

Lesson 1

# Christ the Superior Spokesman

Hebrews 1:1-3

## Introduction

The epistle to the Hebrews could well be titled "Christ is Superior." Its main purpose is to show Christ's superiority as God's spokesman. Some of the Hebrew brethren were apparently tempted to go back to serving Moses' law. They needed to be shown Christ's greatness. It was important for them to recognize Him as the lawgiver for this age. It is impossible for us to know the exact identity of the author of this letter. After long years of hearing people say Paul wrote the book, it is hard to say we cannot site positive proof. Perhaps it is out of that bias that I seem to see Paul's style and argumentation throughout the book. The reader will have to make up his own mind on the question. If such a study is of interest to someone, careful consideration should be given to Milligan's arguments and Lightfoot's discussion.

A casual reading of the book convinces one it was written to Hebrew Christians. What is not so obvious is where they lived. Again, I have been inclined to assume they were in Jerusalem and Judea. However, there would have been persecution there. Some of the readers had resisted to the point of shedding blood (Hebrews 12:4; Acts 7:54-8:3; 12:1-2). Also, it is likely that some, if not most, at Jerusalem would have seen the Lord. They would not have had to be informed by other eye witnesses. So, my

assumption that the letter was addressed to those in Jerusalem is confronted by some hard questions. However, Milligan gives some good reasoning which should be examined before discarding Jerusalem as a possible destination.

### **God Has Spoken to the Fathers**

The writer was so full of his subject that he did not take the time to extend the usual greetings or identify himself. Rather, he launched into a sentence four verses long. In that sentence, he completely previews the letter's subject matter. His purpose is to demonstrate the absolute superiority of Christ and His church.

The key part of verses one and two is a simple statement, "God has spoken." God spoke in several ways in the Old Testament. He spoke out of a burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6); in dreams (Genesis 40:8; Daniel 2:19-23); and in a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12), to name but a few. The writer says God spoke to the Jewish forefathers through His spokesmen, the prophets. They were simply proclaimers of divine truth both spoken and written. Several passages make it clear they spoke with divine authority (Exodus 4:12; Jeremiah 1:7-9; Matthew 22:31-32; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

God revealed His will a portion at a time, or at various times. He also revealed it in many ways. Close examination of the Old Testament will reveal that God truly unveiled His scheme for man's redemption one part at a time. Perhaps this was done to give man time to understand the things being revealed.

## **God Has Spoken in These Last Days**

God changed His spokesman in these last days, that is, the days of the gospel dispensation. As James D. Bales points out, the contrast is between the time when God delivered His authoritative word through the prophets and the time when He spoke through His Son to us. During His personal ministry, Jesus made it clear that Moses' law was still in force (Matthew 8:4; 23:1-4). He insisted it would not pass away until all of it passed (Matthew 5:17-19). Since part of the law was in force during Christ's ministry, all of it was in force.

Christ did not assume authority until after His resurrection (Acts 2:34-36; Romans 1:4; Ephesians 1:19-23). Thus, Jesus brought about the end of one age and the beginning of another (Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 3:1-6). Peter announced the beginning of the last days on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). Jesus now speaks to all who will receive His message. In fact, He instructed His disciples to teach all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

## **God Has Spoken by His Son**

The messenger during the gospel dispensation is the only begotten Son of God. Obviously the message is important if God sent His Son to deliver it to man. Psalm 2:7-8 shows Jesus was appointed by God to be the Son. God planned for Him to receive the nations as an inheritance. Psalm 22:22-27 shows He will rule over them. They will show their subjection to Him and honor Him by worship.

So we do not misunderstand, the writer tells us God made the worlds by the Son who is His spokesman. Such is in complete agreement with John 1:1-5. It should also be noted that Jesus said it was His purpose to do the work God sent Him to do. He prayed God's will would be done (John 9:4; Matthew 26:36-44). It might appear Jesus was just another part of creation, yet Paul told the Colossian brethren Christ created the worlds. Everything now stands by His power (Hebrews 1:17). All things are upheld by His word in that they were put in motion by and remain because of it.

