronic priests. In chapters 7-9 he argues that the New Covenant Jesus inaugurated is better than the Old Covenant instituted at Mt. Sinai. Now in chapter 10:1-18 he sums his argument up, saying that the sacrifices of the Old Covenant could never take away sin, whereas Christ's sacrifice of his own body and blood takes away sin once and for all.

Beginning in 10:19, the author turns from his argument to an exhortation to remain in the faith and not to return to their old, obsolete Jewish religion. We will look at that in Lessons 17 and following. This lesson deals with verses 1-18, the author's summing up of his reasons for claiming that Christ and his work are better than Moses and his Law.

2. The Blood of Bulls and Goats.

The life of a human being is worth more than the life of a goat. Apart from vegetarians and vegans, people do not consider butchers murderers. Now, if the life of a goat is less than the life of a man or woman, then the life of a goat is not a sufficient ransom for the life of a man or woman. It cannot atone for the sins of a human being.

Didn't the Jews recognize that? Didn't they recognize that the animal sacrifices commanded in the Law of Moses were but copies of a worthy sacrifice to come?

Old Testament believers knew more than we sometimes think they did. The Old Testament did indicate that one would come who would do the will of God, a will better than animal sacrifices. Verses 5-8 quote Psalm 40:6-8:

Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

The heading of Psalm 40 identifies it as a psalm of David, which would make it a messianic psalm.¹⁷ It prophesies the coming of Christ to do the will of God *in place of the sacrifice of bulls and goats.*

3. What Is New About The New Covenant?

Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:33 and says that it is fulfilled in the New Covenant. Consider the entire paragraph in Jeremiah which contains that verse:

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for

¹⁷ Whether or not the heading is an inspired part of the psalm, the content shows it is a messianic psalm.

they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31:31-34

Some Christians, even some Bible commentators, have a mistaken idea about what is new about the New Covenant. It is not true that people were saved by works under the Old Covenant but are saved by grace under the New Covenant. Salvation has always been by grace. The animal sacrifices prescribed by the Law of Moses were but types looking forward to the sacrifice of Christ. It should be clear by this point in Hebrews that the blood of bulls and goats never washed away sins under the Old Covenant, but the blood of Christ atones for us under the New Covenant. Moreover, the blood of Christ saved Old Testament believers as well as believers under the New Covenant.

This passage from Jeremiah reveals one other crucial difference between the covenants. Under the New Covenant believers will have God’s Law written on their hearts. They will know the Lord by an inward witness.

This inward knowledge of God is from the Holy Spirit, who dwells in every born-again person. The apostle John wrote, “You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you have all knowledge” (1 John 2:20). And Paul told the Corinthians, “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians).

We must not misinterpret this glorious truth. Too many people think that whatever pops into their mind about the Lord is from him, whether “a word from the Lord” or simply an understanding of a Bible passage. We still need the Bible to winnow our thoughts. But God gives every one of his children, whether small or great, the ability to recognize the truth and reject error.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” John 10:1-5

Every one of Christ’s sheep - everyone chosen by God for Jesus Christ and born again - has he witness of the Spirit within, confirming the truth and warning against error. We do not know everything about the Lord, the Christian life, and the world to come as soon as we come to faith in Christ, but we do know the voice of the Lord.

LESSON 17. HEBREWS 10:19-31

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the holy place we have now confidence to enter? *v. 19*
2. What gives us that confidence? *v. 19*
3. What is the house of God? *v. 21*
4. What conclusion does the author draw from the truths in verses 19-21? *v. 22*
5. Why are we fit to enter the holy place? *v. 22*
6. We have a hope. Why can we be confident in it? *v. 23*
7. What does the author charge us to do? *vs. 24-25*
8. Why are we to encourage each other more and more? *v. 25*
9. What awaits us if we continue sinning after having learned the truths the author has taught in the first part of Hebrews? *vs. 27-27*
10. Is it possible for one who has been sanctified to spurn the Son of God and profane his blood? *vs. 28-30*
11. “The Lord will judge his people” (v. 30). Is that true for born-again Christians?

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the holy place we have now confidence to enter? v. 19

Hebrews 9:12 and 24 tell us that the holy place is heaven.¹⁸ Since we are in Christ, we are already seated in the heavenly places as far as God is concerned (Ephesians 2:6). While here on earth we have confidence to come into the holy place in prayer by the blood of Christ.

2. What gives us that confidence? v. 19

We are holy, cleansed by the blood of Christ

3. What is the house of God? v. 21

It isn't clear whether the author means heaven, the true holy place (see study note 1) or the church of God - see 1 Corinthians 3:10-17, where the church of Christ is called the temple of God. See Lesson 5, study note 3. Christ reigns in both heaven above and in the church on earth.

4. What conclusion does the author draw from the truths in verses 19-21? v. 22

He urges us to draw near to God with full assurance.

5. Why are we fit to enter the holy place? v 22

We are sanctified and holy, cleansed of sin. We no longer have an evil conscience that so often makes us fearful to come before God.

6. We have a hope. Why can we be confident in it? v. 23

God is faithful. What he has promised, he will do.

7. What does the author charge us to do? vs. 24-25

- a. Encourage one to practice love and good works.
- b. Keep meeting together (that is, don't stop going to church!)
- c, Encourage one another.

8. Why are we to encourage each other more and more? v. 25

The day of Christ's coming draws near. We know that persecution will increase and we need encouragement so as not to lose heart, or, even worse, to fall away. The author's purpose in writing Hebrews was to encourage his readers to remain steadfast as suffering and persecution tempted them to return to Judaism. Likewise, we need to encourage one another in our own day, when it is increasingly hard to remain faithful.

