


# Creative Living Bible Study



## A Faith That Works

*Studies from the Book of Hebrews*

This book belongs to:



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# A Faith that Works

*Studies from the Book of Hebrews*

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 1-932395-60-1

*A Faith that Works*

*Studies from the Book of  
Hebrews*

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# LESSON 1

## INTRODUCTION

**M**ore than any other New Testament writing, the Book of Hebrews draws the Old Testament together with the New. It presents the Lord Jesus Christ as our eternal advocate before God and proves Christianity to be God's plan of the ages to redeem mankind and draw people to Himself.

This great masterpiece of Scripture was written primarily to first century Jewish Christians who were suffering persecution for their faith. Many were tempted to renounce their new-found faith in Jesus Christ and return to the safety of the Jewish religious system established under Moses (10:38-39). The anonymous author of Hebrews exhorts these believers to hold fast to their faith and press on to spiritual maturity, basing his appeal on the supremacy of Christ and the Christian faith.

This is why the basic theme of Hebrews is found in the word "better," first describing the preeminence of Christ in His Person and work (1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24), then describing the Christian faith. Christ is better than Moses; He created Moses. He is superior to Aaron and the priesthood; His sacrifice need never be repeated. Christ is better than the Mosaic Law; He mediates a better covenant of grace. The new covenant in Jesus Christ is shown to be the completion of Judaism, fulfilling the laws and prophecies of the Old Testament.

The author states that while other religions hold value, faith in Christ is superior because it is God's way to know Him personally. Through His new covenant, we are made right with God and enabled to come

into His presence, not by struggling to keep rules and rituals, but rather by simply trusting in the Person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. No other religion, including Judaism with its grand Old Testament Scriptures, gives a person forgiveness, new life within, peace and an eternal personal relationship with God as His beloved child. This relationship fulfills our deepest needs, making Christianity a faith that works.

When difficult times come or in the daily challenges of life, it is easy to become weary and give up truly practicing a life of faith. Persecution, hardship, doubt or the difficulty of living for God may cause us to feel that we need to add something to the simplicity of trusting Jesus. In such times, we may be tempted to revert to just going through the motions of being a Christian. Or we may abandon faith in God altogether. Yet, the Book of Hebrews encourages us to persevere as we "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." (Hebrews 12:2). We will be refreshed in our walk of faith as we look at the greatness of the Son of God—His superiority and sufficiency for all who trust in Him.

## *THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST*

### *Hebrews 1*

The Book of Hebrews was probably written around 64-68 A.D. before the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. While the teachings of Hebrews sound like those of Paul, most scholars doubt the apostle wrote the book. Paul always identified himself in his letters, and the style and approach of the author are different from any other New Testament book. Clearly, the writer knew Paul well and had often listened to his preaching. Luke, Barnabas, Apollos and Priscilla have all been suggested, but only God knows the true author.

The scattered Jewish believers to whom this letter was written were probably going through terrible persecution from both Romans and Jews. Perhaps they had expected Christ to return immediately to set up His kingdom. When He had not, they needed to be reassured that

Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) and that Christianity was the true worship of God. They needed to see the futility of returning to the old life that was inherently inferior to the new life found in Jesus Christ. They needed to see how Judaism's prophecies, laws and promises had all been fulfilled in the Son of God.

The writer proves to fellow Jewish Christians that Jesus Christ is superior to all those whom Jewish people had considered God's authorities—the prophets, angels, Moses and the priests.

**Read Hebrews 1:1-3.**

1. How has God communicated to mankind (1:1-2a)?

**Note:** *prophets* here refers to all Old Testament writers because their testimony prepared the way for Christ. *in these last days* signifies the Messianic (Christ) era inaugurated by the incarnation of Jesus.

2. What is true of God's Son (1:2b-3)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *exact representation*, p. 8.

**Read Hebrews 1:4-14.**

3. People revere angelic beings. What is their purpose according to Hebrews 1:14?

**Reference:** Note 2, *angels*, p. 8, and Note 1, *angels*, p. 85.

4. a. What name did Old Testament prophecies give the Messiah (Jesus) that proves Him superior to angels (1:4-5)?

b. The author quotes Psalm 45, a Messianic prophecy describing the reign of God's Son. What would make angels worship Jesus (Hebrews 1:6-9)?

c. What does the author add to this as he quotes the prophecy of Psalm 102 (Hebrews 1:10-12)?

5. What does the author show God (the Father) promised His Son as he quotes the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 110 (Hebrews 1:13)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *The Trinity*, p. 8.

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *The Picture of God We Need*

We only have to look into nature to see that God is a being far transcendent to human beings. We might be able to draw an ant, but we could not make one or give it life. We can learn about the human mind and create computers, but crafting a human mind is beyond us.

Creation—the expansive universe hurling about our tiny earth with its amazing animal, plant and sea worlds—so demonstrates the awesome nature of God that people of all cultures have feared Him. Around the world, religions have been established with one or more fearful gods to explain creation and human existence. Each religion has rituals and works required to appease their gods.

But in Christ God has done the unimaginable in order to reveal His true nature to mankind. The Son of God became one of us to communicate and demonstrate God's gracious and righteous nature



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and His great love for us. Hebrews echoes other New Testament passages that reveal that "the Son is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of His being" (1:3).

When life becomes difficult and we wonder if God is good, we need only to look at God's character in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus to be assured of God's love. In this lesson, we will take a brief look at some important aspects of God's character taught and demonstrated by Jesus, the exact image of God.

1. What did Jesus say about Himself?

John 14:9-11 (12:49-50)

*Verses in parenthesis ( ) are always optional in Building on the Basics section.*

Matthew 28:18 (after His resurrection)

**Reference:** Note 3, *Trinity*, p. 8, and Note 4, *Claims of Jesus*, p. 9.

2. a. The teachings of Jesus reveal what God is like. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) contains many of Jesus' teachings.

What kind of person does God bless, according to the teaching of Matthew 5:3-10 (list only descriptions; i.e. "the peacemaker").

b. What did this reveal about God?

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c. What did Jesus both teach and model that shows us God's goodness?

Matthew 5:16

Matthew 5:43-45 (Matthew 7:12)

Matthew 6:19-21,24c

Mark 12:30-31

3. The miracles of Jesus demonstrated God's power and compassion as well as proved Jesus was from God. At least 24 miracles of healing and deliverance, three of raising the dead, and nine showing power over nature (ex: calming a storm; feeding 5,000) are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These were only a few of the miracles of Jesus (cf. Luke 6:19; 9:11; Matthew 4:24; 9:36). What do these miracles tell us about the character of the Father as seen in His Son?

Mark 1:40-41

Mark 6:34, 38-44

Luke 7:11-16

4. Jesus told many parables to reveal God to us. What did He teach about the love of His heavenly Father in Luke 15:11-24?

5. Jesus fulfilled 300 Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah who would come to save Israel. Isaiah's prophecy, written around 700 B.C., precisely describes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for man's sin.

**Review Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12.**

What did Jesus demonstrate about the heavenly Father through His death and resurrection?

Romans 8:31-32, 34-35a, 38-39

**Reference:** Note 5, *Why God gave His Son*, p. 9.

## S U M M A R Y

6. Why is Jesus a higher authority than the prophets and angels whom people esteem?

7. As the exact representation of God's being, what does Jesus show us about the true nature of God?

8. a. Have any recent negative circumstances tempted you to doubt the goodness or love of God toward you?

b. Of what does fixing your eyes on Jesus assure you?

## LESSON 1 NOTES

**1** *exact representation* (1:3). "Not only is Jesus the exact representation of God, but He is God himself—the very God who spoke in Old Testament times. He is eternal; He worked with the Father in creating the world (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). He is the full revelation of God. You can have no clearer view of God than by looking at Christ. Jesus Christ is the complete expression of God in a human body." *The Life Application Bible*, p. 2219.

**2** *angels* (22:43). Angels are spiritual beings, created by God early in creation. Though we know only three by name—Michael, Gabriel and Satan—the Bible refers to numerous ranks and divisions. Satan is the leader of the company of evil angels, while good angels are under the authority of God. The duties of God's angels include praising and worshiping God, taking messages from God to man, and providing for or protecting God's people. *NIV Topical Bible*, p. 1367. See also Note 1, *angels*, p. 85.

**3** *The Trinity*. While "Trinity" as a word is not in the Bible, Christian doctrine historically has used this term to describe God as He has revealed Himself. The Bible explains that God is one God in three equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Certain passages in the Old Testament hint of a plurality in God (Genesis 1:26-27, 3:22, 11:7; Isaiah 6:8). The Old Testament also speaks of someone coming from God who is God (i.e. Christ, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6). The New Testament clearly portrays Jesus Christ as God (John 1:1; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:8) and the Holy Spirit as God (Luke 1:35; Acts 5:3-4; Matthew 28:19; II Corinthians 13:14). All three persons of the Trinity share the divine characteristics of holiness, power, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, etc. While they all may

be involved in an activity such as teaching, for instance, each is associated with certain specific works. The Father is associated with the work of creating, the Son with the work of redeeming, and the Holy Spirit with the work of sanctifying believers. In many New Testament passages, mention of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit occurs in the same sentence (Jude 20-21; Ephesians 4:4-6, I John 4:2; I Peter 1:2; Titus 3:4-6; II Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 4:4-6; Romans 5:5-6; John 15:26). See also Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 57.

**4** *Claims of Jesus.* Jesus claimed to be God and the only way to reach God. Such claims, if not true, render him a liar or lunatic. The Christian believes these claims because of the supernatural essence of His life and resurrection as facts of history. His life, teachings, miracles and resurrection as recorded by contemporaries in the gospels and secular historians support Jesus' claims about Himself. Jesus also fulfilled 300 specific Old Testament prophecies regarding Messiah (Christ), connecting Him to the Jewish revelation of the One true God. Also, where the message of Christ has gone, individuals and societies have been changed for better. This would not make sense if Jesus had been a liar or a lunatic.

In *The Case for Christianity* C. S. Lewis wrote: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell; you must take your choice. Either this was and is the Son of God, or else a mad man or something worse. You can shut Him up for a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But don't come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great moral teacher. He hasn't left that alternative open to us."

**5** *Why God gave His Son.* The Bible tells us that we were made in God's image (Genesis 1:26), a spiritual creature able to relate to God personally. But Genesis records that in the beginning, man chose to go His own way and his relationship with God was broken (spiritual death, or separation, is the penalty for sin Genesis 2-3). But God has made a way to restore our relationship to Him. He came to earth in the Person of His Son to provide a way for forgiveness and reconciliation for those who would believe. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says God was in Christ reconciling the wayward world to Himself, not charging men's transgressions to their account. Through the death of His own dear Son, He proved His amazing love for us (Romans 5:8; John 3:16). The theme of the Bible is God making a way for us to be reconciled to Him through His Son Jesus Christ who took the

penalty for our sin on the cross (Romans 3:23; 6:23). When we turn from going our own way apart from God, ask His forgiveness for the sins of our lives and place our faith in Jesus Christ, our relationship with the Father is re-established.

While many have never experienced a loving father, Jesus makes it possible to know the one true God as a loving heavenly Father. According to the Scriptures, this relationship to God as a Father begins when we receive His Son. "Yet to all who received Him [Jesus], to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13). When we open our lives to Christ, God plants His Spirit in our hearts—His life placed within us. Jesus calls this being born again (John 3:3), coming alive spiritually to know and experience God as a loving heavenly Father. The Spirit in our hearts frees us from slavery to guilt and sin and gives us a spirit to shout, "Abba! [Daddy] Father!" The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (1 Peter 2:9; Romans 8:14-16). See also, Note 3, *Why Did Jesus Have to Die in My Place?* p. 18.

## LESSON 2

### *JESUS--THE PERFECT MAN*

#### *Hebrews 2*

**H**ebrews 2 begins with the warning that if people obey angels when they speak, should they not heed much more the message of the Son of God? Jesus proved He was the Christ (God's Messiah)<sup>1</sup> by the signs, wonders and miracles He performed during His earthly ministry, in His resurrection and in the early church. The author insists that every believer must pay attention to these facts to avoid drifting away from faith because of immaturity and spiritual sluggishness.

Continuing on the issue of the superiority of Christ, the writer adds that He is not only superior to angels in title, but also because He experienced life as a human being. Becoming a man, suffering in a fallen world and dying (for man's sin) completed the experience of the Perfect Son of God. Jesus lived a life of complete trust in God; He was the perfect man as God intended man to be. This qualified Him alone to represent mankind before God as our great high priest, turning aside the justified wrath of God against guilty sinners through His substitutionary death for our sin.

Jesus' human experience also made Him our perfect high priest in that He suffered all the temptations that we experience as humans and can sympathetically help us with the temptations we face.

**Read Hebrews 2:1-4.**

1. a. What does Hebrews 2:1-3 exhort us to do and why?

Note: The *message spoken by angels* and obeyed refers to the law given to Moses by angels at Sinai (cf. Deut. 33:2; Gal. 3:19).

b. What verified Jesus' message of salvation in the early church (Hebrews 2:3b-4)?

**Note:** *gifts of the Spirit*, (2:4) See 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

For a review of the supernatural events of Jesus' ministry and the early church, read the Gospel of Mark and the Book of Acts.

**Read Hebrews 2:5-9.**

2. a. How are Jesus' incarnation (i.e. human experience), present state, and future described by the prophecy of Psalm 8 (Hebrews 2:7-9a)?

incarnation: Hebrews 2:7a (9a)

present state: Hebrews 2:7b (9b)

future: Hebrews 2:8

b. Why is Jesus now crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9b)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *Jesus ... now crowned with glory and honor*, p. 18.



**Read Hebrews 2:10-18.**

3. What made the Author of our salvation, complete (Hebrews 2:10)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Why did Jesus have to die in my place?* p. 18

**Note:** *perfect through suffering.* Christ had not been morally or spiritually imperfect, but His incarnation was completed (perfected) when He experienced suffering. He identified with us on the deepest level of anguish, and so became qualified to pay the price for our sinful imperfection and to become our sympathetic high priest." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1860.

4. What was Jesus able to do through His death (2:14-15)?

**Note:** *children* (2:14), *sons* (2:10), *brothers* (2:17), refer to those who would believe in Jesus Christ and become God's children (cf. John 1:12).

**Reference:** Note 4, *the devil* (2:14), and Note 5, *fear of death* (2:15), p. 19.

5. a. What had to be true of Christ for Him to represent mankind before God as our great high priest (Hebrews 2:17)?

b. What is possible because Jesus became human (2:18)?

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### ***The Understanding We Need***

In Hebrews 1, we see the Lord Jesus as the eternally exalted Son of God. Through His incarnation God "spoke to us" to reveal His goodness and love and way of salvation. We no longer have to

wonder what God is like; we see Him in Jesus. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being" (1:3).