### **Shining With the Glory of God**

That Jesus was, and is, God come down to earth must be. His glory was testified to by the Father and the Holy Spirit at His baptism (Matthew 3:13-17). He shines forth with the glory that is the glory of the Father (Colossians 1:15; John 1:14). Jesus is God's "express image" like the exact imprint of a seal in wax (Hebrews 1:3).

Lightfoot sees "upholding all things by the word of His power" as referring to Jesus' responsibility for the "providential government" of the universe and His direction of its destiny. Also, Jesus is our redeemer (John 3:16-17). It is in the likeness of His death, burial and resurrection that we are able to put away our old lives of sin. We thereby begin to live a new life (Romans 6). Jesus was made a purification for our sins. He exercised His priestly office in offering His own blood in sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus told His disciples He would go to be with His Father. He also said He planned to build a place for His people (John 14:1-6). The Hebrew writer declares, with the

Psalmist (110:1), that Jesus is on the right hand of God in heaven. It is declared elsewhere in the Bible as well (Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; 1 Peter 3:21-22). His place at God's right hand is pointed to as a glorious hope of His coming again to receive us.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Discuss the purpose of writing, author and possible recipients of the letter called “Hebrews.”
2. Discuss God’s means of speaking to the people of the Old Testament.
3. When are the “last days”?
4. Through whom did God speak during the last days?
5. Describe some of the things that make Jesus shine with the glory of God.

## Lesson 2

# Christ Is Superior to Angels

Hebrews 1:4-2:4

### Christ is Superior

Jesus is the author of redemption. While on earth, He was lower than the angels (2:9). Lightfoot translates Hebrews 1:4; "having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs." Jesus was lower than the angels while on earth. He resumed His position as one "better" than them when He sat down on God's right hand. The word "better," or superior, appears thirteen times in Hebrews. Once each in 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 40 and 12:24. It is used twice in 1:4 and 8:6. The whole point of the book is that Christ and His covenant are superior.

The points concerning Christ made in the previous verses are used as reasons He is better than the angels. His name is better than all. One day, at the sounding of Jesus' name, every knee will bow (Ephesians 1:21; Philippians 2:9-10). It should be noted angels were used in giving the law of Moses (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19). However, the one with the excellent name of the Son of God delivered the new covenant. Christ's excellent name comes from His rank.

### God's Statements Show Christ Is Superior

Christ's superiority to the angels can be seen in statements God has made about Him. For instance, Psalm 2:7 is quoted by the writer of Hebrews in 1:5 and by Paul in

Acts 13:33. In Acts 13, Paul points to the resurrection as the time Jesus was begotten of the Father. John 3:16 and Romans 8:3

tell us God sent His only begotten Son to rid us of sin. Romans 1:4 says, "and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." As another instance, 2 Samuel 7:14 is quoted. The writer says this is another verse recording God's words to Jesus, His true Son. All of these facts combined make Jesus greater than the angels who were involved in the transmission of the law of Moses (Galatians 3:19; Acts 7:53).

In Hebrews 1:6, we find a quotation from Deuteronomy 32:43, which is taken from the LXX (or Septuagint translation). The Psalmist said something very similar in 97:7. Since the angels are commanded by God to worship Christ, He is obviously superior. Jesus was the "firstborn" in several senses. There can certainly be no doubt He was the firstborn from the dead. "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5; Romans 8:29).

As Thompson writes, "In the Old Testament, the *firstborn* son was the recipient of special favors and privileges (cf. Genesis 48:18; 43:33). Thus, the term came to apply to one who is specially favored (cf. Hebrews 12:23.) In Psalm 89:27 the king is referred to as God's *firstborn*. Thus when Jesus is called the firstborn, the author is referring to his pre-eminence as one who has a unique and favored relationship to God." Notice Psalm 89:20 says God anointed David, yet he was the youngest of Jesse's sons (1



Samuel 16:11).