9. What awaits us if we continue sinning after having learned the truths the author has taught in the first part of Hebrews? vs. 27-27

If we lapse into a life of sin we can expect nothing but fiery judgment when the Lord comes.

10. Is it possible for one who has been sanctified to spurn the Son of God and profane his blood? vs.28-30

We see people fall away who once professed Christ, were baptized into his church, and lived for a

time like Christians. Some just drift away, but some openly spurn Christ and profane the blood he shed. On the other hand, Scripture tells us that those who left were never of us (1 John 2:18-19). Is that the case with all who abandon the Christian faith? That question was dealt with in earlier

lessons. See Lesson 3, study note 1; Lesson 6, study note 4; Lesson 9, study note 4.

11. “The Lord will judge his people” (v. 30). Is that true for born-again Christians?

Yes. Verse 30 is quite clear. Consider also the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

2 Corinthians 5:10

The words *we* and *all* make it clear that the apostle has Christians in view.

STUDY NOTE

The Judgment of Born-again Christians,

The answer to study question 11 makes it clear that Christians as well as unbelievers must stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive what is due for what we have done during our time on earth. 1 Corinthians 3:1-15 tells us more about the judgment of Christians on that great day:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

The immediate context of these verses is the Apostle Paul's remarks about Christian workers who spread the gospel and build Christ's church, but they apply to all God's people on the day of judgment. Gaining or losing salvation is not at issue here; rather, Paul is writing about receiving reward for work that lasts or losing potential reward because one's deeds produced nothing that lasted. If we did nothing of lasting (eternal) significance, we will suffer loss of reward, but will be saved, though with nothing to show for it, as one may escape a fire with nothing but the clothes on one's back.

The great majority of believers who are not ministers, evangelists, or missionaries may not add converts to Christ's church, but we can build the church by raising our children as Christians , witnessing Christ to friends, relations, neighbors and coworkers, encouraging the fainthearted and discouraged so that their faith is strengthened, and doing works of mercy "so that [people] may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). By the grace and power of God these things will yield fruit that will last, fruit that will yield a reward on the last day.

LESSON 18. HEBREWS 10:32-39

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What were “the former days”? *v. 32*
2. Were the former days “the good old days” for the readers of Hebrews? *vs. 32-33*
3. What did they go through? *vs. 32-34*
4. What gave them confidence at that time to persevere in Christ in their sufferings and troubles? *v. 35*
5. What do they need now as their troubles continue? *v36*
6. What do you think the author has in mind when he writes of “the will of God”? *v. 36*
7. How long till deliverance comes? *v. 37*
8. How must we live while waiting for Christ to return? *v. 37*
9. What does “shrink back” mean? *vs. 38-39*
10. Some shrink back and some have faith. What is the end of each? *v. 39*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What were “the former days”? v. 32

Apparently the readers of Hebrews had been Christians for some time when the author wrote his letter. The former days were the time following their enlightenment, the first days of their Christian life after they accepted Jesus as their Messiah and Lord..

2. Were the former days “the good old days” for the readers of Hebrews? vs. 32-33

Not at all. From the beginning of their Christian life they were subjected to a hard struggle with Jewish authorities and zealots, some doubtless with their own relatives and former friends, just as Jesus predicted:

For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Matthew 10:35-36

3. What did they go through? vs. 32-34

They suffered reproach, affliction, the plundering of their property, and even prison.

4. What gave them confidence then to persevere in Christ in their sufferings and troubles? v. 35

They had great hope of reward, as do we.

5. What do they need now as their troubles continue? v. 36

Endurance. We have no promise that our tribulation for Christ will be fleeting.

6. What do you think the author has in mind when he writes of “the will of God”? v. 36

In this context, the will of God is that we remain faithful to our Lord

7. How long till deliverance comes? v. 37

It will be in “a little while”. See study note 1.

8. How must we live while waiting for Christ to return? v. 37

We must live by faith. See study note 2.

9. What does “shrink back” mean? vs. 38-39

It means to abandon Christ and retreat to our old religion or way of life.

10. Some shrink back and some have faith. What is the end of each? v. 39

Those who shrink back from Christ will be destroyed. Those who live by faith until he comes or takes us to himself by death will preserve their souls for eternity. See study note 3,

STUDY NOTES

1. A Little While.

Verse 37 quotes part of Isaiah 26:20 to encourage the reader that the Lord will come in a little while to rescue his people from oppression and persecution. The Apostle John also indicated that it is already the last hour (1 John 2:18)

The time until the Lord returns may seem long to suffering Christians. But we live by faith, knowing that it will not seem long at all when he finally comes to take us to himself. It will not seem long in the light of the never-ending joy and happiness that will be the reward for faithfulness.

2. *The Righteous by Faith Shall Live.*

The Apostle Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:3-4 in Romans 1:17, a verse known and beloved by many Christians, a verse that may be thought of as the slogan of the Reformation:

The righteous shall live by faith.

Generations of Protestant ministers and theologians have expounded this verse to mean that God reckons us righteous and gives us eternal life when we have faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. This interpretation is true, but there is even more good news in the verse. The word order in the original Greek is

the righteous by faith shall live

The middle term, *by faith*, can be taken with the first term, *the righteous*, to yield the truth that we are righteous by faith. But it can also be taken with the third term, *shall live*, to yield the truth that we live our lives by faith. Both meanings are true, and I believe Paul had both in mind. We Protestants tend to emphasize the first meaning more, but we ought not to neglect the second meaning. It is the second meaning the author of Hebrews has in mind in 10:36-39. We live by faith in an unbelieving, hostile world, a world that is no friend to grace, trusting in our Savior to be our Protector, Defender, Guide, and Friend, trusting that a reward awaits all who are faithful.