In Hebrews 2, we see how Christ's incarnation allowed Him to fully understand the human experience and represent man before God as our great high priest in heaven. "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted" (2:18). Jesus knows what it is like to face the temptation to be selfish, disobey God's laws, and not trust God, especially when the path is difficult or confusing. With understanding, He represents us before the heavenly Father to say, "It is very hard, and I have given my life to pay for their failures." He then turns to us to say, "I understand your struggle. Take my hand and let me lead you through it."

The words to John Peterson's famous hymn read:

*No one understands like Jesus. He's a friend beyond compare.  
Meet Him at the throne of mercy; He is waiting for you there.  
No one understands like Jesus, When the days are dark and grim;  
No one is so near, so dear as Jesus. Cast your every care on Him.*

We all reach points in life when it seems that no one can completely understand the depth of our struggle with temptation or suffering. But Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ, our heavenly high priest, fully understands because He both knows us completely and experienced the struggle with temptation Himself.

1. a. The three major areas of temptation mentioned above are *selfishness*, *disobedience of God's laws for life*, and *not trusting God*. Try to imagine, Jesus suffered temptation in all these areas, but never sinned (4:15).

What factors in our society make these temptations significant today?

b. What is the result:

in our society?

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in the family?

in our personal lives?

2. How much of our struggles with temptation does Jesus see?

Psalm 139:1-4

Hebrews 4:13

3. How do the following promises encourage us in our struggle against temptation?

1 Peter 5:6

Hebrews 13:5b-6

1 Corinthians 10:13

Psalm 34:18

4. What in the Lord's character allows us to be open and honestly face our deepest struggles with Him?

Psalm 103:8, 10-11

Psalm 147:5b

5. What must we do to receive the Lord's help in overcoming temptation?

Philippians 4:6-7

Hebrews 4:16 (15)

Hebrews 12:2a

6. What can we pray as we go before God's throne?

Psalm 86:1-5

## S U M M A R Y

7. Why did Jesus have to suffer in order to be a perfect high priest in heaven on your behalf?

8. a. What bad habits or nagging temptations are you seeking to overcome? In what areas are you resisting temptation at this point in your life?

b. What choices make it possible for you to receive the Lord's help in facing temptation?

9. What promises from this lesson are encouraging to you?

### ***A Final Note***

While the Lord is present everywhere, He is a gentleman and waits to be invited to share His life with us on a heart level. The New Testament explains that a personal relationship with God begins with faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:12, 14:6). In Revelation 3:20, Jesus states His desire to have fellowship with us: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." If you want to invite Jesus Christ to come into your life, the following prayer may help you express this desire to Him:

*Lord Jesus, I open the door of my life to you. Please forgive the sin that makes me feel awkward in your presence. Thank you that this is possible because of the cross where you paid the penalty for my sin. Help me begin to know and experience the joy and comfort of your presence. Amen.*

**References:** Romans 3:23-26; 6:23; Colossians 2:13-14.

## LESSON 2 NOTES

**1** *Messiah* (Hebrew/Greek), *Christ* (Greek/English). The meaning of the word Messiah or Christ is "anointed one." The term Messiah or Christ refers to the anointed one promised by God to deliver Israel from their enemies and establish them as *the* world power. Old Testament prophecy described the Messiah as a King and Savior who would come from the line of David. (I Chronicles 17:11-15). He would suffer and die for the sins of the world (Isaiah 53; John 1:29). Jesus fulfilled 300 Old Testament Messianic prophecies.

**2** *Jesus...now crowned with glory and honor.* (2:9). "Psalm 8 is here applied to Jesus in particular. As forerunner of man's restored dominion over the earth, He was made lower than the angels for a while but is now crowned with glory and honor at God's right hand. By His perfect life, His death on the cross and His exaltation, He has made possible for redeemed man the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 8 in the future kingdom, when man will regain sovereignty over creation." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1859.

**3** **"Why did Christ have to die in my place?"** This is one of the most important yet least understood questions of the Christian faith. The following biblical terms help answer this question:

**a. Propitiation** (atonement; 2:17) is a biblical word meaning "satisfaction" and refers to the righteous demands of God being satisfied. God will not compromise His attributes of righteousness and justice which are legitimately outraged by man's deliberate violation of His will. But God's attribute of love motivated Him to provide a way to bring man back into fellowship with Himself *without compromising* His attributes of absolute righteousness and justice. God's holy character demanded that man's sin be paid for. Therefore, God came into the world in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Because Christ was born without sin and never committed an act of sin, He qualified to bear the holy wrath of God due the human race as He willingly died on the cross for our sin. In so doing He "satisfied" the just demands of God's holy character against man's sin. This act set God's love free to pour out grace on those who receive His gift of salvation. In this way, God is "just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

**b. Justification** refers to God declaring us "not guilty" and righteous in his sight, even though we are guilty of sin. God is able to do this because of the life and death of Jesus Christ acting as man's substitute. When God declares a person righteous in His sight, He

does so on the basis of the life and death of the One who was acting on his behalf. "Jesus our Lord...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:24-25). When we place our faith in Jesus Christ to save us from sin, God declares us justified, or not guilty, and righteous. We are justified by the death of Christ which paid the penalty for our sin, and we are justified by the life of Christ whose life of righteousness is also credited to us. This justification, which is all by God's grace and received by faith, brings us into fellowship with God as a child in His family.

**4** *the devil* (2:14) *Satan, demons*. The Bible refers to Satan as an angelic being who led a heavenly revolt against God and consequently was cast out of heaven with his rebelling host of angels (II Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-9). Under his leadership, these angelic beings became known as *demons*, and are very organized in their schemes and attacks on human beings (Ephesians 6:12). Satan and his forces work to get people to worship Satan (Luke 4:7) and to prevent individuals from turning to God (Luke 4:8). Satan's defeat is promised in Genesis 3:15 and completed at the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:15). He is still a force to be reckoned with until Christ returns to judge the earth (Matthew 16:27). James 4:7 instructs believers to resist the devil (or demonic forces) by continually willing God's leadership in their lives.

**5** *fear of death* (2:15). "Jesus had to become human ("flesh and blood") so that he could die and rise again, in order to destroy the devil's power over death (Romans 6:5-11). Only then could Christ deliver those who had lived in constant fear of death, and free them to live for Him. When we belong to God, we need not fear death, because we know that death is only the doorway into eternal life (1 Corinthians 15)." *Life Application Bible*, p. 2222.





## LESSON 3

### *JESUS--OUR PLACE OF REST*

Hebrews 3:1-4:13

The author continues to encourage his Hebrew Christian readers to persevere in their faith in Christ, not only because of the rightness of that faith, but also because of all they would lose in turning from it.

Hebrews 1 and 2 explains Jesus Christ's superiority to angels, who gave the Jewish laws to Moses. By His suffering and death, Jesus made it possible to lift mankind above angel status into the family of God.

Hebrews 3 explains Jesus' superiority over the revered Jewish leader, Moses. The *Son* over God's house is above Moses, a faithful *servant* in God's house. Also, while Moses and Aaron were for a time the apostles and high priests of Judaism, Jesus Christ is the Apostle and eternal high priest for mankind. And because Jesus lived a perfect life, He is uniquely qualified to serve as high priest for sinful mankind. His perfect sacrifice for sin and intercession for sinners ranks Him far above any human priest.

To further encourage perseverance, the writer goes back in Jewish history to demonstrate how the entire generation of Jews who rebelled against God's promises during the wilderness wanderings were excluded from His rest in the Promised Land. He argues that now, for the people of God, there is an even better rest than Canaan—a rest from striving to keep religious rituals and rules to be saved from judgment. Instead, we are called to place our faith in the finished work of our high priest, Jesus Christ. Faith in Him, not our

own striving, cleanses us from sin and produces His righteousness in us. The author exhorts his readers to rest in and enjoy God's gracious gift of salvation, fixing our thoughts on Jesus, "the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess" (3:1).

**Read Hebrews 3:1-6.**

1. How is the believer described, and what should he do in light of the truths of Hebrews 1 and 2 (3:1)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Apostle and High Priest*, p. 27.

**Note:** *Therefore...* refers to the major truths of Hebrews 1-2. (1) Jesus Christ is the eternally exalted Son of God whose incarnation revealed God's character and way of salvation. (2) Jesus' earthly experience, perfect humanity and sacrificial death enabled Him to be our great high priest before God—able to sympathize with our struggle with sin and turn away God's wrath for our sin because He died in our place (Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

2. a. The Jewish people exalted Moses. While Moses and Jesus were both faithful to their appointed tasks for God, how is Jesus superior to Moses (3:5-6a)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *Jesus superior to Moses*, p. 28.

b. What proves one to be a true child of God and member of His household (3:6b)?

**Note:** *hope* refers to assurance of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Read Hebrews 3:7-19.**

3. a. Moses was faithful, but Israel was not. Consequently, a whole generation died in the wilderness outside the promised land of rest (Hebrews 3:7-11, 15-19 quoting Psalm 95:7-11). In light of this, what three things is the reader exhorted to do (Hebrews 3:12-14)?

b. What caused the rebellion, sin and disobedience that kept this generation of Israelites from finding the rest God promised them in Canaan (Hebrews 3:19)?

**Read Hebrews 4:1-13.**

4. Why was the message of Moses of no value to the generation who died in the wilderness (4:2)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Entering God's rest*, p. 28.

**Note:** The temporary rest given the generation of Israelites under Joshua after they entered Canaan pointed to the spiritual and eternal rest found through faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

5. a. The Sabbath day rest is a picture of God's rest from His finished work of creation. To enter God's rest, the believer ceases his efforts to gain salvation by His own works and rests in the finished work of Christ on the cross. What are we charged to do each day (4:7, 10)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Sabbath*, Note 5, *Sabbath-rest in Christ*, and Note 6, *make every effort* (4:11), p. 28.

- b. Why can we rest, according to Ephesians 2:8-9?
- c. What did this say to the Hebrew Christian who was tempted, because of persecution, to return to salvation through the Jewish religious system?
6. To not "harden" our hearts, how must we continually view God's Word (4:12)?
7. What does the author remind his reader about God that is also an encouragement to remain faithful to the truth in spite of hardship or persecution (4:13)?

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *The Place of Rest We Need*

A religious faith that works is one that brings the rest and peace we long for as we face the issues of life that cause anxiety. Spiritually, only in the cross of Christ do we find the forgiveness that brings peace with God. The promise of eternal life is proven by the resurrection of Christ, dispelling the fear of death and judgment for the believer. And as we walk with the Lord Jesus, He can give us supernatural peace and rest as we face life's unavoidable difficult times. These aspects of the unique peace we can know through faith in Christ Jesus are all included in His invitation, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

This is why the writer of Hebrews exhorts us to cling to our faith in Christ when life gets hard, and Christ will prove faithful to fulfill His promises and give us His best. To shrink from faith in difficult times is to miss these blessings.

The example is given of the ancient Israelites who sent twelve spies to see the land which God had promised to give them. Ten discarded their faith as they came back saying it would be impossible to defeat the giant people of the land. Joshua and Caleb, however, believed God's promise to give them the victories that would allow them to receive the land. Joshua insisted, "Only do not rebel against the Lord, and do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us" (Numbers 14:9).

Even so, the people of that generation abandoned their faith, died after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and never received God's best. Had they only remembered the faithfulness and power of God demonstrated in the Red Sea crossing and the supernatural provision of daily manna and water in the wilderness!

With their example of what not to do, the author of Hebrews warns his readers to stand firm through difficult times and see God's faithfulness. We do this in part by remembering the historical and supernatural roots of our faith recorded in the Scriptures and fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because He serves today as our high priest before God, we can rest assured that God will fulfill all His promises to us as His dearly loved children. This makes our faith in Christ the only way to know the rest and peace we need.

1. a. What can cause us unrest and anxiety in our lives?

spiritually:

physically:

*A Faith That Works*

emotionally:

b. Why is rest, or peace, so important in our lives?

2. What promises of God that give peace are stated in the following verses?

Romans 5:1 (1 Peter 2:24)

Philippians 4:6-7

1 John 5:11-13

3. What commands and promises did Jesus give in these passages that are related to the rest of faith?

COMMAND

PROMISE

Matthew 11:28-30

John 14:1-3

COMMAND

PROMISE

John 14:27

John 16:33

4. a. What can divert us from going to Jesus when we are facing overwhelming circumstances?

b. The Israelites at the time of Moses abandoned faith and evaluated the situation in light of their own strength. What does the following suggest we do instead? Joshua 1:9

5. a. What must we choose when we are tempted to abandon our faith and let fear or self-effort prevail?

1 Corinthians 15:58

b. What does the Lord promise to give as we choose to trust Him?

2 Timothy 1:7

Isaiah 26:3-4

## S U M M A R Y

6. How does Christianity (a personal relationship with God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ) provide a peace and rest which cannot be found anywhere else?

7. a. What does Jesus promise you in the areas of concern in your life today?

b. What does He command you to choose in order to experience His peace, His victory, and His best?

8. a. What are you encouraged to do as a result of reviewing the mistakes and losses of the ancient Israelites?

b. How can you overcome overwhelming negative emotions in difficult circumstances?

Hebrews 12:2a; Philippians 4:13

## LESSON 3 NOTES

1 *Apostle and High Priest* (3:1). *Apostle* means "one who is sent," referring to Jesus being sent into the world by the Father. The Jewish *high priest* was a Levite (in the lineage of Jacob's son, Levi) appointed to represent the people before God. Hebrews 2:17 speaks of Christ being the merciful and faithful high priest before God who is able to turn aside the wrath of God against guilty sinners because He became human and died as a substitute for them.



2 *Jesus superior to Moses*, the revered leader of Israel. The writer uses the analogy of the builder having greater honor than the house to reflect Jesus as the actual builder of the household of God, whereas Moses was simply a part of it (3:3). Jesus is also equated with God and thus superior to Moses (3:4; cf. 1:2). The author states that Christ is over Moses because (1) Moses was a servant, whereas Christ is the Son, and (2) Moses was in God's house, i. e. a member of it, whereas Christ is over God's house (3:5-6).

3 *Entering God's rest* (4:1-2). Some of the Jewish Christians who received this letter were on the verge of turning back from the promised rest in Christ, just as the people in Moses' day had turned back from the promised land because they did not believe God would help them conquer the giants in the land (Numbers 13:31-14:5). As result, the Israelites wandered in the desert 40 years instead of receiving God's best. The writer encourages Jewish believers not to miss God's best by letting the difficulties of the present moment overshadow God's promise of salvation and eternal life in Christ.

4 The *Sabbath* is the seventh day of the week and the God-ordained day of worship and rest for Jewish people (Exodus 20:8-11; 23:12). Jesus emphasized God's purpose for the Sabbath as a day for man's spiritual, mental and physical restoration.