### **God Made Jesus a King**

God causes His angelic messengers to be changed into whatever form suits His purpose (Hebrews 1:7; Psalm 104:4). They are simply servants to do God's bidding. Jesus' greatness is seen in His kingship (Hebrews 1:8, 3; 7:1-2; Psalm 45:6-7; Zechariah 6:12-13). It should be noted the Son is here called God, whereas the angels were just called messengers.

Because of Christ's righteous character, God anointed Him with "oil of gladness." In other words, He honored Him above all others. That such anointing was an honor can be seen in Psalms 23:5-6 and Luke 7:46. Jesus is also said to be Lord, creator, eternal and all-powerful. He will roll up the heavens and is unchangeable (Hebrews 1:10-12; Psalm 102:25-27). All of these are characteristics of God and give proof of Jesus' divinity.

His authority as king can be seen in the quotation from Psalm 110:1, which is quoted in Hebrews 1:13. Jesus and Peter also said this was a reference to Christ, the Messiah (Matthew 22:41-46; Acts 2:34-36). He will sit at God's right hand, a place of authority, until all His enemies are put under His feet (compare Joshua 10:24-25). The angels are all ministering spirits. They are not sovereign. Jesus is made sovereign by sitting at God's right hand. Notice the angels serve the King and for the benefit of all His followers (Hebrews 1:14).

### **The Danger of Drifting**

Because Christ is better than the angels, we ought to pay closer attention to His message. To reach a goal upstream, it is absolutely necessary that one put forth diligent effort (Luke 13:24). The Hebrew writer is warning Christians not to relax and drift downstream. This is especially important in light of the superior messenger. The message heard by Christians is greater than any man ever heard. So, one should strive to keep the teachings of Christ in mind and reach toward the perfection found in Him (Hebrews 2:1).

### **God Gives a Just Reward**

The “word spoken through angels” is all of the Old Testament revelation (Galatians 3:10; Acts 7:51:53). It can be considered steadfast because God backed it up with His power. Also, those who disobeyed or neglected the law were punished. Those under that message from God were properly rewarded for their works, either obedient or disobedient. Having dealt in such a just manner with those under the lesser law, surely God will deal justly today. We clearly will not escape our reward. There is a great salvation available in Jesus. Of course, this implies there was some type of salvation in the past. This may refer to those who were saved from things like the flood, the destruction of Sodom and bondage in Egypt (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:7; Acts 7:34-36). Or, it may indicate there was salvation under the law of Moses, with its shedding of the blood of bulls and goats. If the latter is true, it must be remembered that those in the Mosaic age could not attain perfection without Christ's coming (11:39-40). In either case, the salvation Christ brought is greater (2:2-3).

### **Witnesses to the Truthful Message**

The trustworthy nature of Christ's law was first attested to by the Lord who was its deliverer. Then, the apostles confirmed the message. The Father added His witness to theirs. He was with Jesus and proclaimed His Sonship (John 8:16; Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Indeed, He was with all those He chose to carry out His purpose (compare Exodus 33:14). His witness can be seen in the works done by Christ and the apostles (John 14:10; Acts 2:32, 33; 4:10; 14:3; 19:11-12). The terms "signs," "wonders," and "various miracles" would all seem to refer to different aspects of the same works. A miracle which was called a "sign" would be designed to be a testimony in behalf of the truth. The "wonder" would be the awe aroused in those witnessing the miracle. "Various miracles" would describe the other works wrought by God's power (2:4).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What word is used 13 times in Hebrews? Why do you think it was used so often?
2. What various facts make Jesus better than the angels?
3. Explain the meaning of "firstborn" in light of Romans 8:29 and Colossians 1:15-18.
4. List at least three verses the writer quotes. Why do you think he used so many quotations from the Old Testament?
5. Why do you think we ought to pay close attention to the salvation delivered by the Lord and those who heard Him?