3. *What Does “Destroyed” Mean?*

Destroyed in v. 29 means to spend eternity in hell, the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Jesus made this clear:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28

This truth is fearsome. It repels many. Truth be told, a lot of Christians wish it were not so. Who wants to think of loved ones who died apart from Christ spending eternity in torment? Consequently, while unbelievers may simply reject it and consider the doctrine of endless torment a relic of an earlier, barbaric age, some Christians have sought ways to deny or at least mitigate it.

Some heretical sects simply reject the doctrine. Jehovah's witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists have always denied it. Moreover, many members of orthodox churches personally do not believe in an eternal hell. Some people, both heretical and otherwise orthodox, believe the wicked are simply annihilated in hell. Just as fire reduces wood to ashes, the fires of hell reduce the individual to nothing. He or she no longer exists. The fire of hell is “the fire that consumes,” as one influential annihilationist author puts it.¹⁹

It seems to me that annihilationism appeals to people primarily because they do not want to believe in an eternal, fiery hell, not because they are convinced that is scriptural. In fact, the

19 Edward Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*.

arguments for annihilationism ignore or attempt to explain away certain biblical passages. Consider the following words of Jesus::

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”
Matthew 25:46

The punishment of the wicked is as eternal as the life of the righteous. Annihilation is not eternal punishment. Such punishment ends when the sinner no longer exists.

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ Mark 9:47-48

Those in hell are never consumed; they are never reduced to nothing. The worm would die if it had nothing to feed on, and the fire would go out if it had no fuel. But the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched; for eternity there is always something to feed on, something to burn.

Consider finally the last word the Bible has about the lake of fire:

and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:10

Forever must mean eternal suffering if words have any meaning at all. Men and women who do not know the Lord will be in the same place. Will they have an end whereas the devil and his angels will not?

The author of Hebrews could not have portrayed the stakes any higher. Remain in the faith and inherit endless bliss in a little while, or abandon Christ and suffer eternal destruction, which means eternal punishment and not annihilation.

We who know the Lord and believe that hell is eternal must always regard the fate of the unsaved with horror. We should pray even for our enemies, that they come to faith and avoid such a fearful ending. After all, we are as deserving of eternal fire as the worst of humankind; it is only by the sacrifice of Christ that we are spared and promised heaven instead of hell.

LESSON 19. HEBREWS 11:1-22

Chapter 10 ends with the statement that those who have faith preserve their souls. Chapter 11 explains what Christian faith is and gives examples from biblical history of men and women who had faith.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Some people think faith is simply intellectual assent to the teaching of the Bible. Some people think faith is believing in spite of the evidence. Some think it is hope that all will turn out for the best. None of these is biblical faith. What is faith? *v. 1*
2. Why were heroes of the past commended by God? *v. 3*
3. How does faith relate to our understanding of creation? *v. 3.*
4. Why was Abel's sacrifice more acceptable than the sacrifice of his brother Cain? *v 4*
5. What must we have to please God? *v. 6*
6. Relate *v. 7* to *vs. 1-2.*
7. Relate *v. 8* to *vs. 1-2.*
8. R.C. Sproul wrote, "The promises of God for tomorrow are the anchor for believers today." How does that describe the life of Abraham? *vs. 8-12*
9. How should our life be like the lives of those described in *vs. 13-16*

10. How are vs. 13-16 especially relevant to the author's purpose in writing to his Jewish Christian readers?

11. The peak of Abraham's faith was his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command (vs. 17-19). What did he believe God could do, and how is that like the faith of Christians? *v. 19*

12. How was the faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph "the assurance of things hoped for" (v. 1). vs. 20-22

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Some people think faith is simply intellectual assent to the teaching of the Bible. Some people think faith is believing in spite of the evidence. Some think it is hope that all will turn out for the best. None of these is biblical faith. What is faith? v. 1

a. Faith is the assurance or conviction of things hoped for. That means faith is trust and confidence that God will fulfill all his promises that constitute our future hope.

b. Faith is also the evidence of things not seen. We have the evidence of our own eyes for things in the present, but our eyes cannot see into the past or future. Some things not seen occurred in the distant past, some things not seen are yet to come, but in neither case do we have direct evidence of them. Faith accepts God's Word as all the evidence we need.

2. Why were heroes of the past commended by God? v. 3

They were commended for their faith, not for bravery, success in battle, personal holiness. or anything else men are approved by other men.

3. How does faith relate to our understanding of creation? v. 3.

It is by faith that we understand that God created the universe out of things that do not appear. Christian theologians interpret that to mean he created all things out of nothing. The ancient Greeks had various creation myths and philosophical ideas regarding the origin of the universe, modern science has theories about how the universe either always was or came into existence from . . . well, there are various hypotheses, but none of them has gained the approval of a majority of scientists. They are no more than guesses.

4. Why was Abel's sacrifice more acceptable than the sacrifice of his brother Cain? v 4

Abel had faith that God would accept his sacrifice; apparently Cain did not.

5. What must we have to please God? v. 6

Without faith it is impossible to please him. Those who please God draw near to him, and those who draw near must believe he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him.