5 *God rested* on the seventh day, "not because He was tired, but to indicate the completion of creation. The world was perfect, and God was well satisfied with it. This rest is a foretaste of our eternal joy when creation will be renewed and restored, every mark of sin will be removed, and the world will be made perfect again. Our Sabbath-rest in Christ begins when we trust Him to complete His good and perfect work in us." *Life Application Study Bible*, NIV, p. 2224.

Just as entering physical rest in Canaan required faith in God's promise, so salvation rest is entered only by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. God rested from His work on the seventh day of creation (Gen. 2:2), and thus his rest is already a reality. Since Christ has already paid for our sin, we can rest in God's gracious gift of salvation and His promise of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Also Note 3, *Why Did Jesus Have to Die?* p. 18.

6 *make every effort* (4:11) does not mean struggle to do good or to overcome selfishness for salvation, but rather to do all we can to maintain our appreciation of and commitment to the gospel of salvation in Christ.



## LESSON 4

### *JESUS--OUR ETERNAL HIGH PRIEST*

*Hebrews 4:14-6:12*

**W**hat a comfort it is to those who have received Jesus Christ into their lives to realize He is at the right hand of God as our great high priest. In the sanctuary of heaven, He represents us as One who has experienced our human struggle with temptation and sin and endured the tremendous pull of evil we face, yet He never sinned.

You would think this perfection would make Jesus a harder judge of sin than the Levitical priests. Yet Jesus proved Himself as the more merciful high priest during His ministry. He was sympathetic and instantly available to help weak and needy people. He reached out to individuals Jewish priests considered "unclean." Jesus touched, healed and forgave "tax collectors and sinners," lepers, the disabled and the poor. Because of His graciousness, no formalities are necessary in coming to our great high priest, only that we call upon His name.

Having shown the superiority of Jesus Christ, our great high priest, over the prophets, angels, and Moses, the writer now begins to prove His supremacy over the Jewish priesthood. He also contrasts the earthly sanctuary, or Tabernacle,<sup>1</sup> established under Moses, and the eternal heavenly sanctuary where Jesus now represents believers.

To enter the presence of God, an Old Testament priest had to (1) be appointed by God, (2) be human in order to sympathize with those he represented, and (3) come with an atoning sacrifice<sup>2</sup> for sin. Hebrews shows how Jesus met all of these criteria. The Son of God

was appointed by the Father as our high priest; Jesus experienced being human; and He presented His own blood as an atoning sacrifice for man's sin. However, Jesus also introduced a new order of priesthood, making the Jewish (Aaronic, or Levitical) priesthood under Mosaic law obsolete. Old Testament Scripture prophesied that the Messiah<sup>3</sup> would be a priest forever, like Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4). This was a priest to whom the father of Israel, Abraham, paid homage before the existence of Mosaic Law and Jewish priesthood.

Realizing these concepts were too difficult for some of his readers, the author leaves the theme of Christ's priesthood to give a rebuke and warning. The Hebrews to whom he wrote lived in the days of the death of Jesus Christ; they knew the fact of the resurrection as well as the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and in the early church. Many had fellowshiped with the apostles, like Peter and Paul, and seen miracles of healing by the Spirit in Jesus' name. Even with such evidence of Jesus being the Messiah and God's Son, because they had not worked to mature in their faith, these Jewish believers were vulnerable to giving in to the persecution, abandoning faith in Jesus, and placing themselves again under the leadership of those who had orchestrated Jesus' death. The author warns that such a choice would amount to putting themselves in the same mob that shouted, "Crucify Him!" and would nullify their salvation through Christ.

Quickly after these strong words, the writer reassures his readers that none of them had done this, and God had not forgotten their faithful service to Him and each other. He encouraged them to keep their earnest spirit, imitating those who had persevered in faith.

One such person was Abraham, who remained faithful because God promised and swore by His own name to bless Abraham with innumerable offspring. But the author declares that God has given an even greater motivation for perseverance to Christians. Jesus Christ, God's Son and our great high priest, is the anchor of our souls at the very throne of God in the sanctuary of heaven. As our forerunner into heaven itself (6:20), Jesus guarantees that all of His redeemed children will follow Him there.

**Read Hebrews 4:14-5:10**

1. a. Jesus represents us as our great high priest before God in heaven, having offered His blood for our atonement. In light of this, what are His followers to do (4:14b)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Apostle and High Priest*, p. 27, Note 2, *atonement*, and Note 4, *through the heavens* p. 38.

b. What is true of Jesus as our high priest, and what does this enable us to do (4:15-16)?

2. a. What is true of an earthly high priest (5:1-4)?

b. How did Jesus meet all these standards (5:5-10)?

**Reference:** Note 5, *learned obedience* (5:8) p. 38. Also, *in the order of Melchizedek*, see Lesson 5 Commentary, paragraph 3, p. 39.

**Note:** *with cries and tears* (5:7) refers to Jesus' hours of agony in Gethsemane as He pleaded for deliverance from the death He would die for man's sin. His request was fully granted in the resurrection, which proclaimed His victory over death.

**Read 5:11-6:12.**

3. a. Some of the readers of Hebrews had become spiritually sluggish and mentally lazy. What were they exhorted to do (5:14; 6:1a)?

**Note:** *solid food* (5:14) refers to advanced teaching, such as in Hebrews 7.

b. What do we avoid when we do this (6:1b)?

**Note:** *the foundation of repentance...and faith* (6:1) are the first two elementary doctrines of the Christian faith listed. Repentance is *turning away* from the darkness of sin; faith is *turning to* the light of God.

4. What warning does the author give his readers who have experienced the realities of the risen Lord's presence in the church but are tempted to turn back to Mosaic law (Hebrews 6:4-6).

**Note:** *coming age* (6:5) refers to the coming righteous age which will begin with the second advent of Christ and continue forever. See Note 5, *Second coming of Christ*, p. 67.

5. a. Of what does the author express confidence regarding his faithful readers and why (6:9-10)?

b. What must believers determine to do daily (6:11-12)?

**Read Hebrews 6:13-20.**

6. God's promise to Abraham to make his descendants into a great nation plus His oath to fulfill that promise motivated Abraham to persevere in faith. God's promise of forgiveness for sin and eternal life in Christ, proven by the resurrection of Jesus, gives even greater motivation for the Christian to persevere in faith. Where does Jesus firmly anchor the believer's soul according to Hebrews 6:19-20?

**Note:** *hope* (6:19) biblically is not wishful thinking but a firm assurance, not a "hope so" but a "know so." It is a joyful anticipation of good.

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *The Intimacy with God We Need*

The Jewish believers after the death of Christ knew the resurrection was factual and that Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.<sup>3</sup> This meant Jesus was indeed the Son of God as the angel Gabriel had proclaimed to Mary (Luke 1:35), as the revered prophet, John the Baptist, had declared (John 1:32-34), and as Jesus Christ Himself had claimed (John 3:18; 10:36-38). And it meant that everything Jesus taught and promised was true.

Furthermore, these early Jewish believers had witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and in the church. They saw miracles of healing and conversion in Jesus' name.

Yet in spite of the evidence, the spiritual immaturity and pressures of persecution made these early believers vulnerable to denying Christ and returning to the Jewish works system. This was an abhorrent thought to the writer of Hebrews who used strong language to warn

his readers of the peril involved in forsaking Christ. He systematically unveils the beauty of the living and glorified Lord Jesus in his letter as he gives the key to remaining faithful to Christ over a lifetime. This key is "fixing our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1; 12:2), deepening our understanding of who He is, and knowing Him personally as the "anchor of our soul."

It has been well said that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. A faith that works does not come from a hollow piety based on our own good works, but rather is born out of a dynamic personal relationship with Jesus Christ. No matter what we have experienced or how vigorously we have professed Christian commitment, only this love relationship with Christ sustains true godliness over time.

All of us are on a spiritual pilgrimage; none of us have arrived at perfection. To finish the race, we cannot get bogged down in our failures or linger around the starting gate of faith. We must press on to maturity by building our relationship with the Lord. In this lesson, we will review some principles involved in sustaining the intimate relationship with Christ that is at the heart of true Christian faith.

1. a. Spiritual immaturity resulting from spiritual laziness and an increasing fear of persecution caused early Hebrew believers to waver in their faith. Which of these can be obstacles to our faith today?

b. If these obstacles to faith dominate us, what is the result: in the steadfastness of our commitment?

in our understanding of spiritual truth?



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2. a. Using the imagery of a branch in a vine, what did Jesus tell us about the importance of a living union with Him?

John 15:5

b. What must we do to ensure a close, vibrant personal relationship with the Lord?

Psalm 105:4

Proverbs 3:5-6

3. Our relationship with Christ is nurtured by obedience to Him, study of God's Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers and sharing our faith. Paraphrase what the following reveal about these areas of Christian discipline.

a. Obedience to Christ:

John 15:9-11

b. God's Word:

Psalm 1:1a,2

2 Timothy 3:16-17

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c. Prayer:

Philippians 4:6 (Ephesians 6:18)

*Verses in parenthesis ( ) are optional.*

d. Fellowship with other believers:

Hebrews 10:24-25

e. Sharing our faith in Christ:

1 Peter 3:15 (Romans 1:16)

4. What do the following verses remind us to do when we experience defeats and challenges to our faith?

Proverbs 29:25

Philippians 3:13b-14

Hebrews 12:2a

S U M M A R Y

5. Why is developing our relationship with Christ the key to persevering faith?

6. What practices can keep your relationship with the Lord dynamic?

7. a. What roadblocks to deepening your relationship with Christ have you faced? Where are you most vulnerable?

b. What do you think are the most important keys to overcoming these challenges to your walk of faith?

## LESSON 4 NOTES

**1 Reference:** *Tabernacle*, p. 58.

**2 Atoning sacrifice or atonement** "describes the process whereby God draws sinful men and women back to be 'at one' with Himself. In the Old Testament this was carried out in an elaborate ceremony, practiced on what was called the Day of Atonement. The main feature of the ceremony, the shedding of blood, taught that atonement symbolized the substitution of life for life (Leviticus 16:14,18: 5:5-10). In this way, the Old Testament points forward to the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross for our sins (Isaiah 53:4-7; John 1:29). Our Lord entered heaven to present His blood before God, thus making us clean and acceptable (Hebrews 9:11-14); through faith in the blood of the great Reconciler, we can be welcomed back home into the arms of our loving Father (Colossians 1:20). Because of Jesus, the atoning Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we are accepted as righteous, and we are declared not guilty (Romans 3:24-25; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Hebrews 13:12)." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, pp. 16, 124. See also Note 4, *Redemption*, p. 65.

**3 Reference:** Note 1, Messiah, Christ, p. 18.

**4 through the heavens** (4:14). "As the Aaronic high priest on the Day of Atonement passed from the sight of the people into the Most Holy Place (see Lev. 16:15,17), so Jesus passed from the sight of His watching disciples, ascending through the heavens into the heavenly sanctuary, His work of atonement accomplished (Acts 1:9-11).

**5 He learned obedience from what He suffered** (5:8). "Jesus was made 'perfect' (5:9) through suffering, namely, his temptation in the desert and his ordeal on the cross. Though He was the eternal Son of God, it was necessary for Him as the incarnate Son to learn obedience—not that He was ever disobedient, but that He was called on to obey to an extent He had never before experienced. The temptations He faced were real and the battle for victory was difficult, but where Adam failed and fell, Jesus resisted and prevailed. His humanity was thereby completed, 'made perfect' (5:9), and on the basis of this perfection He could become 'the source of eternal salvation.' (cf. 9:12)." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1864.

## LESSON 5

### *CHRIST—OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST*

#### *Hebrews 7*

High priests, such as Aaron, had the divinely appointed task of building a bridge between sinful mankind and holy God. But their animal sacrifices for their own sin and those of the people had to be perpetually repeated, because these sacrifices only covered sin temporarily as they foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Animal sacrifices were imperfect; they could not cleanse people from sin and give them the holiness to enter God's presence.

However, the author of Hebrews shows how God has replaced the imperfect sacrifices of this Levitical priesthood by the perfect priesthood of Jesus Christ. As prophesied in Psalm 110, the Christ would become a priest of a new order and law like the ancient non-Levitical priest/king named Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-20).

Jesus' priesthood is obviously far superior to that of Melchizedek, but this ancient king and priest was a type of Christ in several ways:

- (1) Melchizedek lived before Abraham's descendants. He was therefore outside the Levitical priesthood prescribed by the law of Moses, whereby priests must be from the tribe of Levi. Jesus also was outside this priesthood, having come from the tribe of Judah.
- (2) Melchizedek was a type of Christ in that he blessed Abraham and received tithes from the father of the nation of Israel. In Hebrew thinking, this would mean Melchizedek was superior to Abraham and all Abraham's offspring, including Levitical priests. So is Christ, our high priest.

(3) Melchizedek was like Christ in that he had an honorable name. He was both a *priest* and a *king of righteousness and peace*.

(4) Melchizedek, though he did live and die, had no biblically recorded genealogy or end to his priesthood. This was symbolic of Jesus, the Son of God, who existed from eternity past and God has sworn will have no end to His priesthood (Psalm 110:4).

The writer of Hebrews goes on to show how Jesus, a Priest of a new order, is superior to the expired Levitical priesthood of Mosaic Law. As the eternal high priest of a new order, Jesus has created a permanent bridge between sinful mankind and God. Through His sacrificial death for man's sin, Jesus put an end to the Levitical sacrificial system when He offered Himself, the perfect sacrifice—sinless Man for sinful man—once and for all. Through His death and resurrection, all people everywhere who receive Jesus Christ can be cleansed from sin and go before the throne of God. And God has sworn that the priesthood of Christ will never be changed (7:28).

It must be understood that for the first century Hebrew Christian who had grown up around smoking altars, this was revolutionary. No longer was their practice of sacrifices on Jewish altars through Jewish priests necessary. But as revolutionary as these concepts were for early Hebrew believers, the author shows that to abandon faith in Jesus as their high priest and go back to the Levitical system would be to return to something that was inferior, outdated, and could in no way satisfy their spiritual needs. Jesus is God's appointed high priest who has perfectly satisfied God's just penalty for our sin by His sinless life and death attributed to our account. And Jesus perfectly meets our spiritual needs as He eternally lives to intercede for us and as He is instantly available to us to wisely and sympathetically meet our needs.

### **Read Hebrews 7:1-10.**

1. What had been said regarding Israel's Messiah (Christ) in Psalm 110:4 (Hebrews 7:17)?

2. a. What unusual combination of offices did Melchizedek hold which made him like Christ (7:1a)? How did his name and title also reflect the character of Christ (7:2; Genesis 14:18)?

**Important Note:** Chapter Overview, p. 47, may be helpful for these questions on Melchizedek. Also, Timeline for Genesis 14, p. 47.

b. Because his genealogy and end of priesthood are not recorded, Melchizedek resembles the eternal Son of God whose priesthood will never end (7:3).