Lesson 3  
**Christ's Work In  
Man's Restoration**  
Hebrews 2:5-18

**Made a Little Lower than the Angels**

God chose to put Christ in charge of restoring man to his lost dominion over the world, rather than using the angels for restoration. The world spoken of in this place is apparently the world in which we now live. Its true meaning would be the "habitable world," as Milligan writes (2:5). Psalm 8:4, which is quoted in Hebrews 2:6, is a case of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. The psalmist, and seemingly the writer, is awed by the blessings God has given man. James D. Bales writes, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:6, shows that Christ has identified himself with humanity and makes possible for us what sin made impossible. He accomplished this through his incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, reign and work as high priest" (2:7-18).

Continuing to quote from Psalm 8:5-7, the writer shows man's rank in the universe. All things were put under man's authority. Though he may now be frustrated in this, he will some day see it come to pass. In fact, Christians see the beginning of that fulfillment in Jesus. He was crowned with "glory and honor" after He tasted death. When Jesus tasted death, He did it for every man. 1 Corinthians 15 shows Jesus died for our sins. It is through that death that we will live again. The new life we have in Him will be unlike this existence. We will have an

incorruptible body and a specially prepared place to live. Christ will not keep death from us the first time (9:27). However, He will keep us from the second death which is described in Revelation 20:14. Jesus took the rank of man for a time so we could avoid that death (Hebrews 2:7-9).

### **Sonship Attained Through the Perfected Leader**

God was the basic reason for, and power behind, creation (Romans 11:33-36; 1 Corinthians 8:6). It was both His and Jesus' purpose to cause many to attain heaven. Notice that Christians are called sons in this context (Hebrews 2:10). This Sonship is by adoption (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5). For this to be done, our leader, or pioneer who went ahead to open the path for us, had to be made perfect. He was completely prepared through suffering, which was the only thing He lacked.

Lightfoot says the word here translated "perfect" was regularly used in the Septuagint translation of the "Pentateuch to refer to the consecration of priests (Exodus 29:9, 29, 33, 35, etc.)." As an example, he tells of the priests under Moses' law who "were perfected or consecrated by various rites, so Christ in the New was perfected or consecrated or qualified. The thought is that, apart from suffering, Christ could not have been made a thoroughly effective, perfect Leader of His people."

### **Set Apart To Be God's Sons**

The sanctified are those set apart for God's service. Jesus is the one who sanctifies, while those who do His will are the sanctified. Since we are both of the same Father,

Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren (2:11). In Psalm 22:22, David pled for help because of the danger he faced. His plea was also based upon his close relationship to God. Of course, Christ fulfilled the message to a greater degree (Hebrews 2:12). His suffering and the glory which followed it are both seen in its prophetic prediction. Both Lightfoot and Thompson remark that the opening verse of this Psalm is used by Jesus on the cross (Mark 15:34). Thompson shows that "the language of Psalm 22 is woven into the language of the passion narratives (Matthew 27:35; Psalm 22:18; Matthew 27:39; Psalm 22:7; Matthew 27:43; Psalm 22:8).

### **The Man Who Conquered Death**

In 2:13, the writer quotes from Isaiah 8:17-18. Jesus was a man, as the first quote would indicate. As such, He put His trust in God. The second verse indicates Christ and His children are very closely bound. Surely then, those that are His should put their trust in the Father!

Jesus came to earth and became a man in every sense of the word, even accepting the weaker, fleshly, aspects. Vine says the word "destroy" means to "reduce to inactivity." Sin, which produces death, was under Satan's control. It was used by him to make man his servant. Jesus died to put Satan out of work by taking away the power of death (2:14). Through this conquering of death, Jesus conquered any man's fear of death (2:15). That is, anyone who will give himself up to Him. Boles says, "Christ removes the bondage of fear through: (a) Bringing life to light (II Timothy 1:10). (b) Forgiveness of sins (I Corinthians 15:54-56)."

### **Why Did Jesus Come to Earth?**

Jesus' purpose on earth was not to release angels from slavery, but man (2:16). Lightfoot says, "The entire thought is that He laid hold of men in order to help them out of their distressed condition." Since Jesus' purpose was man's salvation, He had to become a perfect high priest. He also had to make a perfect sacrifice for the sins of His people (2:17).