6. Relate v. 7 to vs. 1-2.

Noah had evidence of things not seen. He had God's word, a word of judgment on the world but a word of deliverance for Noah, his family, and the animals. He received that word a hundred years before God sent the Flood. The coming Flood was as yet unseen, but Noah had all the evidence he needed that it was certain to come.

7. Relate v. 8 to vs. 1-2.

Abraham was promised a land he had never seen. God's promise was good enough for him, and he believed. In faith he obeyed and left his home in Mesopotamia and journeyed to Canaan.

8. R.C. Sproul wrote, "The promises of God for tomorrow are the anchor for believers today." How does that describe the life of Abraham? vs. 8-12

God promised Abraham an inheritance to come. Abraham lived in that hope.

9. How should our life be like the lives of those described in vs. 13-16

God has prepared a heavenly home for us. We must live as strangers and pilgrims in this world, obeying our Lord and clinging to him in faith, being strong in our hope of that heavenly home.

10. How are vs. 13-16 especially relevant to the author's purpose in writing to his Jewish Christian readers?

His readers felt the weight of living in an alien world. Their Jewish relatives and neighbors (to say nothing of the Gentiles) were strangers to them now. Like Abraham, like Christians today (whether of Jewish or Gentile background), they were in the world but not of the world. That was not easy for them.

11 The peak of Abraham's faith was his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command (vs. 17-19). What did he believe God could do, and how is that like the faith of Christians? v. 19

Abraham believed God could and would raise Isaac from the dead in order to keep his promise. We believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead in order to keep his promise.

12. How was the faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph "the assurance of things hoped for" (v. 1) vs. 20-22

- a. Isaac invoked future blessings on his posterity, believing God would bless them.
- b Jacob (also named Israel) blessed his grandsons while they were children.. Those blessings would not be theirs till they grew up. See Genesis 48. Jacob believed God would bless them in the future, long after he had died.
- c. Shortly before his death, Joseph told his descendants to bury him in Canaan, the land promised to Abraham and his offspring. He had faith and hope that they would enter it and possess it

STUDY NOTES

1. Faith Looks Forward and Back.

Faith looks to the future. Hebrews tells us faith is the assurance of things hoped for. What do we hope for? Christian hope is faith that God will bring about the return of Jesus Christ in the future to take us to the heavenly home.

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Titus 2:13

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. John 14:1-3

Faith also looks to the past. Hebrews tells us that faith is the evidence of things not seen. The author cites the creation of the universe as the prime example of this kind of faith. We are to believe that the world was created by the word of God.

Augustine and Calvin both understood Jesus, who is the Word of God, to be the agent of creation signified by "and God *said*" in Genesis 1. They took those words anthropomorphically, as God's way of stating that it was by means of his Son that he created the heavens and the earth and all their parts. Augustine wrote (emphasis added):

It must therefore be that you spoke and they were made. In your word alone you created them. But how did you speak? It . . . is this way, then, that you mean us to understand your Word, *who is God with you, God with God*, your Word uttered eternally . . . and it is by this Word that all things are made which you say are to be made. You create them by your Word alone and in no other way.

Calvin adopts the same view (emphasis added):

The Word was truly God. And this is clearly enough shown by Moses in his account of the creation, *where he places the Word as intermediate*. For why does he distinctly narrate that God, in creating each of his works, *said*, Let there be this - let there be that, unless that the unsearchable glory of God might shine forth in his image? I know prattlers would easily evade this, by saying that Word is used for order or command; but the apostles are better expositors, when they tell us that *the worlds were created by the Son*.

God did not create the world out of things that are visible. What did he create the world out of? From early in the Christian era theologians have believed that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.²⁰ That is the almost universal opinion of Christian thinkers today. I know of no Christian scientist or philosopher who believes God used pre-existing materials to create the universe. Belief that

20 Various ancient societies had myths regarding the formation of the present world from earlier matter, that had existed for eternity. Christians reject the idea of eternal matter; only God is eternal.

the world was not made of pre-existing matter is a matter of faith. It cannot be proved or disproved by science.²¹

2. Cain and Abel.

This is what Genesis tells us about the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel:

Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it. Genesis 4:4-7

Some Bible students think that God accepted Abel's sacrifice because it was a blood sacrifice and rejected Cain's sacrifice because it was not. Hebrews does not say that. Hebrews tells us that God accepted Abel's sacrifice because of his faith. It tells us that God rejected Cain's sacrifice because of his sin.

The hypothesis that Cain should have offered an animal sacrifice for sin may be true, but there is no direct scriptural evidence for it. The sacrificial system of the Hebrews, which included the slaying of animals as sin and guilt offerings, was not instituted until long after Cain and Abel lived and died. The sacrifices offered by the patriarchs prior to Moses often were animal sacrifices, but Scripture does not specifically say they were sin offerings.

The author of Hebrews has made it clear that the blood of bulls and calves cannot take away sin. He certainly did not think that blood sacrifice was what made Abel acceptable to God. It was Abel's faith that pleased God.

3. Seeking God.

Verse 6 tells us that those who seek God must seek him by faith. That faith has two components:

- a. we must believe God exists.
- b. We must believe God will reward those who diligently seek him by finding him.

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13

Jesus said:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Matthew 7:7-8

People who expect spiritual enlightenment to be easy will not be rewarded. We seek God in the Scripture - nowhere else - and that sometimes requires concentration, repeated reading, study, recourse to commentaries, meditation on what we have read and most of all prayer that God will grant understanding. Sometimes that is hard work. But the Lord says that he who seeks, finds. We press on because we have faith that we will find God there.