What point did the author make about the superiority of Christ's priesthood in showing that Melchizedek blessed Abraham and received a tithe from Israel's patriarch (7:4; 6-7, 9-10)?

**Read Hebrews 7:11-28.**

3. The Messianic prophecy of Psalm 110 pointed to the fact that Jesus Christ's priesthood, *in the order of Melchizedek*, would bring a needed change in the way mankind is reconciled to God (7:11-12).

a. What difference about Jesus Christ as high priest is noted in Hebrews 7:13-14?

Note: In the law of Moses, the priestly function was restricted to the tribe of Levi (Deuteronomy 18:1).

## *A Faith That Works*

b. Every Levitical priest died and was replaced (7:23). What is different about Jesus Christ as God's final high priest (7:16, 24)?

**Note:** *indestructible life* (7:16) points to the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ and to the promise of Psalm 110 that Christ would be a priest as well as king forever.

4. a. Why is the law of Moses regarding the Levitical priesthood to be set aside (7:18)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Jesus' high priestly role*, p. 47.

b. What blessing does Christ provide that the law could not give (7:19)?

**Note:** *The former regulation...was weak and useless.* We cannot be perfected by trying to keep the laws of God (7:11, 19a). They are perfect, but *weak and useless* in saving us from sin. Jesus has a better way. Through His death in our place, we can be completely redeemed and brought into God's presence. We are given a new heart that desires to obey God's laws (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

5. a. What oath regarding Christ's priesthood did God give (7:20-22)?

b. Because of God's oath, the priesthood of Jesus Christ will never be replaced. What does this mean for the believer (7:25)?

**Note:** *save completely* means to the end of time and throughout eternity. *to intercede* means to pray for and stand for the believer before God.



6. Why is Jesus, the high priest of the new covenant, superior to all previous high priests?

Hebrews 7:26

Hebrews 7:27

Hebrews 7:28

**Note:** *made perfect forever.* Jesus was made perfect because He faced temptation, yet never sinned. By perfectly obeying the Father, He established a perfection that is eternal and imputed to the one who receives Him as Savior.

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *The Grace We Need*

As hard as it is to understand first-century Judaism and its imagery, what the early Jewish believer had to completely trust was that faith in Jesus Christ made them right with God, not keeping Old Testament Jewish rules. The Jewish sacrificial works system and old Levitical priesthood could only temporarily cover sins. The time had come for Jesus to establish the new order that would ensure lasting forgiveness and cleansing from sin so that the worshiper could enter God's presence and know Him personally.

Unfortunately, many people today of all faiths, including professing Christians, try to work their way to God by carefully following religious rules, being good ethically or doing good for others. However, the idea that what we do or don't do determines our relationship with God only leads to pride and self-sufficiency or defeat and guilt.

Faith that works is faith placed in Jesus Christ, our great high priest, who offered the perfect sacrifice, his own perfect life, for our sin. He

## *A Faith That Works*

cleanses us from sin, then takes us into the presence of a loving heavenly Father. Living to please God then becomes the natural outcome of a love relationship with Him and a life transformed by His grace.

1. a. How does sin affect our relationship with God, according to Romans 6:23a?

**Note:** *Death* biblically is separation, in this case, from God.

b. How is God's provision for our sin described?

Romans 3:22-24

**Note:** *justified* means made right with God. *redemption* points to the ransom paid by Christ (His own life) to free us from the penalty and bondage of sin.

Ephesians 2:8-9

2. a. How did Peter, a first century apostle and Jewish believer, describe the perfect sacrifice of Christ, our high priest?

1 Peter 2:24

b. What was one of the greatest proofs to Peter and the early Jewish believers that Jesus was the Son of God and eternal high priest?

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

**Note:** *according to the Scriptures* refers to fulfilled prophecy (cf. Isaiah 53:10b-11).

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3. How does God see us when we come to Him through Jesus, our high priest? 2 Corinthians 5:21b

4. What does the following verse say about coming to God on our own merit? (This was written by Paul, a Hebrew believer who had formerly been a strict Pharisaic Jewish leader.)

Galatians 2:16 (2:21)

5. a. How do we come into God's presence through Christ, and what relationship does this establish?

John 1:12 (speaking of Jesus Christ)

**Note:** To *receive* Jesus Christ means to repent (be sorry for and turn from our sin) and invite Christ to come into our lives. See prayer, p. 17.

b. What did the apostle John, another first century Hebrew believer, declare about the privilege of knowing God as a Father?

1 John 3:1

6. a. Of what are we assured when we come to God through Jesus Christ, our great high priest?

Hebrews 7:25

*A Faith That Works*

b. Since we have such a personal, understanding, and sacrificially loving high priest, what are we privileged to do?

Hebrews 4:16

7. Paul praised the Thessalonian believers whose lives reflected the good works produced by their faith in Christ. What is the natural outcome of knowing Jesus Christ as our faithful high priest and God as our loving heavenly Father?

1 Thessalonians 1:3

S U M M A R Y

8. a. What results from trying to earn your salvation or be right with God on your own merit?

b. What is Jesus Christ able to do for you as your great high priest?

9. What kind of relationship with God does Jesus make possible, and for how long?

10. The author of Hebrews has shown how Jesus Christ and His new priesthood are not only superior to the old Jewish priesthood, but He is superior to everything and everyone else. This means that any decision that takes us down a path other than growing in our relationship with Him is an inferior and inadequate way. On the other hand, what quality of life does Jesus promise to produce in you as you build your relationship with Him as your great high priest?

## LESSON 5 NOTES

1 "*Jesus' high-priestly role* was superior to that of any priest of Levi, because the Messiah was a priest of a higher order (Psalm 110:4). If the Jewish priests and their laws had been able to save people, why would God need to send Christ as a priest, who came not from the tribe of Levi (the priestly tribe), but from the tribe of Judah? The animal sacrifices had to be repeated, and they offered only temporary forgiveness. Under the new covenant, the Levitical priesthood was canceled in favor of Christ's role as high priest. Because Christ is our high priest, we need to pay attention to Him. No minister, leader, or Christian friend can substitute for Christ's work and for his role in our salvation." *The NIV Life Application Bible*, p. 2229.

### *Jesus our Great High Priest*

#### Overview of Hebrews 7

**The New Eternal and Superior Priesthood of Christ promised in Psalm 110.**

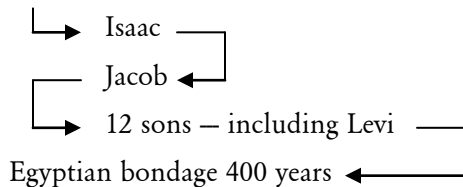
| <u>Melchizedek like Christ</u>   | <u>Jesus Christ</u>  |
|--|--|
| King and priest.   | King and priest.   |
| His name means "king of righteousness." Title "king of Salem" means "king of peace."                         | Jesus is the eternal King of righteousness and peace.  |
| Outside Levitical priesthood, lived before Levi was born.  | Outside Levitical priesthood, from the Jewish tribe of Judah, not Levi.                                    |
| Levitical priests paid tithe to him through father Abraham, and were therefore inferior in their priesthood. | Jesus received oath of God in Psalm 110:4 to be "a Priest forever in the [superior] order of Melchizedek." |
| Had no recorded beginning or end as priest.  | Eternal Son of God and High Priest in heaven.  |

**Psalm 110:4 promised a new priesthood and covenant, given to Christ by an oath of God (the Father; see Psalm 110:1).**

| <u>Changes from Levitical Priesthood to</u>   | <u>Superiority of Jesus' heavenly Priesthood</u>  |
|---|---|
| Old Covenant.   | New Covenant.   |
| The Law (priestly laws regarding sacrifice) could not save from sin.  | Jesus' blood presented on the heavenly altar purifies us from sin permanently.              |
| Sinful priests could only offer the blood of animals—to temporarily cover their own and the people's sin. Endless stream of sacrifices must be offered. | Jesus—sinless and human—offered Himself to pay completely for sin—Man for man—once for all. |

**TIMELINE FOR EVENTS AND WRITINGS OF HEBREWS 7**

Melchizedek (Genesis 14) app. 2000 B.C.  
 blessed and received tithes from:  
 Abraham (Father of the Jews) app. 2000 B.C.



Exodus Moses app. 1400 B.C.  
 Laws of Levitical (Aaronic) Priesthood

David wrote Psalm 110 prophecy app. 1000 B.C.  
 Messiah as both King (110:1-3)  
 and eternal Priest (110:4)

Gospels Jesus Christ 30 A.D.  
 Life, death resurrection, ascension.

Book of Hebrews writing app. 65 A.D.

## LESSON 6

### *CHRIST—THE MEDIATOR OF A BETTER COVENANT*

#### *Hebrews 8*

As we continue to study the superiority of Christ and the Christian faith, the author shows our great high priest to be the mediator of a new and better covenant, or relationship with God, than the Mosaic one by which the Jews had lived for almost fifteen hundred years.

He first shows how the Old Testament tabernacle,<sup>1</sup> which allowed God to dwell among His people on earth, was only symbolic of the true heavenly tabernacle in which Christ now serves as our high priest. There, instead of a steady stream of sacrifices for sin offered by mortal priests under the old covenant, Jesus has offered the perfect and final sacrifice for man's sin, once and for all. The Levitical system had only been a shadow and example of the final offering made by the Son of God. The old covenant God had made with Israel was now replaced by a perfected and eternal covenant.

This new covenant had been predicted by God through the prophet Jeremiah some 600 years earlier (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The first covenant,<sup>2</sup> established after God had delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, had an "if you will" obey clause (Exodus 19:5). Israel had not remained faithful to God, so He promised in time to make a new covenant whereby He would put His laws in their minds and "write" them on the hearts of His people, enabling them to delight in doing His will. Each of God's people would know Him personally and have everlasting forgiveness of sin.

The writer of Hebrews declares that this new covenant, ushered in with the words of Jesus at the last supper (Matthew 26:28), is not only superior to the old, but makes the old covenant obsolete. The perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ completely and finally fulfilled the old covenant requirements, removing the need for that system, which would soon disappear.

**Read Hebrews 8:1-5.**

1. a. What important point has the author made thus far (8:1-2)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *The tabernacle*, p. 56.

b. How does Jesus' position compare to that of the Levitical priests (Hebrews 10:11-12)?

2. a. The Levitical high priests offered sacrifices for sin and gifts of thanksgiving to God (8:3-4). What offering and sacrifice did Jesus Christ give in the sanctuary of heaven (Hebrews 7:27b)?

**Reference:** Note 5, *Why God gave His Son*, p. 9.

b. How is the tabernacle sanctuary in which the Levitical priests offered sacrifices shown to be only symbolic of the true sanctuary in which Jesus serves (8:5a)?

**Reference:** *The Plan of the Tabernacle*, p. 58.



**Read Hebrews 8:6-13.**

3. Hebrews 8:6 states that Christ's ministry as our high priest is superior because the covenant He mediates is superior. It is based on the better promises of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Why should the Hebrews have realized that the covenant of Mosaic law was imperfect (8:7-9)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *Covenant*, p. 56.

**Note:** Jeremiah's prophecy was written around 600 B.C.

4. When was the old covenant established, and why would it be replaced (8:9; cf. Exodus 19:5-6)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Superiority of the new covenant*, p. 56.

**Note:** *took them by the hand* (8:9) is the imagery of a father tenderly helping his child to learn to walk.

5. a. Rather than the conditional "if you will" of the old covenant (Exodus 19:5), what does God promise under the new covenant (8:10)?

**Note:** *Put my laws in their minds* (8:10) means internally, in contrast to setting it before them externally as in the Mosaic covenant. *write it on their hearts* means so it will effectively govern their lives, which did not happen with written laws.

b. What does God call those who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and high priest (8:10, last clause)?

6. a. What is the wonderful outcome of the new covenant (8:11)?

b. How would the new covenant expand God's family around the world (Luke 2:10; Romans 9:24b; 1:16)?

**Note:** Gentiles are all those of non-Jewish lineage.

c. What is God's promise to *all* who come to Him through faith in the Christ (Messiah) of Israel (Hebrews 8:12; Acts 13:38-39)?

7. The "new" covenant supersedes the "old" because the old covenant is fulfilled and its purpose achieved in the new covenant of Christ. His sacrifice for sin is perfect and final. What would eventually happen to the old Levitical covenant (8:13)?

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *The Transformed Life We Need*

If the Jewish believers that the author of Hebrews addresses had not determined by now that to go back to the rituals of Judaism would be foolish, certainly they made that decision after Chapter 8. The new covenant fulfilled in Christ Jesus had clearly been predicted and its "better" promises explained in Old Testament Scripture. All that fulfills the soul is included in the benefits: complete forgiveness and cleansing from guilt; a personal relationship with a loving heavenly Father, regardless of your race, gender or standing; and a changed heart that now delights to do God's will. All this under the eternal care of a great high priest, Jesus Christ, who loved us enough to give His own life for us and who prays for us continually before the throne of God.

How could these blessings not fill the believer with joy and hope? When we come to God through Christ, trusting that He alone can make us right with God, all these "better promises" become real in

## *A Faith That Works*

our lives. Our sins are forgiven, we come to know God as our personal heavenly Father, and our lives are changed from within.

The transformation of heart that changes our lives when we accept Christ is called regeneration. Jesus explained it to the religious leader, Nicodemus, as being "born again." The nation of Israel had proven that just knowing God's laws is not enough for human nature to obey them. We naturally find it unpleasant and difficult to do what we are told and tend to rebel against God's rules for life. Because "the wages of sin is death," or spiritual separation from God, we are by nature dead in sin. But when we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit<sup>4</sup> brings us to life spiritually. He gives us the assurance of eternal life, victory over our old sinful life style, and the power and desire to please God.

The new heart God gives us when we open our lives to Him enables us to live the Christian life with power from within. This transformation is a major reason why faith in Christ is the faith that works.

1. a. What do people naturally do when they are told how to act or live by others?

b. What does this human tendency cause in our relationships with others and with God? What does it cause in our world?

2. a. The change God promises in Christ comes from His taking up residence in our lives. What does Jesus promise in Revelation 3:20?

b. How does He describe the change that takes place when we open our lives to Him? John 3:3, 5-6

c. How is the inner change which Christ brings described in 2 Corinthians 5:17?

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3. a. How do the following verses explain the new spiritual life we experience when we accept Christ?

John 14:16-17

**Reference:** Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 57.

John 14:19-20

Colossians 1:27b

**Note:** *glory* is the pure and good nature of God.

Philippians 2:13

b. What do we become with God in our lives?

1 Corinthians 3:16 (2 Corinthians 6:16b)

4. How did Ezekiel, another Old Testament prophet, describe the transformation of the heart that God would bring about under the new covenant in Christ?