He suffered all the trials and temptations a man can suffer. Or, at the very least, He suffered one of each kind. This was done so that He might be the perfect high priest. He had to suffer the same trials as man to understand man's problems. Lightfoot suggests the word "tempted" particularly refers to 2:9 "the suffering of death." Certainly that does show Christ understands how far persecution and trials can go. It should also be a source of courage for those of us about to give up because of suffering (2:18).



### **Discussion Questions**

1. What does the Hebrew writer say Psalm 8:4-6 tells us about Jesus?
2. Discuss God's purpose in making Jesus "a little lower than the angels."
3. Explain how Christians can be called Jesus' brethren.
4. Why is it important to you that Jesus came to earth in the form of a man? What fear should that help to alleviate?
5. How did Jesus become a merciful and faithful High Priest? What does that mean to you?

#### Lesson 4

## **Beware of Unbelief**

### **Hebrews 3:1-19**

#### **Christ's Superiority Over Moses**

Because of the things He has done, Christians should center their thoughts on Jesus, who is the "Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (Hebrews 3:1). An apostle is one sent on a mission. Jesus, then, was certainly an apostle of God (John 3:16-17; Matthew 26:39, 42; John 13:20; 20:21; 1 John 4:14). Hebrews 2:17-18 shows that Jesus is our high priest, in that, He, like that figure, made reconciliation for our sins. Remember that the high priest was the one who offered the sacrifice on the day of atonement. He was the only one who could enter the holy of holies and he took that blood sacrifice in to atone. The word translated "confession" actually includes two ideas. First, it is, as Milligan states, "a public avowal of one's beliefs and sentiments." Second, it is a way of life for the Christian (Matthew 10:32; 16:13-20; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Timothy 6:12). So Jesus is the object of our confession because He was the one sent and the one who offered, and indeed was, the reconciliation for our sins. Paul tells us in Romans 10:9-10, that confession of Christ leads to our salvation and Jesus, in Matthew 10:32, says that if we confess Him on earth, He will confess us in heaven.

Moses was trustworthy in carrying out the duties appointed to him in God's house, as was Jesus (1 Corinthians 4:2). Moses was faithful in his duty, but Jesus is held in higher esteem. Moses was a part of the house of Israel, but

Jesus was both the builder and furnisher of that house. Even today, the man who built a great building is considered greater than the building itself. The greatness of the builder can be seen as the writer goes on to say God is the builder. Clearly, these verses let the reader know the writer thought of Jesus as divine (Hebrews 3:2-4).

Hebrews 3:5 goes on to extend the superiority of Christ over Moses. Moses was faithful in God's household as a servant and his faithfulness testifies to the accuracy of the message he brought. However, Moses' service was only a foreshadow of things that would come long after his life on earth was finished (see also Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). Christ, as Son, is more than a servant over the house. While Moses was a servant over God's house, Jesus is the Son over a house which the author calls His "own." As members of the church, Christians are considered members of God's household (1 Timothy 3:15.) This truly is Christ's house, as He pointed out in Matthew 16:18. One can become a part of that church (as is recorded in Acts 2:47), but, as the author points out, to remain a part of it he must speak boldly of it and hold fast to the hope of it to the end of life (Hebrews 3:6).

### **Lessons from the Unbelief in the Wilderness**

The writer turns to a quotation from Psalm 95:7-11. This Psalm is a call to worship God and a warning against a disobedient heart. The writer was warning the Hebrew people against a hardening of their hearts and rejection of God. Their fathers had rebelled against God in the wilderness and because of that were not allowed to enter into "rest," which in their case was the promised land, or Canaan.

The events in the wilderness clearly demonstrate God will not tolerate unbelief after He has shown His power to His people. So, the writer called his readers to worship and asked them to remain receptive so they could enter into God's "rest," which, for the Christian, is heaven (Hebrews 3:7-11).