4. This World Is Not My Home.

Among God's promises to Abraham was the promise of a land to belong to him and to his

21 Some cosmologists believe the physical universe to be eternal, that it existed before the Big Bang, but there is no physical evidence that they can point to.

descendants:

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim. Genesis 15: 18-20

Some evangelical Christians in our day believe that the nation of Israel is heir to that promise or believe at least that the Jewish people will all be converted and that converted Israel will occupy the land once called Canaan before Christ comes.

But Abraham understood God's promised inheritance to be much more glorious. Canaan was but a type of his full inheritance, just as the sacrifices of the Mosaic law were types of Christ's sacrifice. Abraham lived in the hope that his offspring would inherit, not the land of Canaan, but a heavenly country, a city prepared for him and all his descendants (vs. 13-16).

That country is the new heaven and the new earth, the city is the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-2), and we who are in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, are those descendants who will inherit:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Galatians 3:28-29

We, like Abraham, live in hope of heaven and of our place in the Father' house in the New Jerusalem.²² Let that hope keep our faith strong, no matter what hardships we may be going through today.

LESSON 20. HEBREWS 11:23-40

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Did Moses have any knowledge of Christ who was to come? *v26*
2. What enabled Moses to endure the mistreatment of his people and the wrath of Pharaoh? *vs. 26-27*
3. What did the people of Israel accomplish through faith? *v. vs. 29-30*
4. What happened to Rahab after the walls of Jericho fell down? *Joshua 6:25*, Read also *Matthew 1:5-6*.
5. Can you link any of the names in v. 32 with the faith accomplishments listed in vs. 33-35?
6. Verses 36-38 describe the experiences of some who did *not* triumph through their faith in this life. What did they have in common with those who did triumph in their faith? *v 39*
7. What will become of the sufferers? *v. 40*
8. When will they and we be made perfect?

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Did Moses have any knowledge of Christ who was to come? v26

Apparently so, just as Abraham had knowledge of a heavenly country (Lesson 19). The Old Testament saints knew more than we think.

2. What enabled Moses to endure the mistreatment of his people and the wrath of Pharaoh? vs. 26-27

He knew as did Abraham that God had a reward waiting for him if he was obedient in faith. He endured as seeing him who is invisible.” He had “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (v. 11:1).

3. What did the people of Israel accomplish through faith? v. vs. 29-30

They crossed the Red Sea as on dry land.

4. What happened to Rahab after the walls of Jericho fell down? Joshua 6:25, Read also Matthew 1:5-6.

She and her family were spared when the rest of the residents of Jericho were slain.

5. Can you link any of the names in v. 32 with the faith accomplishments listed in vs. 33-35?

Gideon became mighty in war, Barak and Jephthah put foreign armies to flight, David conquered kings, Samson was made strong out of weakness, Samuel enforced justice. Many of those mentioned received promises. Not named, but known to every Sunday School child are Daniel, who stopped the mouths of lions, and Daniel’s friends, who quenched the power of fire.

6. Verses 36-38 describe the experiences of some who did not triumph through their faith in this life. What did they have in common with those who did triumph in their faith? v 39

They are commended for their faith just as much as those who conquered their foes and circumstances.

7. What will become of the sufferers? v. 4

They will receive something better than what they received in this life; they will receive what God promised.

8. When will they and we be made perfect?

At the resurrection, when Christ returns to reign.

STUDY NOTES

1. Israel's Loss of Faith.

Verse 29 recounts Israel's one great act of faith in their journey out of Egypt to the land of Canaan. They passed through the Red Sea where God had miraculously made a path of dry land in the midst of the water . Perhaps Israel's having seen the plagues God visited on Egypt and their own being spared on the night of Passover had created their faith.

But as they proceeded into the trackless desert their faith weakened as they faced thirst and hunger. Then, when they paused at the boundary of the Promised Land as their spies reconnoitered the land, their faith utterly failed when the spies told of great walled cities and of the inhabitants of the land, the Nephilim. The spies felt themselves to be like grasshoppers in comparison to the Nephilim, whom they would have to fight. The people lost heart, lost faith in the Lord, and rebelled. They wanted to return to Egypt in spite of God's promise. The Lord was angry and swore that faithless generation would not enter his rest. See Lesson 6, covering 3:7-19.

The author of Hebrews wrote his letter so that his Jewish Christian readers would not lose their faith in the face of the trouble and persecution they were facing. Many Christians today suffer abuse, contempt, tribulation, and even persecution. We too need to look back at what God has done for us and forward to his promised blessing, a place in his glorious kingdom, whenever the trials and troubles we suffer as Christians seem overwhelming. We will receive the promised inheritance if we remain faithful.

2. Rahab.

Rahab was a prostitute. She lived with her family in a house on the wall of Jericho, where she plied her trade. Prostitution was not as deplorable in Canaan as it is in our country; it was tolerated in Canaan, as evidenced by the existence of many temple cult prostitutes. Rahab was not a cult prostitute; for her, prostitution was a means making a living.

Joshua, Moses's successor, led the people through waters of the Jordan River, a miracle reminiscent of their forebears passing through the Red Sea forty years before. The first city on the western bank was Jericho. Joshua sent two spies to reconnoiter the city. They went to the prostitute's house, where visiting strangers might escape notice. But they were noticed:

And it was told to the king of Jericho, "Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out. Joshua 2:2-7

To disobey the king in this way was treason, worthy of death. But Rahab knew that the LORD, the God of Israel, was the one true God. She knew that he had done wondrous works and given victory of Israel from the time of the exodus till then; and that he had given the land of Canaan, including Jericho, to Israel. She had faith that the God of Israel would spare her if she honored him and his people:

she . . . said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away

before you.