Ezekiel 36:26-27

5. What does God want to do in our lives by His Spirit?

Ephesians 3:16-19

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6. a. Why are you changed and enabled to do God's will when you place your faith in Christ?

b. How does faith in Christ change your relationship with God?

7. Even if you have received Christ, you will always struggle with temptation in this life. But the Spirit living in you can give you a deep desire and strength to choose what pleases God. When you fall, complete forgiveness through the cross can allow you to continue to walk with God.

Is there an area of your life where you want to see more of the control of the Holy Spirit and please God in a greater way?

Take a moment to thank God for the desire to please Him that comes from your changed heart. Then trust Him for the power to grow in His likeness as you walk with Him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

## LESSON 6 NOTES

### 1 *Tabernacle, Holy Place and Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies).*

"God showed Moses on Mount Sinai the plan for this symbol of His presence among the people. Enclosed in a courtyard, it had two main parts, separated by a curtain: the *Holy Place*, and the *Most Holy Place*. The only furniture in the Most Holy Place was the ark. The Old Testament revealed the tabernacle as the place where God and humans could meet, where people approached God with sacrifices and where God communicated His forgiveness and revelations. The New Testament shows that Christ offered the sacrifice that brought us back into relationship with God, thus Himself becoming the tabernacle, the place of meeting, the one through whom God dwells with humans. His crucified body symbolized the torn curtain (Mark 15:38) through which we may now come into God's presence (Hebrews 10:19-20)." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 87. See also, Note 2, *Ark of the covenant*, p. 66, and *The Plan of the Tabernacle*, p. 58.

2 A *covenant* "is an agreement or contract that God initiates with humanity; some have conditions, some do not. For example, God's covenant with Adam before the fall required obedience to His commands, with the prospect of either life or death; the covenant with Abraham contained no conditions, but only promises of blessing to him and his descendants. These promises pertain to us as well, since those who love the Lord are children of Abraham through faith in Christ (Romans 4:16-17,24).

Some see as many as nine separate covenants in the Bible: in Eden, with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses and the Israelites at Sinai, with Israel in Palestine, with David, the new covenant in Christ, and the future covenant of peace. Others, preferring to emphasize only the division of old and new covenant (Old and New Testament), see the other covenants as variations on the same theme." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*. p. 848.

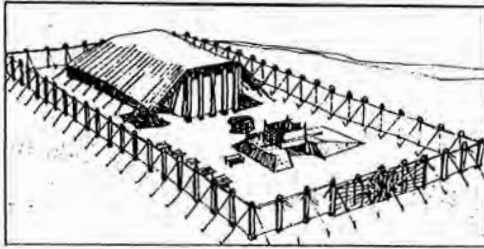
3 *Superiority of the new covenant.* Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Hebrews 8:8-12) defines the superior benefits of the new covenant over the Mosaic covenant (8:9). (1) God's laws will become inner principles (8:10a) that enable His people to delight in doing His will (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Romans 8:2-4); (2) God and His people will have intimate fellowship (8:10b); (3) sinful ignorance of God will be removed forever (8:11); and (4) forgiveness of sins will be an everlasting reality (8:12).

4 *Holy Spirit.* When we personally receive Christ (John 1:12), the Scriptures tell us that God's Spirit takes up residence in our hearts

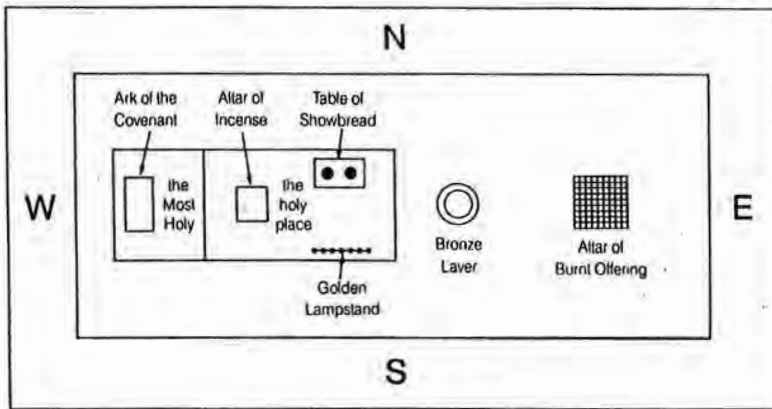
(Romans 8:9b). Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to indwell each believer's heart (John 14:16-17). It is the Holy Spirit who produces the life of Christ in us, enabling us to unselfishly and joyfully serve God and others.

Because the Holy Spirit is the source of power in the Christian's life, it is important to know who He is. Throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is revealed along with the Father and the Son as a full and distinct person of the Godhead. As a divine person, the Holy Spirit is eternal, everywhere present, almighty, perfectly wise, perfectly just and perfectly good (Hebrews 9:14; Psalm 139:7-10; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11). The Holy Spirit's distinct role is the Sanctifier who frees us to lead new lives in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17). It is the Holy Spirit who leads us to spiritual rebirth, brings Christ's presence to us, keeps us in touch with God, reveals God's love, gives us power to witness and to live the Christian life, and gives us spiritual gifts with which to serve the body of Christ (Titus 3:5, John 14:16-18, Romans 8:26, Romans 5:5, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:5-9, 1 Corinthians 2:4-12). He teaches, encourages, comforts, pleads for us and leads us into all truth (John 16:13; Acts 9:31; John 14:16; Romans 8:27).

## THE PLAN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TABERNACLE

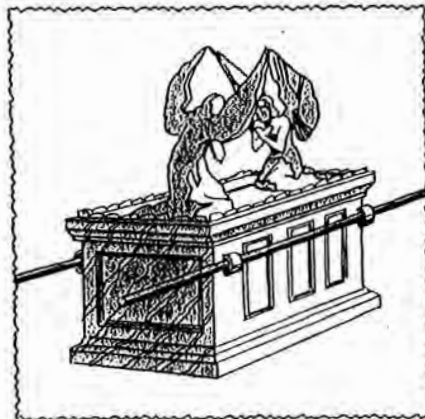


The tabernacle was to provide a place where God might dwell among His people. The term *tabernacle* sometimes refers to the tent, including the holy place and the Most Holy, which was covered with embroidered curtains. But in other places it refers to the entire complex, including the curtained court in which the tent stood.



This illustration shows the relative positions of the tabernacle furniture. The tabernacle (the holy place and the Most Holy) are enlarged for clarity.

The ark of the Testimony.



*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*, pp. 33,34,37.



## LESSON 7

### *CHRIST—THE REDEEMER*

#### *Hebrews 9*

Chapter 9 places the old and new covenants side by side for comparison to show the superiority of the new. It shows that the Mosaic covenant, given to Israel for a certain period of her history, was but an imperfect, temporary, and symbolic foreshadowing of the perfect covenant of God's mercy in His Son, Jesus Christ. The new covenant in Christ, which had been promised by God through the prophets (8:8-12), would forever enable the believer to be made right with God and know Him personally.

The author begins by showing how the Jewish tabernacle and its parts symbolized the eternal heavenly tabernacle at the throne of God. Animal sacrifices that temporarily covered the worshiper's sin showed that atonement could be made for sin and paved the way for the perfect and final sacrifice of Christ.

Under the Mosaic covenant, only the high priest of Israel could go once a year through the curtain to the Most Holy Place. He must first cleanse himself and then the Jewish people by sprinkling them with blood. He would then enter God's presence with the required blood sacrifice of an unblemished lamb and receive forgiveness of sin from Most Holy God. But our great high priest, the sinless Christ, entered the tabernacle of heaven and offered Himself as the once and for all sacrifice for man's sin (9:24,26). The new covenant in His blood ushers all who receive Christ, Jew and Gentile alike, into the heavenly Most Holy Place to be received by a loving heavenly Father.

**Read Hebrews 9:1-10.**

1. a. What is the chief article of furniture in the Most Holy Place (9:3b-4)?

**Reference:** See diagram of the ark, p. 58. Note 2, *ark of the covenant*, p. 66, and Note 1, *tabernacle, Most Holy Place*, p. 56.

b. What was the cover of the ark called (9:5)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Atonement*, p. 38.

2. a. What was the high priest required to have with him when, once a year, he entered the Most Holy Place (9:7)?

**Reference:** See *The Plan of the Old Testament Tabernacle*, p. 58, and Note 3 *Blood sacrifice*, p. 66.

**Note:** *committed in ignorance* (9:7) refers to falling to temptation and being sorry for it. The sacrifices did not cover sin when the sinner had no regret.

b. The veil was symbolic of the way into the Most Holy Place where God's presence was symbolized by the ark. What happened to this veil during the crucifixion of Jesus, and what did this show had happened in the heavenly tabernacle (Matthew 27:50-51; Hebrews 10:19-20)?

3. How was the old covenant ritual limited (9:9-10)?

**Note:** The sacrifices showed the Israelites the seriousness of sin. For the sinner to be pardoned, something had to die—shedding its blood—because the penalty for sin is death (Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 6:23; Leviticus 17:11). But animal blood could only cover sins temporarily (Hebrews 10:4) as they pointed toward Jesus dying on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for all man's sin—a sinless Man (Lamb of God) died in the place of sinful man.

**Read Hebrews 9:11-28.**

4. a. What did our great high priest take into the real Most Holy Place in heaven, and what did this presentation obtain for the believer (9:12)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Redemption*, p. 66.

b. How is the sacrifice of Christ contrasted to the first covenant sacrifices (Hebrews 9:13-14)?

**Note:** *acts that lead to death* refers to sin that separates us from God.

5. What redeemed the faithful Hebrew believers that came before Christ's sacrifice (9:15b)?

6. a. What was necessary to bring the new covenant (last will and testament) into force (9:16-17)?

**Note:** Beneficiaries cannot claim benefits until the testator dies. The "promised eternal inheritance" (v. 15) is now available since Christ died.

b. What was absolutely necessary for our salvation (9:22)?

**Note:** *blood* biblically usually refers to "taking of a life."

7. What proves that Christ's sacrifice is superior to and the fulfillment of the old covenant (9:24-26)?

8. a. What does Hebrews 9:27 say is the destiny of each person?
- b. What are believers in Christ looking forward to since we have been forever redeemed (9:28)?

**Reference:** Note 5, *Second coming of Christ*, p. 67.

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *The Unconditional Love We Need*

The depth of God's love that was demonstrated when Jesus presented Himself as a sacrifice for our sin is beyond our comprehension. Jesus had to leave His throne in glory, become human and shed His blood on a cross to satisfy the justice of God toward our sin. Jesus' love for the Father, in response to His Father's great love for Him, motivated Jesus to do God's will and go to the cross (John 14:31; 17:24,26). The Father had to endure the agony of watching His Son take our sin on Himself, be separated from God's love, and die a torturous death. Romans 5:8 declares, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

In Ephesians, the apostle Paul prays for his readers to be "rooted and established in this love...although it surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:17-19). To contemplate such love brings us to our knees before God in humility, gratitude and adoration. Such comprehension also establishes a healthy self esteem as we see our incredible worth to our Creator. If the King of all creation loves us this much, the value we or the world places on us is insignificant by comparison.

Comprehension of God's love also gives us security in that He who paid such a price for our eternal life with Him is trustworthy to direct our lives in the best way, regardless of what it seems like to us. As His incredibly loved child, we are motivated to love and serve the Lord with hearts full of peace and purpose and deep joy.

## *A Faith That Works*

Hebrews 7-10 explodes with the vision of God's great love as Jesus, our great high priest, presented His own blood on the mercy seat of the Father in the Most Holy Place of heaven. Certainly all of heaven was silent for this sober and awesome moment. It seems appropriate for us to take this moment ourselves to contemplate the tremendous love of God that makes our faith superior to all.

1. Psalm 119:64 declares, "The earth is filled with your love, O Lord." 1 John 4:8 says, "God is love." The greatest demonstration of God's perfect love for us is in the sacrifice of Christ for our sin. His death was foreshadowed in the Passover lamb of Israel introduced in Exodus 12. Before their deliverance from Egypt, each Hebrew family was instructed to kill a lamb and spread its blood over the doorpost of their home to protect them from the angel of death that was coming to take the firstborn of each Egyptian family. Fourteen hundred years later, Jesus, God's only Son, became the "Lamb of God" and was crucified during the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. His blood, presented in the Most Holy Place of heaven, saves us from spiritual death for our sin.

a. How did the prophet John the Baptist declare this would happen at the beginning of Jesus' ministry? John 1:29

b. What had Isaiah 53:7, 10-11 prophesied about the Christ 700 years before Jesus' crucifixion? Isaiah 53:7, 10-11

c. What did Peter and Paul, both of whom were apostles and Hebrew Christians, declare about this?

1 Peter 1:19 (18)

1 Corinthians 5:7b

*A Faith That Works*

2. a. This sacrifice of Jesus Christ as our Passover Lamb is the supreme demonstration of God's love. Can you imagine Jesus presenting Himself as the slain Lamb of God in the Most Holy Place of heaven? What did this sacrifice prove about God's love, as stated in Ephesians 3:17b-19?

b. What did this sacrifice prove about the love of God the Father?

John 3:16-17 (Romans 5:8)

3. a. What does comprehension of God's unconditional love for us produce in our lives?

b. What do these passages suggest?

Titus 2:12-14

1 John 4:10-12

Hebrews 9:14 (8:12)

**Note:** *death* refers to spiritual separation from God.

4. What is God's desire for each of His children?

Jude 1:21

## S U M M A R Y

5. Jesus offered Himself in the Most Holy Place of heaven for you so that you could be made holy and live in God's love forever. Take a moment to personalize (place your own name in) the verses of Building on the Basics Question #2.

6. What will be the natural result in your life of comprehending God's love for you in Christ? (Review BOB Question #3.)

7. Why is it important to meditate on God's love for you ("keep yourself in God's love," or "be rooted and established in love")? What can happen if we do not?

8. God wants us to relate to Him as dearly loved children. If you have trouble receiving or believing God's love for you, take a moment and ask Him to help you "be rooted and established" in His love.

## LESSON 7 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 1, *Tabernacle, Most Holy Place*, p. 56, and *The Plan of the Tabernacle*, p. 58.

2 *Ark of the Covenant*. "The Ark of the Covenant, or Testimony, was a special chest made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold; on top was the atonement cover. It was placed in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle and later in the Most Holy Place of the Temple. It contained a jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the two tablets on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments.

The ark's position in the center of the tabernacle symbolized God's presence in the middle of the people. Blood sprinkled on the atonement cover symbolized God's forgiveness for the sins of His people through sacrificial blood. Jesus, the perfect high priest, offered Himself as the perfect and final sacrifice to atone for all sins of all time, thus replacing the sprinkling that could not deal effectively with sin." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 101.