The writer next issued a warning to his brethren. Notice he said, "in any of you," which indicated he was not only concerned with the church as a whole but with individuals who make up the church. The warning is against the "heart of disbelief" which is one that does not trust God and His promises. A heart such as this can cause one to distrust God so much that he will turn totally away. Remember, the readers of this letter were considering rejection of Christ which would cause them to turn back to Moses' law (Luke 9:62). It is significant to note the writer equates rejection of Christ with rejection of God (Hebrews 3:12).

### **Exhortation to Faithfulness**

So that they will not fall, Christians are to encourage one another every day. This is done so that sin and its tricky ways will not be able to harden a believer in the ways of sin. Such exhortation is needed while it is called "today"--before the night of death, which may come at any time. Members of the body of Christ come to share with Him if they hold close to themselves the hope with which they started. One must not only have that hope in the beginning of his ministry with Christ, but must maintain it until the end of that ministry. This is unlike those of the first generation Israelites who lost hope and trust in God and died without entering Canaan, which was their land of

promise (Hebrews 3:13-14).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews then repeated his quotation of Psalm 95:7 to show the great importance placed upon keeping one's heart from hardening. Then, as the New International Version has it, he asks, "Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?" The rebellion was complete save for Joshua and Caleb. All those who had enjoyed the deliverance under Moses, one of God's great leaders, were lost because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:15-16).

That the possibility of falling away is great was plainly demonstrated in the falling of the people of Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 14:28-32). Though they had once believed and trusted God's promises, once they turned to unbelief they were unable to enter into the "rest" God offered. It is important to realize Israel possessed the land of rest in the promise of God but lost it through their unbelief. The writer pointed out their death in the wilderness was totally and solely brought about because of their unbelief. Edward Fudge remarks that their falling was not due to any unfaithfulness on Moses' part or inability on God's part. They simply quit trusting God (Hebrews 3:17-19; Deuteronomy 32:20).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think Jesus is called an Apostle and High Priest?
2. Why is Jesus said to be worthy of more glory than Moses?
3. Explain why you think the writer quotes Psalm 95:7-11.
4. List some of the miracles Israel saw. Explain how they could fall after seeing such great works.
5. Why do you think the writer put such emphasis on

"today"?

### Lesson 5

## The Promised Rest

Hebrews 4:1-16

### A Lesson On Rest Learned from Israel's Failure

Though the children of Israel failed to enter the promised rest, a promise of rest still remains for those in Christ. Remember, in 3:15 the writer quoted Psalm 95 which shows Christ's disciples have a promise of entering God's rest today. It must, however, also be remembered that Christians can fall short just as surely as did Israel (Hebrews 4:1).

Both physical and spiritual Israel have heard the gospel preached. Milligan says this would be better translated, "for we are evangelized as well as they." So, the promise of entering into rest is ours, as Christians, as well as theirs, as Israelites. God's word was heard by them, but it was to no avail since they fell into unbelief. Their failure, according to the writer of Hebrews, resulted from an unbelief which was produced by their failing to hear the word of God with faith (Hebrews 4:2; Numbers 13:1-33).

### God's Rest Is Limited to the Faithful

The promise of entering God's rest is affirmed for all who believe, yet God's wrath would not allow those who rebelled in the wilderness to enter in (Psalm 95:11). As Thompson states, "The expression, from the foundation of the world, is used frequently in the New Testament (Matthew 13:35; Luke 11:50; Hebrews 9:26). The phrase

suggests the eternity of God's plan of salvation, which was conceived before all ages and will be fulfilled in the last time" (cf. Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:20). The phrase thus refers logically to the creation story of Genesis 1 and 2 and the time before it. Apparently rest has been an idea inherent in the world since the resting of God in Genesis 2:2. God, at that time, entered into rest, and instituted the Sabbath rest. As the quotation from Psalm 95:11 shows, God's rest is reserved for those who are truly faithful in service to God (Hebrews 4:3-5).