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For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." And the men said to her, "Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you." Joshua 2:8-14

The spies agreed, and when Jericho fell to the Israelites Joshua decreed:

The city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. Joshua 6:17

So Rahab was saved from destruction through faith in LORD. Rahab and her family were put outside the camp of Israel while the Israelites were slaughtering the inhabitants of Jericho, but then they were brought back in and made Israelites.

But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. Joshua 6:25

Indeed, Rahab became the great-grandmother of King David!

3. Faith in Triumph, Faith in Tribulation.

Verses 32-38 tell of Old Testament saints who triumphed through faith and also of those who suffered tribulation but remained faithful..The author does not paint a rosy picture by writing only of those who "through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, etc.". He also writes of those who suffered mocking, flogging, imprisonment, death, exile, and affliction. The latter died in faith that they would receive the heavenly kingdom God had promised. The experience of the first group showed God rewards those who keep their faith; the experience of the second group shows that the promises of God find their ultimate fulfillment in the future.

The original readers of Hebrews and we today need to keep both truths in mind. God rewards those who remain in the faith of Christ. Some are rewarded in this world, all are rewarded in the world to come - in 2:4 the author reminded us that it is the world to come of which he was speaking.

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LESSON 21. HEBREWS 12:1-17

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the “great cloud of witnesses” referred to in v. 1?
2. Is that great cloud of witnesses our ultimate example of how to live? *vs. 1-2*
3. Who is the *him* of vs. 3-4?
4. What should we consider our trials and tribulations to be? *vs. 5-6*
5. Why should the fact that God disciplines us make us rejoice? *vs. 6-8*
6. Why does God discipline his children? *vs. 9-11*
7. How do we lift up our drooping hands, strengthen our feeble knees, and make straight paths for our feet? The words are figurative - what do they mean? *vs. 12-13*
8. What traits must characterize our relationships with other Christians? *vs. 14-15*
9. What does the author mean by a “root of bitterness”? See Deuteronomy 29:18-19, which the author probably has in mind. *v. 15*
10. Esau was unholy (v. 16) in that he had no regard for God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants. What does it mean that he later had no chance to repent? *v. 17*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the “great cloud of witnesses” referred to in v. 1?

The heroes of faith of chapter 11.

2. Is that great cloud of witnesses our ultimate example of how to live? vs. 1-2

The heroes of faith of chapter 11 should be an encouragement and examples to us of how to endure our sufferings and trials and how to live in faith that God fulfills his promises, but the ultimate example of faith is the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Who is the him of vs. 3-4?

Jesus Christ, the founder and perfecter of our faith. See study note 1.

4. What should we consider our trials and tribulations to be? vs. 5-6

They are means by which our heavenly Father disciplines us.

5. Why should the fact that God disciplines us make us rejoice? vs. 6-8

It is proof we are truly his sons and daughters. Only legitimate sons and daughters receive discipline.

6. Why does God discipline his children? vs. 9-11

So that we may be more holy and live more righteous lives.

7. How do we lift up our drooping hands, strengthen our feeble knees, and make straight paths to our feet? The words are figurative - what do they mean? vs. 12-13

Drooping hands and weak knees refer to the discouragement that accompanies our trials and difficulties - Will they ever end? How can I go on? They result from growing weary and fainthearted. To lift up our hands and strengthen our knees means to take heart. To make straight our paths means to walk in the way of faith, to live intentionally as those who know God is keeping us and will fulfill his promises to us. See study note 2.

8. What traits must characterize our relationships with other Christians? vs. 14-15

As much as it depends on us we must live at peace with all men (Romans 13:18). We must live holy lives. We must not become a “root of bitterness” (see the answer to question 9, below).

9. What does the author mean by a “root of bitterness”? See Deuteronomy 29:18-19, which the author probably has in mind. v. 15

A “root of bitterness” is a supposed Christian who stirs up dissension, division, and evil in the body of Christ. See study note 3.

10. Esau was unholly (v. 16) in that he had no regard for God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants. What does it mean that he later had no chance to repent? v. 17

Repent does not mean simply to be sorry - Esau wept bitter tears of sorrow that he had foolishly sold his birthright. Repentance includes sorrow, but it is much more. To repent means to turn around (literally, to have a change of mind and heart). One repents of a sinful life by ceasing to sin beginning to do good. Some times a past sin can be undone: a thief can restore what he stole and then steal no more. But some sins cannot be undone. Esau had no way of going back and undoing what he had done.

STUDY NOTES

1. The Founder and Perfecter of Our Faith.

Jesus is the Founder and Perfecter of our faith. He is the founder in that he laid the foundation of our faith, or better, he is the foundation: “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). Faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1). The life and death of Jesus are the basis of our hope of eternal life. We have a share in the joy that was set before him (v. 2).

Jesus is also the Perfecter of our faith. Our faith grows unto perfection as we follow in his footsteps of obedience and trust in the Father. He is our example of how the just live by their faith (Romans 1:17). His example is the subject of 11:2-4.

2. Straight Paths for Our Feet.

The Old Testament speaks of straight paths:

Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Psalm 119:35

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:6

Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil. Proverbs 4:26-27

The straight paths are the Lord’s commandments. We are not saved by keeping the commandments, but if we neglect or forsake them we demonstrate by our works that we do not belong to Christ.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Perhaps the author of Hebrews bring up obedience to the Lord here because it is natural for a disheartened, discouraged person to just chuck it all and revert to the comfortable, easy ways of sin, when he or she was not abused or even persecuted for following Christ. See study note 3.