3 *Blood sacrifice*. Though blood occasionally refers to the literal fluid in human beings, the Bible uses it primarily as a symbol of life and death, so that the phrase "shedding of blood" means taking a life. Since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the beginning, and God had promised they would surely die if they made such a choice, all mankind inherited their state of rebellion, and the same penalty for going against God's laws. Thus, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Romans 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). But in His mercy, God made a way of redemption for mankind in Jesus Christ, who died in man's place to take the punishment for our sin. The blood shed in the Old Testament sacrifices represented death as punishment and established the principle that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). These sacrifices pointed to the blood of Christ shed on the cross. Through this blood (or the giving of His life), presented to God in heaven, He obtains for us forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7), release from bondage (1 Peter 1:18-19), atonement (Romans 3:25), justification (Romans 5:9), cleansing (Hebrews 9:14), holiness (Hebrews 13:12) and victory. See also Note 3, *Why did Christ have to die*, p. 18, Note 1, *Atoning sacrifice*, p. 38.

4 *Redemption* is a biblical word meaning "to buy out" or "to set free by the payment of a price (ransom)" and refers to a slave being purchased out of slavery. Romans 3:24 says we are "justified freely by his grace through the *redemption* that came by Christ Jesus." As born



sinner, we are in the slave market of sin, so to speak. But Christ, the only free man who ever lived (because He was sinless), paid the ransom price of His own blood to purchase sinners out of the slave market of sin and set them free to become sons of God. Only by the price of death can one be set free (Romans 6:23), and only one who is free (sinless as Christ was; cf. Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21) can buy a slave's freedom. By paying the ransom price of His shed blood, Jesus purchased the person who puts faith in Him out of the slave market of sin and sets him free to become a son of God (Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Gal 4:4-5).

5 *Second coming of Christ* (9:28). Before He was crucified (John 14:3; Matthew 24:30-31) and again after His resurrection (John 21:22), Jesus promised that He would return to earth. He taught that the time of this event, referred to as *the day of Christ*, or simply *the Day*, is known only by God (Mark 13:32). Jesus promised to return in person, with a body (Acts 1:11), and His coming will be visible and unmistakable, with great glory and majesty. When He comes, He will judge everyone (II Timothy 4:1) and usher in the glorious new world of righteousness and peace. Some believe there will be two returns of Christ, one in the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:17), the other after the great tribulation (Revelation 7:14). Others see all the references in the Bible to Christ's return as aspects of one single event at the end of history. *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 1075. References: Amos 8:3,9,13; 9:11; Micah 4:6; 5:9-15; II Thessalonians 1:6-10; Revelation 19:11-16; Acts 1:9-11.



## LESSON 8

### *CHRIST--THE PERFECT SACRIFICE*

#### *Hebrews 10*

The writer of Hebrews believed that true religion provides access to God—fellowship with the Creator. Hebrews 10 begins by restating the fact that "the law is only a shadow of...the realities." Old Testament laws and prophecies foreshadowed, or presented a vague outline of, God's plan in Christ to restore man's relationship with Him, broken by man's sin. While the sacrificial laws demonstrated a sinless life could atone for one's sin, the fact that these sacrifices had to be repeated endlessly proved them inadequate in taking away sin. They did not cleanse the worshiper's conscience, but rather served to remind him of his guilt. They pointed to a perfect and final sacrifice which Scripture promised would be fulfilled by Christ (cf. Isaiah 53).

To further explain the perfect sacrifice of Christ, the author highlights the prophecy of Psalm 40 to show that the Messiah would come primarily to do God's will. A life of perfect obedience, even to the cross, is what qualified Jesus to be the Savior of mankind. The Old Testament ritual on the Day of Atonement explained why. In this annual ritual, the priest laid his hands on the head of an innocent lamb to impute, or transfer, the sins of the people to the innocent creature. The lamb was then killed with the sins of the people on its head, and its blood was sprinkled on the people to symbolize the transfer of the lamb's innocence to the people. This imperfect sacrifice, repeated time and time again, served to outline the perfect sacrifice of Christ which was to come.

At the appointed time, Jesus Christ became human to live a life of perfect obedience to God, even to the point of dying on the cross. This perfect obedience qualified Jesus to give his sinless life in exchange for man's sinful one. John the Baptist once called Jesus "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). On the cross, man's sin and God's wrath toward that sin was placed on the innocent Son of God. He died with that sin to "take it away." This made it possible for His perfect life to be transferred to the one who receives God's gift of salvation in Christ, an exchange which allows God to justly "remember no more" the sins of the believer. Not only so, but the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in the believer, enables him to obey God from the heart (10:10-11).

The author of Hebrews demonstrates how all this was prophesied hundreds of year earlier by various Old Testament prophets who did not know each other. The perfect once and for all sacrifice of Christ made possible what the old covenant could not achieve—the removal of sin, internal change of the believer's heart and a personal relationship with God based on unconditional love.

How, then, should the Christian live in light of this understanding about God's love in Jesus Christ. Through the breaking of His own body, Christ removed the veil between sinful man and God. Having finished His work, He sat down at the right hand of God like a king returned home after accomplishing His task and winning the victory. "Therefore," the writer declares, "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith," and let us hold fast to our faith, continue meeting together, and consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (10:24).

The author sternly warns that to shrink, or turn back, from faith once one understands these truths is to trample underfoot the sacred grace of God demonstrated in the death of Christ; there is no other salvation for such a person. Instead, the reader is encouraged to receive God's grace and live out the life of faith with certainty, perseverance and loyalty to Him who has given His very life for us.

**Read Hebrews 10:1-18.**

*A Faith That Works*

1. What were the limitations of the Levitical ceremonies of sacrifice under the law of Moses?

10:1

**Note:** *only a shadow.* The Levitical sacrifices under the law only prefigured Christ's ultimate sacrifice. Thus they had to be repeated year after year until His final, sin-removing sacrifice was offered.

10:2-3

10:4

**Note:** *impossible for the blood of [animals] to take away sins* means an animal cannot be an adequate substitute for a human being made in God's image. The sacrifice needed to be Perfect Man for sinful man to accomplish justice for man's sin in God's sight.

2. a. What did God have to do for His Son to offer an effective sacrifice for sins (10:5)?

b. What did the incarnate Son of God say to His Father (10:7 quoting Psalm 40:7-8)?

c. What did the will of God—the life and death of His Son—make possible for us who believe (10:10)?

3. a. What can no other sacrifice do (10:11)?

b. Earthly high priests had to offer continual sacrifices. After Jesus, our high priest, offered His sacrifice for sin, what did he do that showed His sacrifice to be final (10:12)?

4. a. Because Jesus' sacrifice is final, what will God do regarding our sins (10:17)?

b. Because of the finality of Christ's payment for our sins, what is obsolete (10:18b)?

**Read Hebrews 10:19-39.**

5. a. How can we confidently enter God's presence (10:19-21)?

**Note:** *through the curtain.* The temple curtain was torn during Christ's crucifixion, symbolizing the tearing of His body that we might enter God's holy presence.

b. In light of this confidence and privilege as believers, what are we encouraged to do?

10:22

**Note:** *bodies washed with pure water* refers to inner cleansing through faith in Christ of which the washing of the priests under the old covenant was a symbol (Ex. 30:19-21). **Reference:** Note 3, *blood sacrifice*, p. 66.

10:23

**Note:** *hope* biblically is certainty, not wishful optimism.

10:24

10:25

**Note:** *the Day* refers to the Lord's return. See Note 5, p. 67.

6. In Hebrews 10:26-31, the author once again sternly warns against turning from faith in Christ after seeing the truth about Jesus. To do so brings greater judgment than before knowing about His sacrifice for our sin. To reject Christ's sacrifice for sins is to reject the only

sacrifice for our sin that exists. To face God's judgment on our own merit should be feared. (See Notes 1 and 2, p. 76.)

a. Instead, what standard are we exhorted to keep (10:32-34)?

**Note:** *better and lasting possessions* refers to our eternal inheritance in Christ.

b. What is the command and promise of Hebrews 10:35?

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *The Freedom from Guilt We Need*

While guilt can lead to positive action, there is no doubt that unresolved guilt can have devastating effects on our lives. The common human experience of feeling guilty comes primarily from violating our God-given consciences. The inability to resolve guilt completely leads to low self-esteem, poor relationships with others and a sense of estrangement from God.

People through the ages have dealt with the problem of guilt in different ways. Some have tried to disregard human conscience and its underlying accountability to God by claiming that neither God nor any absolute standard of right and wrong exists. Those who hold this view often claim biblical principles to be man-made, outdated and intolerable.

But modern psychologists are quickly realizing that godly principles are built into nature, and we ignore them at our own peril. The person who disregards God's standards cannot disregard for long the spiritual laws that govern man, made in the image of God. We are fulfilled to the degree which we truly know God and live according to His laws.

The more prevalent response to guilt in history, however, is mankind's seeking ways to appease God for wrongdoing. Because guilt naturally makes most people fearful to face God, societies all

over the world have established religions that provide systems to reconcile guilt through certain rituals and actions.

The Jewish faith is unique in that God revealed Himself to Abraham and created the nation of Israel. Israel's history and rituals of worship given to Moses by God are recorded historically in the Scriptures. The Book of Hebrews beautifully draws together the Old and New Testaments, showing God's fulfillment of Old Testament law through His Son, Jesus Christ. Sacrificial laws given to temporarily cover man's sin foreshadowed the suffering of the prophesied Messiah who would offer His life as the perfect sacrifice for sin to free us from guilt (Isaiah 53). Because Jesus took the penalty for our wrongs, we can be cleansed of sin and know God personally.

Hebrews shows that we are made right with God, not because we have kept rituals or rules, but because Christ made the once and for all payment for our sin. On the basis of the cross, God can justly forgive our transgressions, saying, "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more" (10:17). As one writer stated:

Because the sinless Savior died  
My guilty soul is counted free,  
For God the Just, is satisfied  
To look on Him, and pardon me.

Hebrews declares that God through Christ has paid a great price to give us a clear conscience and allow us to know Him personally. Faith in Christ is a faith that works because in Him, our guilt is dealt with completely and positively. We can experience the freedom from guilt that we need for emotional health and a fulfilling relationship with God as a loving heavenly Father.

1. a. What can guilty feelings be positive?

b. What negative feelings and actions result from unresolved guilt:  
in relationship to God and others?

in relationship with ourselves?



*A Faith That Works*

2. a. Apart from Christ, what are some ways people attempt to free themselves from guilt and its negative effects?

b. What do these responses lead to, and why do they not solve the problem of guilt?

3. a. As seen in earlier lessons, what must we do to receive the forgiveness of Christ?

John 1:12 (speaking of Christ)

Acts 3:19

b. According to these verses, what heart attitudes are necessary for us to come to God through Christ?

4. a. Because Jesus took the full penalty for all our sins, what is a holy God able to justly do?

Hebrews 10:17

**Note:** Hebrews proves that salvation through Christ is God's plan by citing its prediction through prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah and David, hundreds of years before Jesus' incarnation (Jeremiah 31:34; Isaiah 53; Psalm 22).

b. How does God see us when we have accepted salvation through Christ according to Colossians 1:21-22 (Hebrews 10:14, 22)?

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5. What does God want us to experience when we place our faith in Jesus Christ?

Romans 5:1

Romans 8:15-16

6. After initially receiving Christ as our Savior, the cross is still the basis for forgiveness of sin in our walk of faith. When we become aware of an area (an attitude or action) that is displeasing to the Lord, how can we make it right?

1 John 1:9

1 John 1:7

**Note:** To *walk in the light* is to deal with sin immediately by confession; i.e. call it sin, call it forgiven on the cross, and call on God to change you.

7. What does the following passage declare about God's forgiveness and redemption fulfilled in Christ?

Psalm 130:3-4

**Note:** *feared* means revered and trusted.

Psalm 103:7-8

S U M M A R Y

8. a. How has God made it possible for you to experience a cleansed conscience, freedom from guilt, and a relationship with Him as your loving heavenly Father?

b. What will these blessings produce in your life?

9. What will allow you to continually experience this relationship?

*A Final Note: Are there areas of your life where you would like to experience God's forgiveness once and for all? It may be helpful to take a piece of paper, go before the Lord, and prayerfully list unforgiven sin. After this time of confession and repentance, write 1 John 1:9 in large letters across the sheet and destroy it, signifying God's total forgiveness.*

*You may want to then express forgiveness to yourself and acknowledge forgiveness of specific individuals who have hurt you. Finally, you may feel led to ask forgiveness of individuals you have wronged. These tasks may be challenging, but can bring great freedom and joy.*

\* If you have never made a decision to put your faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sin and would like to do that now, the prayer on page 17 may be helpful to you.

## LESSON 8 NOTES

1 *no sacrifice for sin is left* (10:26). "When people deliberately reject Christ's offer of salvation, they reject God's most precious gift. They ignore the leading of the Holy Spirit, the One who communicates to us God's saving love. This warning was given to Jewish Christians who were tempted to reject Christ for Judaism, but it applies to anyone who rejects Christ for another religion or, having understood Christ's atoning work, deliberately turns away from it (see also Numbers 15:30-31 and Mark 3:28-30). The point is that there is no other acceptable sacrifice for sin than the death of Christ on the cross. If someone deliberately rejects the sacrifice of Christ after clearly understanding the gospel teaching about it, then there is no way for that person to be saved, because God has not provided any other name under heaven by which we can be saved (see Acts 4:12)." *NIV Life Application Bible*, p. 2235.

2 *dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (10:31). "This judgment is for those who have rejected God's mercy. For those who accept Christ's love and His salvation, the coming judgment is no cause for worry. Being saved through His grace, they have nothing to fear (see 1 John 4:18)." *NIV Life Application Bible*, p. 2235.



## LESSON 9

### *THE VICTORY OF FAITH*

#### Hebrews 11

**H**aving proven faith in Christ as the only way to God, the author once again encourages his readers to profess confidence in Christ and refuse to be moved, regardless of the circumstances. In Hebrews 11, he points to beloved Old Testament heroes of faith, showing that sacrifice, hardship and persecution are not unusual for God's people, and that victory comes from unwavering confidence in God's promises.

Hebrews 11 recounts exemplary men and women whose actions in the face of such pressures proved their unwavering faith and brought blessing on the generations after them. Some lived out lives of faith while others were martyred, not willing to deny the reality of God's love which they had experienced and lived by. All passed into the presence of God with a certainty He would keep the promises they had not yet seen fulfilled. They demonstrated that any believer can be victorious over the temptations to give up faith. As the apostle John wrote, "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

#### **Read Hebrews 11.**

1. a. What does Hebrews 11:1 say about faith?

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b. What are two characteristics of faith that allow us to know God (11:6)?

c. What does faith enable us to understand (11:3)?