Though some did not enter in because of unbelief, the promise still remained for faithful Israelites. All of the first generation, except Joshua and Caleb, died in the wilderness because of their unfaithfulness. Joshua and Caleb were part of those who were to have rest because they were faithful. Some of the unfaithful were killed as late as during the encampment at Baal-Peor, just prior to the crossing of the Jordan (Numbers 25). However, it would seem that faithful and unfaithful alike entered into Canaan, the land of promised rest, during the second generation. The supposed dilemma is solved by a quote from Psalm 95:7-11, which shows that in David's day, despite the fact that they were already in the promised land, the people had to be warned against the sin of unbelief, lest they fail to enter the promised rest. It must be kept in mind that Canaan was only a type of the heavenly land of rest to come. Too, emphasis is placed on the word "today," because the promise of rest is available now. Joshua took the children of Israel into Canaan, but that physical rest did not completely satisfy. Thus, David spoke of the Canaan which completely satisfies, or heaven (Hebrews 4:6-8).

### **Pursuing God's Rest**



Then, over and above the types of rest found under the old covenant, there remains a promise of God's rest for those who are obedient (Hebrews 4:9-10). This rest was spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30, and is, indeed, the reason Christ came to earth. The rest has been entered into by some and those who enter do not have to worry with the labor and cares of this world any more. The idea is a rest at the completion of one's life work (2 Timothy 4:6-8.) Lightfoot writes, "As God in the beginning entered his sabbath, they too will enter theirs--'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them'" (Revelation 14:13.)

Since we know the rest does await us, we ought to work diligently to obtain it (Hebrews 4:11; 2 Peter 1:10.) The writer urged his readers to be diligent in their pursuit of the promised rest. In using the word translated "diligent," he was describing a hastening to do a thing and a use of all of one's might. If we fail to give our all to attain the goal, we have the bad example of the Israelites which shows us we will fall.

### **God Sees Us As We Are**

Some might think they can deceive God by pretending to be diligent. However, His powerful insight into the depths of man's soul is clearly seen in a full understanding of the nature of His word. So, the author next turned to a discussion of the word and the God who delivered it. He spoke of the "word of God" which Peter says is the incorruptible seed by which we are to be born (4:12; 1 Peter 1:23). It is the seed of the kingdom (Luke

8:11-15). By the hearing of it faith can be gained (Romans 10:17), without which one cannot be pleasing to God (Hebrews 11:6). If one will hear it, he can obtain blessing (Luke 11:28). The "word of God" was that which was delivered by Jesus and should dwell richly in the heart of the Christian (John 17:8, 14, 17; Colossians 3:16). By it we can find our salvation (John 5:24; Acts 20:32). It was this "word" that Timothy was to deliver (1 Timothy 4:5-6; 2 Timothy 4:1-5). However, the "word" is worthless to anyone who refuses to work the works it tells him to do (James 1:18-25). That word would be the good news that was carried to the entire world upon the instruction of Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47-49).

The writer said this word is alive and powerful, meaning that it carries a forceful, living message today. The word, which is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), is so sharp that it can divide the very "essence of man." That word is also able to discern, or judge, a man's very purpose in life. It can cause one to be seen as he really is since it reveals his very thoughts and feelings. It is really no wonder that this word has such powers, since God, who had that word written, is able to see all things, nothing being secret from him. This is the God with whose word we have to deal (Hebrews 4:13).

### **The High Priest Gives Strength to Continue to The Rest**

The strength of the foundation of the Christian's confession is further indicated by the High Priest that is his. He is Jesus Christ the Son of God, who has already passed through the heavens and is in the ultimate place of glory, being with God. He is there to make intercession for His disciples (Hebrews 4:14; 7:25). He is a glorious High

Priest who is loving, compassionate and understands the feelings and weaknesses with which people are confronted. He really understands temptation more fully than men since He met and overcame it (Hebrews 4:15; John 8:29, 46; 10:32; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

For all the reasons previously mentioned, Christians should have no fear as they approach their High Priest and ask for help in a time of need. Under Moses' law, only the priests could "draw near" to God. However, under the covenant of Christ, every believer is a priest and the way to the "throne of grace" is opened to all (Hebrews 4:16).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What significance do you see in the writer's use of "rest"?
2. Describe some of the things that caused the children of Israel to lose their rest.
3. What lessons can we learn from the failure of the children of Israel to enter God's rest?
4. Describe the rest awaiting faithful Christians.