3. A Root of Bitterness.

The root of a plant is the source of its growth. The root takes up water, together with whatever solutes are the whole plant is poisoned and will sicken and likely die. A person who is a root of bitterness dissolved in the water, and supplies it to the whole plant. If the water contains a toxic substance, the whole plant is poisoned and will sicken and likely die. A person is a source of poison in a home or a church if he or she is a source of unholy, immoral behavior and/or false teaching.

The apostles encountered roots of bitterness in the early church:

- a. Peter had to deal with Simon the Magician - read the account in Acts 8:9-24.
- b. Paul commanded the church in Corinth to remove an immoral member, warning, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Corinthians 6:6).
- c. John rebuked the church in Thyatira with these words:

But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. Revelation 2:20

The author of Hebrews is speaking to the church. They must take action to remove such a root of

bitterness from the fellowship.

LESSON 22. HEBREWS 12:18-29

STUDY QUESTIONS

Verses 19-21 describe the scene when the Israelites, having recently come out of Egypt, came to Mount Sinai, where they were to receive the Ten Commandments. Read Exodus 19.

1. What was the attitude of the people of God as they contemplated Mount Sinai before them? *v.21*
2. Was it reasonable that the Israelites should be terrified? *vs. 9-20*
3. By contrast, Christians contemplate a different mountain, Mount Zion, v. 22. The original Mount Zion was the earthly city of Jerusalem. What does Mount Zion represent in vs. 22-24?
4. The author of Hebrews has devoted most of his letter to telling why the Christian faith is better than the Jewish faith. List the things in vs. 22-24 that make Mount Zion better than Mount Sinai.
5. What does the author warn his readers against? *v. 25*
6. What are the things that will be shaken and removed, and what are the things that will remain? *v.27*
7. What should be our attitude towards the heavenly kingdom, and why? *v. 28*
8. What should be our attitude towards God in the light of these things, and why? *vs. 28-29*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What was the attitude of the people of God as they contemplated Mount Sinai .before them? v.21

They were terrified.

2. Was it reasonable that the Israelites should be terrified? vs. 9-20

Absolutely. The fire, gloom, and tempest were frightening in themselves; moreover, they were warned that if they drew any nearer to God they would be destroyed.

3. By contrast, Christians contemplate a different mountain, Mount Zion, v. 22. The original Mount Zion was the earthly city of Jerusalem. What does Mount Zion represent in vs. 22-24?

It represents the heavenly kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, where Christians, already righteous in Christ, are made perfect in holiness; where those who have already died in the Lord are assembled in a great throng; and to which Christians still on earth will be called home.

4. The author of Hebrews has devoted most of his letter to telling why the Christian faith is better than the Jewish faith. List the things in vs. 22-24 that make Mount Zion better than Mount Sinai.

- a. It is the city of the living God, his dwelling place. When we arrive there we will be with him.
- b. The angels are already arrayed in festive garments, waiting to welcome the full ingathering of all God's people.
- c. Its present and future residents, that is, all the elect, are enrolled there. Their names are already written in the Book of Life. See Revelation 20:12.
- d. Now, even before the resurrection of the body, the spirits of those who died in the Lord are made perfect.
- e. Jesus is there, our High Priest, pleading his blood on our behalf before his Father. His blood calls for our forgiveness, unlike the blood of Abel that cried from the ground for justice.

5. What does the author warn his readers against? v. 25

As he has repeatedly warned them throughout Hebrews, he warns again against refusing and rejecting the Lord who now warns them from heaven. The author warns them to listen to the gospel and believe it; he warns them not to turn away from it and be lost.

6. What are the things that will be shaken and removed, and what are the things that will remain? v.27

The things shaken are the present order of the world, including the sacrificial system of Judaism. The things that will remain are the priesthood of Christ and the promised kingdom of God for those who believe.

7. What should be our attitude towards the heavenly kingdom, and why? v. 28

We should be grateful to God for it, for it is a kingdom that cannot be shaken, that is, a kingdom that will never pass away.

8. What should be our attitude towards God in the light of these things, and why? vs. 28-29

We should worship him with reverence and awe, for he is a consuming fire.

STUDY NOTES

1. The Heavenly Jerusalem.

The Bible tells us less than we might like to know about heaven. The Old Testament tells us it is where God sits enthroned in majesty, surrounded by the angels singing his praise, and that is about all it says.

The New Testament tells us more. Jesus told his disciples that when he returned to heaven he would prepare a place for them - for us:

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. John 14:2-3

Hebrews tells us more about heaven. Heaven will be a place of rest (3:7-11), God's own rest. Christ is not only seated here at the right hand of the Father, but he serves there as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary of which the Tent of Meeting and temple were but copies (9:24-26). Verses 21-24 of this lesson describe the inhabitants of heaven: angels; the spirits of those who died believing, now made perfect; God the Father; and Jesus Christ our High Priest.

The most extensive description of the heavenly Jerusalem is found in Revelation 21:9-22:4. It is too long to print here or even to summarize adequately. Read it now before you proceed to the other study notes.

2. The Final Warning.

Verses 25-29 contain the final warning in Hebrews. The author has warned his readers five times before not to turn away from Christ back to their former life and religion:

- a. In 2:1-4 he warned them not to drift away from Christ.
- b. In 3:12-19 he warned them that they would never enter God's rest if they were disobedient to the command to believe.
- c. In 5:11-6:8 he warned them that rejecting the Lord who was crucified for them after they had professed faith could not be repented of, that there could be no turning around and returning to Christ.
- d. In 10:26-30 he warned them that if they continued to sin deliberately after knowing Christ, they would be spurning the blood of Christ that sanctifies sinners and outraging the Spirit of grace. There was no more sacrifice for their sins and could only look forward to a fearful judgment..
- e. In 12:15-17 he warned them that if they became a root of bitterness they could fail to obtain the grace of God would not be able to repent and obtain that grace later.