**Important Note for answering Questions 2-8:** "By faith" could be interpreted "through faith" or "because of his/her faith."

2. a. Why did God commend Abel as a righteous man (11:4b)?

**Note:** *better sacrifice* (11:4; cf. Genesis 4:2-5). The chief reason for the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice was that he offered it "by faith." It is implied that Cain's sacrifice was rejected because he offered it without faith, as a mere formality. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 11, 1871.

b. What happened to Enoch because of his faith (11:5)?

3. What did Noah do and receive because he trusted God (11:7)?

**Note:** Noah trusted God when God instructed him to build a huge vessel to save his family from the coming flood. Noah preached repentance to the people as he built the vessel in a dry landlocked region where enough water to float the craft was inconceivable. When the flood came, it vindicated Noah's faith and brought judgment on the world's unbelief. (See Genesis 5:28-9:29.)

4. a. What did Abraham do that proved he trusted God (11:8-10)?

**Note:** This story is in Genesis 12:1-8; 15:1-15. The promised land was Canaan. Hebrews 11:10 refers to "the heavenly Jerusalem" of 12:22 and Revelation 21:2-4, a city of permanence in contrast to the tents Abraham lived in.

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b. What did Abraham receive because of his faith (11:11-12; story in Genesis 18:1-14)?

**Note:** Twenty-five childless years passed after God called Abraham and promised him a land and innumerable descendants. Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 when Isaac was born (cf. Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5-6; Romans 4:18-21).

c. Years later when Isaac was about 12-15 years old, God tested Abraham's faith by instructing him to sacrifice Isaac. Because God had assured Abraham His promises would come through Isaac, what did Abraham's faith enable him to believe (11:19)?

**Note:** God stopped Abraham from taking Isaac's life, provided a ram for the sacrifice, then made great promises to reward Abraham and his offspring for Abraham's faithfulness. This story is in Genesis 22.

5. a. What characterized the faith of all those mentioned in Hebrews 11 (11:13, 16a)?

b. What is God's response to such a perspective (11:16b)?

6. What does the author suggest his readers can do that Moses did because of his faith (11:24-27)?

**Note:** These accounts of Moses' life are in Exodus 2-14. While all other Hebrew baby boys were ordered by Pharaoh to be killed at birth (Exodus 1:16,22), Moses was miraculously spared, adopted and raised in Pharaoh's court by Pharaoh's daughter.

*for the sake of Christ* (11:26). Moses understood little of the Messianic hope except to believe God's way of blessing and salvation would come through His promises to Abraham's descendants (Israel).

## *A Faith That Works*

7. a. What miracles are mentioned that resulted from faith (11:29-30)?

**Reference:** Red Sea crossing, Exodus 14; Jericho battle, Joshua 6.

b. What resulted when others trusted God (11:33-35a)?

**Note:** *women received back their dead.* Cf. the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24) and the Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4:8-36).

8. a. The author also points to those whose perseverance in faith brought persecution and martyrdom (11:35b-37). What does Hebrews declare about such men and women (11:38a)?

b. What did God have planned as the ultimate reward for Old Testament heroes of faith (11:40b)?

**Note:** Fulfillment for believers of all time is in Christ who is "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25-26).

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *Faith in God's Faithfulness*

As we can see from the remarkably faithful believers mentioned in Hebrews 11, faith in a biblical sense is not a "what-will-be-will-be" attitude, but rather a disciplined mental choice that results in bold action. Faith makes conscious decisions to obey God based on trust in God's faithfulness.



Faithfulness is remaining steadfast to one's commitments, and the faithful men and women in Hebrews 11 all believed that God is faithful; what He promises, He will do. Indeed, God has proven His faithfulness through history and prophecy. His fulfillment of the promise to give Canaan to the descendants of Abraham (Genesis 15) is the crowning Old Testament demonstration of God's faithfulness. God also promised Abraham that all people on earth would be blessed through his offspring (Genesis 12:3), and through the prophets explained that this blessing would come through a Savior Messiah to bear mankind's sin (Isaiah 9:6; 53). These promises were fulfilled when, "in the fullness of time," God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into our world. His incarnation and death for sin were the most outstanding acts of God's faithfulness in human history.

With Christ's resurrection and glorification as our great high priest, all the rest of God's promises can be fulfilled. The second coming of Jesus Christ, the end of the world, the establishment of a new heaven and earth, and eternal life for all believers, are all promises of Scripture we can know with certainty will be fulfilled because of God's faithfulness to His Word.

Likewise, our lives as believers are full of steps of faith where we choose to believe, regardless of our circumstances, that God is faithful to us as His much-loved children. This trust is not blind; it is based upon facts of history—from the fulfillment of every promise to a man of Ur named Abraham to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan for the world.

Christianity is the faith that works because God, not man, initiated this plan of redemption. As seen in Hebrews 11, faith involves a disciplined mental choice to place unconditional confidence in this One who through Christ has proven His love and faithfulness to us.

1. a. How would you define the faithfulness of God?

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b. How would you define our faithfulness to God?

2. a. What did faithfulness involve for Jesus?

b. What did it involve for people in Hebrews 11?

3. Link the following verses to see God's faithfulness through prophecy and history.

Genesis 12:3b (God's promise to Abraham around 2000 B.C.)

Isaiah 9:6-7; 53:11 (Messianic prophecy given to Isaiah around 700 B.C.)

Luke 2:10-11 (angels' announcement to the shepherds of Jesus' birth)

John 3:16; Matthew 28:18, 20b

4. What do these verses declare about the faithfulness of God and His Word that encourages us to walk by faith, not sight? (When possible, substitute the words *trustworthiness and reliability* for *faithfulness*.)

Psalm 86:15

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Psalm 36:5

Psalm 91:4

Psalm 33:4

5. a. What can tear down faith? What are some obstacles to trusting God and His Word over an entire lifetime?

b. How can we secure our faith in the face of obstacles?

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Philippians 4:6-8

Hebrews 10:22-25

1 Peter 5:6-7

6. Regardless of the circumstances or our feelings, what does God promise those who trust Him?

Exodus 14:14 (Psalm 46:10a)

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Psalm 34:7

**Reference:** Note 1, *angels*, p. 85.

Psalm 37:28 (Proverbs 2:8)

Romans 8:31-32, 38-39

S U M M A R Y

7. What did you observe about faith as you studied the lives of those mentioned in Hebrews 11?

8. Sometimes hardship makes us feel that God is not faithful or that our faith is inadequate. What do the experiences of Jesus and the people in Hebrews 11 prove?

9. All other religions of the world originate with man. The historical foundation of Christianity proves it is the plan of redemption initiated by God. How has God proven His faithfulness through prophecy and history? (Review Building on Basics #3.)

10. a. How can you remain faithful to God in difficult times? (Review Building on the Basics # 5.)

b. Is there an area of your life that you want to take this moment to trust God with completely? What promises of God from this lesson can you claim?

***Optional study: Some key verses for trusting God:***

- a. When facing temptation: 1 Corinthians 10:13
- b. When we are fearful: Isaiah 41:10
- c. When we are anxious: Matthew 6:31-34
- d. When we feel inadequate: 2 Corinthians 9:8
- e. When we are tired and discouraged: Matthew 11:28-30
- f. When we fail: Psalm 37:24
- g. When we need strength: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10
- h. When we need courage: Joshua 1:9
- i. When we need stability: Psalm 40:1-3
- j. When we need peace: John 14:27

*Promises of Jesus:* Matthew 28:18; John 10:27-28; 14:1-3.

## LESSON 9 NOTES

1 *Angels* (Psalm 34:7). According to the Bible, angels surround us continually. They are created immortal beings who serve God and believers. An angel is physically powerful; for example, one angel effortlessly moved the huge stone from the tomb of Jesus, a stone three men would struggle to displace. An angel closed the mouth of the lion in Daniel 6:22. Angels are usually invisible to our eyes, but they can become visible (ex.: Genesis 16:7; Numbers 22:23; Luke 1:28). When angels do appear, they are usually glorious and stunningly beautiful so as to cause amazement in those who witness their presence (Luke 1:11; Matthew 28:2-3; Daniel 10:6; Revelation 10:1). II Corinthians 11:14 states that Satan can make himself appear as an angel of God. "Whether visible or invisible, however, God causes his angels to go before us, to be with us, and to follow after us. All of this can be fully understood only by believers who know that angelic presences are in control of the battlefield about us, so that we may stand (Isaiah 26:3) with complete confidence in the midst of the fight." Billy Graham, *Angels, God's Secret Agents*, p. 45. See also, Note 2, *angels*, p. 8.



## LESSON 10

### *THE CHRISTIAN RACE*

#### *Hebrews 12*

Thus far, the writer of Hebrews has focused on proving the supremacy of Jesus Christ over all that the Jew revered. He is superior to angels, to Moses, and to the priests who had been the religious leaders in Israel from the time of Moses. And Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross accomplished what nothing else could—cleansing from sin, eternal life and a new covenant relationship with God for all who would believe.

With this established, the writer turned the topic of this magnificent letter to living for Christ, or "running the Christian race of faith." Hebrews 11 brought before us an array of Old Testament men and women whose lives were a testimony to the power of faith and God's faithfulness to those who trust Him through adversity.

Hebrews 12 opens with the imagery of these being the crowd in the grandstands as the new runners of faith have their turn on the field. But the key to completing the race is not looking to the grandstands, but rather to the finish line. For runners in the race of faith, this focus is on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of our faith. He endured the hatred and hostility of His enemies and the humiliation and pain that surrounded the crucifixion as He looked beyond the cross to the joy that would come from obedience to God's will. This joy was fulfilled as Christ conquered death and accomplished our redemption, and as He took His place at God's right hand as our high priest, advocate and eternal king. To run the race of faith over a

lifetime, we must fix our eyes on Jesus, the supreme example for us in facing the crosses and losses of life that produce eternal rewards.

The author also quotes Proverbs 3:11-12 to remind the reader that God's rebuke and discipline when we sin is proof that we are His children. Any loving father trains and chastens his child to build constructive character for the future. In the same way, God uses adversities to build strength and spiritual maturity in His children. His discipline is not a reason to despair, but rather a sign of being loved by God as His child. To face trials with this understanding produces the encouragement and perseverance we need to be a marathon runner in the race of faith.

This submissive, teachable spirit toward God also improves human relationships. The faithful person will seek harmony with others and purity in his own life, refusing to harbor bitterness toward others or to trifle with God's message of salvation in Christ. To bring home this message to his Hebrew Christian readers who may be contemplating abandoning faith in Christ, the author cites the example of Esau, the son of Jacob who traded the blessing of God for a bowl of stew. When Esau later wanted God's blessing, it was no longer possible to have it.

Finally, the author compares the old and new covenants of faith by contrasting Mt. Sinai, where Moses and the people received the law with fear and trembling, with the Mt. Zion of heaven, into which Christ takes the believer to God the Father. *Zion ... the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...hosts of angels ... the church of the firstborn...God the judge...just men made perfect ... Jesus the mediator of a new covenant* – these make a purposely impressive list to show how the indestructible eternal blessings of faith in Christ outweigh the temporary respite from persecution to be gained from returning to Jewish law.

Taking all these truths to heart, the life-runner in the race of faith listens and clings to the gospel with reverence, awe and perseverance. In God's time, prophecy states that the world will be shaken, and all that will remain is the kingdom of Jesus Christ and those who have finished the race of faith with Him.



**Read Hebrews 12:1-13.**

1. a. In light of the testimony of the faithful gone before us, what are we encouraged to do (12:1)?

**Note:** The many witnesses include the heroes of chapter 11 who together with us will be made perfect (11:40). "They are not spectators but inspiring examples." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1873.

b. The Christian life is compared to a long-distance race rather than a sprint. What can keep us from dropping out of the race from exhaustion or relaxed vigilance (12:2)?

c. What can keep us from growing weary and losing heart (12:3)?

**Note:** *consider* means "to compare ourselves with" or "think over." In this case, we are to consider how Jesus endured and was a contradiction to the hostility and hatred of his enemies.

2. a. How are we to view adversity and our struggle against sin (12:5-7a)?

b. What point does the author make regarding correction and discipline and the father/child relationship (12:7b-9)?

c. What is true of God's discipline of us (12:10-11)?

3. In light of this, what should be our resolve (12:12-13)?

**Note:** *make level paths* refers to integrity, gathering oneself together, in the face of adversity. This helps rather than hinders the spiritual and moral welfare of others, especially the weak in Christian faith.

**Read Hebrews 12:14-28.**

4. What should be our goals in the struggle against sin (12:14)?

**Note:** *To live in peace* refers to seeking harmony, having a peaceful spirit, desiring unity and fellowship among believers. *Holiness* refers to purity and to being set apart for the Lord's purposes.

5. How can we accomplish these goals (12:15-16)?

**Note:** *Esau* (12:16-17) exchanged peace and holiness for immediate and earthly pleasures. His ultimate hopelessness is a lesson to the Hebrew reader contemplating abandoning faith in Christ as well as to believers today. See Note 1, *Esau was rejected*, p. 95.

**Note:** *misses the grace of God* (12:15), means *to fail to lay hold of* or *to fall short of* God's grace. Examples: 2:1-4; 6:4-8.

6. Hebrews 12:18-24 again contrasts the old covenant and the giving of the law to Moses (Exodus 19:12ff) with the new covenant in Christ. What general differences do you observe?

**Note:** Jesus is the *mediator of a new covenant* (12:24), not of law but grace given freely through the sacrifice of Christ for our sin. *the blood of Abel* (12:24) cries out for justice and retribution (cf. Genesis 4:8-10). Christ's blood speaks of forgiveness and reconciliation to God.

7. The reader is exhorted to listen to the voice of God in the gospel (12:25). Those who do will be left standing in Christ's kingdom after the upheavals of His return. In light of these truths, how should the believer approach God (12:28-29)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *consuming* fire (12:29), p. 95, and Note 5, *Second coming of Christ*, p. 67.

**Note:** Consuming *fire* (Deuteronomy 4:24). See Exodus 13:21; 24:15-18; the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night was the visible symbol of God's presence among His people. This "glory of the Lord" looked like a consuming fire.

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *Keys to Running the Race of Faith*

Many things help the marathon runner build the endurance to run the race to completion. He learns from the examples of other excellent runners and perseveres through the pain of the hard, monotonous training required to be in the race. He eliminates anything from his life that detracts from his goal, and he is teachable, trusting and obedient as he relates to his coach.

The writer of Hebrews declares that those who would be faithful over a lifetime to their conquering, reigning King must follow similar principles. To finish the race of faith victoriously requires learning from the examples of those gone before and especially keeping the supreme example of Jesus Christ continually before them. He gave up everything, even His own life, and endured the agony of the cross in order to experience the joy of overcoming death for us. In our allegiance to Him, we must continually yield to our coach, the Holy Spirit, as He builds Christ's character in us. We must remain teachable, trusting and obedient to the Holy Spirit (John 15:17), knowing that He is working everything together for our good. While

we can always have joy in the knowledge of Christ's victory for us, we will simultaneously experience the painful struggle with sin in our lives and with the destruction caused by sin in a fallen world. A loving heavenly Father regulates and uses these adversities to make us able to run the race like His Son. As we submit to the Holy Spirit's training program, we not only grow in faithful endurance, but also become a beacon of light to others.

1. a. It has been said that the Christian life is not a sprint, but a marathon. How is this true?

b. Of what value are the following to the distance runner, and how do these principles apply to us as we seek to run the race of faith?

**Distance Runner:**

**Runner in the Race of Faith:**

Studying the experience and form of excellent runners:

Having a goal:

Keeping eyes on the finish line:

A good coach:

Hard work, pain and ongoing practice:

*A Faith That Works*

2. a. The Holy Spirit coaches the Christian as he runs the race of faith. What did Jesus promise about the Holy Spirit?

John 14:16-17

John 14:26

b. What is the result when we obey the Holy Spirit's leading?

Romans 8:6

**Note:** *Death* biblically is separation, in this case, from God.

Romans 8:26a

Galatians 5:22-23

3. a. Hebrews 12:1 says to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles." What can hinder and entangle us so that we are distracted from training for and running the race of faith?

1 John 2:15-17

**Note:** *the world* refers to the world, or realm, of sin described in vs. 16. God loves the created world and its people (cf. John 3:16; 17:24).

b. What must we continually do in order to stay in the race of faith?

Romans 12:2

*A Faith That Works*

4. a. How did Jesus run the race in a way that is exemplary for us?

Philippians 2:5-9

b. What do we learn from examining the life of Jesus about the race of faith?

c. With our eyes on Jesus, what can we declare? Philippians 4:13

5. Hebrews 12:7-11 reminds us of two things that prove we are really God's child: 1) discipline when sin (disobedience to God's will) pulls us off course, and 2) discipline (training) that builds strength of character through the adversities of our lives.

What does God produce in our lives through such discipline?

Romans 5:3-5 (Hebrews 12:10-11)

6. Far from being distant in times of adversity, Scripture tells us that God is with us as a loving heavenly Father, regulating the circumstances for our good. What does His Word promise?

Jeremiah 29:11

Romans 8:28-29

Hebrews 13:5b

*A Faith That Works*

7. What must we continually choose as we face the trials that produce endurance and bring the final victory in the race of faith?

1 Corinthians 15:58

S U M M A R Y

8. What is your goal as you run the race of faith?

9. What does it mean to "fix your eyes on Jesus" as you run the race?

10. How does God help us when we are weighted down with an area of sin?

11. a. What challenges and difficulties are you facing in your life right now?

b. How does God promise to use these to help you triumph in the race of faith?

12. What keys to remaining faithful over a lifetime stand out to you from this lesson?

## LESSON 10 NOTES

1 *Esau was rejected* (Hebrews 12:16-17; Genesis 25:29-34; 27:30-40).

"Because he only regretted his loss and did not repent of his sin (Genesis 27, especially v. 41). His sorrow was not 'godly sorrow' that 'brings repentance that leads to salvation,' but 'worldly sorrow' that 'brings death' (2 Corinthians 7:10)." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1873.

2 *consuming fire* (12:29). "There is a big difference between the flame of a candle and the roaring blast of a forest fire. We cannot even stand near a raging fire. Even with sophisticated fire-fighting equipment, a consuming fire is often beyond human control. God is not within our control either. We cannot force him to do anything for us through our prayers. He cannot be contained. Yet, He is a God of compassion. He has saved us from sin, and He will save us from death. But everything that is worthless and sinful will be consumed by the fire of His wrath. Only what is good, dedicated to God, and righteous will remain." *NIV Life Application Bible*, p. 2240.

"One can realize God's love for sinners only when he sees Him in the light of His blazing wrath against sin, giving His only begotten Son to die for us." *Hebrews—the Beauty of Christ Unveiled*, Keith L. Brooks, p. 57.



## LESSON 11

### *FINAL WORDS OF WISDOM*

#### *Hebrews 13*

The writer of Hebrews has shown that prophecy and the laws of Judaism foreshadowed the completion of God's plan of redemption in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the greatest motivation to persevere in the Christian faith; it is *God's* way for mankind to have forgiveness of sin and a relationship with Him. With this established, the final chapter of Hebrews speaks to the question of how believers should live out their life of faith in the hostile world around them.

As Jesus taught, love is to be the hallmark of His followers. From this love comes the practice of hospitality, empathy for people who are imprisoned or mistreated, and respect for marriage and sexual morality. The love of Christ also motivates the Christian to be content with what they have and generous rather than greedy and selfish with regard to material possessions. These good, but often unnatural, choices come from the joy of knowing and being loved by God, who has said, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (13:5). The Christian's security comes from confidence that: "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid" (13:6).

The writer also exhorts believers to honor and imitate the faith of spiritual leaders who have served their spiritual lives, the supreme

leader of all being the Lord Jesus Christ, who "is the same yesterday, today and forever" (13:8). Christ's unchanging teachings and plan of salvation by grace are the Christian's continual sources of strength. The author warns that new or complicated teachings about legalistic requirements for salvation will confuse and weaken the believer's faith and are not from God.

Also, because there was no longer reason to make sacrifices for sin at the temple altar, the first century Hebrew Christian could expect rejection and persecution for evading these Jewish traditions. But the author reminds his readers that the altar of forgiveness for the privileged child of God is in the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ has presented Himself as the perfect and final sacrifice for sin. Faith in Jesus could eventually call for them to face the rejection and suffering He faced as He was led out of Jerusalem to die on the cross.

Remembering that this world is temporal, the faithful Christian fixes his hope on his eternal heavenly home, where Jesus is king forever, and fills his life here with praise to God, confession of faith in Jesus Christ, and a Christ-like lifestyle.

As the writer of Hebrews drew his letter to a close, he requested prayers for him and the other believers with him, declared his clear conscience and pure motives, and promised to pray for his readers. Finally, he urged them to take his exhortations to heart by determining to grow in Christian maturity and stand firm in their faith in Christ.

The benediction of this writing is a beautiful prayer we can pray for each other:

*May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

**Read Hebrews 13.**

1. a. What is the hallmark of the follower of Christ (13:1; cf. John 13:35)?

b. List some ways this love is will be manifested in the life of the believer, according to Hebrews 13:2-5a?

2. In what will the Christian find security and confidence in the face of loss, rejection or hardship (13:5b-6)?

3. a. Who should be a continual inspiration to us (13:7)?

b. What is true of Christ, our supreme example of faith (13:8)?

4. a. What must we avoid, and what strengthens our faith (13:9-10)

**Reference:** Note 1, *ceremonial foods* (13:9), p. 105, and Note 2, *We have an altar*, p. 105.

b. What decision did Christ make for us, and what must believers be willing to do for Him (13:11-13)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *outside the camp*, p. 105.

c. What must the Christian continually remember (13:14b)?

*A Faith That Works*

5. Since animal sacrifices have been made obsolete, what offerings or sacrifices can the believer bring to God?

Hebrews 13:15

Hebrews 13:16

6. How should we treat our leaders in the faith, and why (13:17)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *submit to their authority*, p. 105.

7. a. What does the author request (13:18-19)?

b. What news and greetings does he give (13:23-24)?

8. What is the final benediction (13:20-21,25)? List the phrases.

**Note:** *blood of the eternal covenant*. (13:20). The new covenant in the blood of Christ (10:29) was described by Jeremiah as everlasting (31:31; 32:40), also Isaiah (55:3).

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### *The Law of Love*

The entire book of Hebrews proclaims God's plan of redemption of mankind to be one of inconceivable love. God the Father allowed His only Son, Jesus Christ, to become human and to voluntarily die a criminal's death on a cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sin. He did this so that we might be set free from sin's penalty and live with Him eternally. The prophets were inspired by God to foretell this plan; the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices given through Moses foreshadowed it; in time, Jesus came to fulfill it. Christ now reigns in heaven as our eternal king and high priest who gives us access to our loving heavenly Father.

When we personally understand God's gracious plan of unconditional love and forgiveness through Christ, the natural response is to love and follow Him. Jesus summed up how we can do this in one command: love one another. As simple as it sounds, we can only obey this command as we yield our lives to Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to produce Christ's love in us. This love, which produces qualities like hospitality, generosity, compassion and respect for spiritual leaders, overcomes the natural human vices of pride, bitterness, selfishness and rebellion toward God. In a world dominated by these vices, the Christian who exhibits Christ's love will stand out. Even in the face of the kind of persecution and rejection Christ faced, the committed believer is empowered through the Holy Spirit to demonstrate God's love to the world.

It is the law of love that makes faith in Jesus Christ the faith that works. In His Son, God has reached out to save us with amazing love. When we respond to His love with adoration and commitment, He pours His love through us to a world that desperately needs it. We will conclude our study of *A Faith That Works* with a look at these principles of love at the center of Christian faith.

1. How do the following verses sum up much of what we have studied in the book of Hebrews?

1 John 4:9-10

*A Faith That Works*

1 John 3:1a,b

2. What causes us to love God from the heart?

1 John 4:19

3. What is the supreme command of Christ?

John 15:12 (10-11,13)

4. a. List the characteristics of Christ's love we will demonstrate when we allow Christ to be Lord of our lives.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Romans 12:9-13

Romans 12:14-16

Romans 12:17-18,21)

b. What does Christ's love compel us to do?

2 Corinthians 5:14a, 15b

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

*A Faith That Works*

5. How is Christ's supernatural love produced in our lives?

Philippians 2:13 (Hebrews 10:16; 13:20-21)

Ephesians 3:16-19 (Galatians 5:22-23a)

### **Hebrews Review (optional)**

6. a. What do the following key verses from the Book of Hebrews promise about Jesus?

Hebrews 1:1-3

Hebrews 9:24, 26b

b. What do the following declare about Jesus and command us to do as believers?

Hebrews 2:18, 4:15-16

Hebrews 10:19-22

Hebrews 10:23-24, 35

Hebrews 12:1-2

## S U M M A R Y

7. Why is love at the heart of the Christian faith? What have you learned about God's love for you through the study of Hebrews?

8. Hebrews unveils the beauty of Christ in his perfect humanity and as our glorified king and great high priest. What stands out to you about Jesus Christ from your study of Hebrews?

9. What does Hebrews reveal about hardships and the life of faith?

10. What stands out to you about the superiority of faith in Christ from your study of Hebrews?



## Final Note

Hebrews proves that faith in His Son Jesus Christ is God's plan of redemption—the way to forgiveness of sin and a personal relationship with God as a beloved child. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus also states His desire to live in our hearts when He says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

If you would like to receive God's gift of redeeming love and invite Jesus Christ to come into your life, the following is a suggested prayer:

*Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need the forgiveness you purchased for me when you willingly died for me on the cross. Thank you for forgiving my sin. I invite you to come into my life and make me the person you want me to be. Amen.*

If you prayed this prayer, you can know Christ has come into your life as He promised and will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5b).

## Verses to Highlight in the Book of Hebrews

†Hebrews 1:1-3

†Hebrews 2:9, 14, 17-18

†Hebrews 3:13-14

†Hebrews 4:12-13, 14-16

†Hebrews 5:8-9

†Hebrews 6:10, 12, 19-20

†Hebrews 7:25, 26, 27b

†Hebrews 8:1-2, 10-12

†Hebrews 9:12, 14, 22, 26b-28

†Hebrews 10:9-10, 12-14, 19-23, 24-25

†Hebrews 11:1, 6

†Hebrews 12:1-3, 10

†Hebrews 13:5, 8, 12-14

## LESSON 11 NOTES

**1** *ceremonial foods* (13:9). "Apparently some were teaching that keeping the Old Testament ceremonial laws and rituals (such as not eating certain foods) was important to salvation. But these laws were useless for conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires (Colossians 2:23). The laws could influence conduct, but they could not change the heart. Lasting changes in conduct begin when the Holy Spirit lives in each person." *The Life Application Bible, NIV*, p. 2241.

**2** *We have an altar* (13:10) "probably refers to the cross, which marked the end of the whole Aaronic priesthood and its replacement by the order of Melchizedek, of which Christ is the unique and only priest. *no right to eat*. The priests could not eat of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, but we can partake of our sacrifice, so to speak—through spiritual reception of Christ by faith (see John 6:18-58). We have a higher privilege than the priests under the old covenant had." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1876.

**3** *outside the camp; outside the city gate* (13:11-12). "The Jewish Christians were being ridiculed and persecuted by Jews who didn't believe in Jesus the Messiah. Most of the Book of Hebrews tells them how Christ is greater than the sacrificial system. Here the writer drives home the point of his lengthy argument: It may be necessary to leave the 'camp' and suffer with Christ. To be outside the camp meant to be unclean—in the days of the exodus, those who were ceremonially unclean had to stay outside the camp. But Jesus suffered humiliation and uncleanness outside the Jerusalem gates on their behalf. The time had come for Jewish Christians to declare their loyalty to Christ above any other loyalty, to choose to follow the Messiah whatever suffering that might entail. They needed to move outside the safe confinement of their past, their traditions, and their ceremonies to live for Christ. What holds you back from complete loyalty to Jesus Christ?" *The Life Application Bible, NIV*, p. 2241.

**4** *submit to their authority* (13:17). Dictatorial leadership is not condoned by the command of Hebrews 13:17 (see 3 John 9-10), but respect for authority, orderliness and discipline in the church are taught throughout the New Testament. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1875.

## *MAJOR FOOTNOTES DIRECTORY*

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|    |     | 3 The Trinity.                                    |
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|    |     | 5 Why God gave His Son.                           |
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**Diana Schick** has a degree in Education from Texas State University and a Masters degree in Religion from the International School of Theology. For fourteen years, she served as a staff member of Campus Crusade for Christ, International. In 1985, Diana founded Creative Living International, a non-profit organization through which the Bible studies she has written are distributed worldwide. Diana has done extensive speaking, seeking to help individuals discover biblical principles for everyday challenges. Diana and her husband Michael live in San Antonio, Texas, and have two grown daughters.



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*Secrets of Kingdom Living: Studies on the **Beatitudes***  
*Christ, the All-Sufficient Savior: Studies on the Book of **Colossians***  
*Journey to Freedom: Studies from **Exodus through Joshua***  
*Keys to Triumphant Living: Studies from the Book of **Ephesians***  
*Character That Counts: Studies on the **Fruit of the Spirit***  
*New Beginnings: Studies from the Book of **Genesis***  
*A Faith That Works: Studies from the Book of **Hebrews***  
*Lasting love, Lasting Truth: Studies on the Letter of **1 John***  
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