3. Things Shaken and Things that Remain.

The author declares that God will once more shake the earth, destroying some things and leaving other unshaken. Other scriptures tell us this in different words.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth

in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:10-13

Peter's description is quite graphic. John speaks of the passing away of the old world and of the world to come in less graphic, more succinct words:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. Revelation 21:1

The author of Hebrews laid emphasis on the passing away of the Mosaic law and its sacrificial system, but he also speaks of the New Jerusalem. Peter and John inform us that all things will be made new when Christ comes to reign.

3. “Our God is a Consuming Fire.”

My thesaurus give several synonyms for *fear*, among them *terror, fright, dread, alarm*. Those words are appropriate when sinners and apostates read, “Our God is a consuming fire.” Hebrews 10:26-27 describes their fear:

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

However, those who trust in Christ also ought to fear God. The right kind of fear for the Christian is like the fear of offending someone we love and respect. It is the fear of failing someone. Another way of defining godly fear is reverence and awe, as in v. 28. To be sure, in reminding his readers that our God is a consuming fire the author of Hebrews has the first kind of fear in mind, in keeping with his many warnings against turning away from Christ. But those who love Christ ought also to fear him in the second sense. There is no fear of judgment for them, but they should approach God in worship with reverence and awe.

LESSON 23. HEBREWS 13:1-24

There are no study notes for Lesson 23.

STUDY QUESTIONS

In chapter 12 the author concluded his extended argument for not leaving one's new-found Christian faith and returning to Judaism. Chapter 13 consists largely of exhortations to Christian behavior.

1. How does v. 1 sum up vs. 2-4?

2. Verses 5-6 summarize Jesus' teaching about money. See also Matthew 6:19-25.

3. Verse 9 warns the reader not to be led away by diverse and strange teachings. What teachings do you think the author had in mind? *vs. 9-10*

4. Leviticus 4:11-12 commanded the Aaronic priests to take the remainder of a sin offering outside the camp and to burn it there. What does the author mean when he urges his readers to go outside the camp? *vs. 11-13*

5. In what previous passages did the author refer to our heavenly city? *v. 14*

6. Christians are no longer to offer the sacrifices prescribed by the Law of Moses. What sacrifices are we to offer? *vs. 15-16*

7. The leaders mentioned in v. 17 are leaders in the church, not political authorities. How do we know this?

8. Some scholars believe the Apostle Paul was the author of Hebrews. What in vs.19-24. is consistent with that view?

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS.

1. How does v. 1 sum up vs. 2-4?

Showing hospitality to strangers, visiting those who are in prison and those who are mistreated, and being faithful to one's spouse are all acts of love.

2. Verses 5-6 summarize Jesus' teaching about money. See also Matthew 6:19-25.

In Matthew 6:19-25 Jesus said,

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

3. Verse 9 warns the reader not to be led away by diverse and strange teachings. What teachings do you think the author had in mind.? vs. 9-10

The teaching that one should continue to offer the sacrifices and offerings of the Law of Moses. The author devoted much of the letter to showing that the work of Christ for us, on the cross and now in heaven, has done away with the rituals of the Law, which were merely types of the work of Christ to come.

4. Leviticus 4:11-12 commanded the Aaronic priests to take the remainder of a sin offering outside the camp and to burn it there. What does the author mean when he urges his readers to go outside the camp? vs. 11-13

The remains of the sin offering were considered unclean, and so they were removed from the temple of God. Christians must willingly suffer suffering and rejection as Jesus did. He was crucified outside the city; we must identify with him as no longer part of the city of man, the world.

5. In what previous passages did the author refer to our heavenly city? v. 14

See 11:9-1 and 12:22-24.

6. Christians are no longer to offer the sacrifices prescribed by the Law of Moses. What sacrifices are we to offer? vs.15-16

The sacrifices pleasing to God are the praise of our lips and the good works we do for others..

7. The leaders mentioned in v. 17 are leaders in the church, not political authorities. How do we know this?

Leaders in the church keep watch over our souls. Our employers and elected officials don't do that.

8. Some scholars believe the Apostle Paul was the author of Hebrews. What in vs.19-24. is consistent with that view?

- a. The author solicits their prayers that he may be restored to them. See Romans 15:29-32, where

Paul asks prayer for the same thing.

b The author emphasizes that he has a clear conscience in that he has acted honorably towards his readers. Paul made the same point in several of his letters,. Read Acts 20:17-27 and chapters 10-12 of 2 Corinthians..

c. Timothy was an associate of the author, who promises that he will send Timothy to them when he is able. Timothy was part of Paul's entourage; he is not associated with any other New Testament writer.

d. It seems the author was in Italy when he wrote Hebrews. The Book of Acts describes Paul's journey to Rome. Tradition has it that Peter also wound up in Rome. The New Testament does not actually say that he or any other apostle went to Rome.²³

23 The only indication in Scripture that Peter was ever in Rome may be this: In his first letter Peter sends greetings from "Babylon." "Babylon" *may* be a code word for Rome; it certainly was not Babylon in Mesopotamia, which was no more than a village by Peter's day. This is a reasonable conjecture, but by no means certain proof.