5. How does having a High Priest like Jesus help Christians have the strength to continue faithful to their true rest?

### Lesson 6

## **A High Priest After the Order of Melchizedek**

**Hebrews 5:1-14**

### **The Priests Under the Law of Moses**

High Priests were set up by God for man's benefit. God did not need anyone to sacrifice and make offerings for His sins, since He had none. However, He, out of love, gave us a High Priest for these religious duties. It seems the "gifts" which were offered were sacrifices of thanks and the "sacrifices" were for sin (Hebrews 5:1).

The priests under Moses' law, could have a compassionate feeling for all those who were straying ignorantly from the path of righteousness because they understood their weaknesses and were, therefore, aware of them. The "ignorant" would include those who sinned unknowingly, while the "going astray" erred out of weakness. In commenting on this passage, Fudge reminds us that there is no sacrifice for presumptuous sins (Numbers 15:30-31). The High Priests under Moses' law were surrounded by others', as well as their own, sins. Even Aaron fell prey to sin (Hebrews 5:2; Exodus 32:24).

The sins that surrounded the High Priest of old, both

his and the people's, caused him to have to make an offering (Leviticus 9:7; 16:6). One qualification of every High Priest was that of being "called of God as was Aaron" (Hebrews 5:3-4; Exodus 28:1; Psalm 105:26). "And the man who claims this honor for himself as did Korah (Numbers 16), though sustained by the highest human authority, is really not a High Priest, but an usurper (Acts 23:5)." (Milligan, p. 154).

### **Jesus, A Priest After the Order of Melchizedek**

Unlike one who might usurp authority, Jesus did not assume any honors (Hebrews 5:5). Rather, God bestowed the honor upon Him when He raised Him from the dead. The quote from Psalm 2:7 has reference to God's raising up of Christ from the dead, as it does in other places, such as Acts 13:33. "Jesus, even though Messiah, did not glorify himself to be made a high priest (cf. John 8:54.) He did not come in His own name nor did he rely solely on His own testimony (John 5:43,31.)" (Lightfoot, p. 108).

Christ was a priest after the "order of Melchizedek". Melchizedek is mentioned in Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110:4, which is the passage quoted in Hebrews 5:6. The scriptures do not record his parentage, birth, or death. Thus, he is used as a figurative representation of Christ and the facts surrounding Christ's priesthood. His order is superior to Aaron's since it is a figuratively eternal priesthood, while Aaron's lasted for but a time and was imperfect. Also, Melchizedek was a king and priest at the same time, which can easily be compared to Jesus who is our High Priest and head of the kingdom. It should be noted that Christ became priest upon his resurrection from the dead, much as he received other honors at that time (see

comment verse 5). Aaron's priesthood was confirmed by a miracle. God consumed those who questioned Aaron's authority (Numbers 16) and, through Jude, warns those false teachers who might challenge Christ's authority (Jude 11).

### **Jesus Learned the Cost of Obedience**

While Jesus was in the flesh, He was in a position of humility. He, when in the garden, offered up His prayers to God, who was the only one who could have saved Him from His pain and suffering and, finally, death. Because He was reverent in speech to God, Christ was delivered from the hands of the tempter in this most trying hour, which was the thing He most feared. It should be noted that Christ's prayer was heard and answered, though the answer included death on the cross. It was answered because He feared, or respected God's authority (Matthew 26:39). The way Jesus confronted His greatest hour of weakness and grief fully qualified Him as our High Priest. He understands our weaknesses (Hebrews 5:7).

At Calvary, Jesus submitted completely to God's will (Philippians 2:8). He passed through an hour in which He suffered the deepest possible human suffering and learned the cost of obeying God's command. Those sufferings made Him our perfect Savior and qualified Him to offer the sacrifice for sins that would lead to man's salvation. Such salvation is at once eternal and available to all who will obey His commands (John 3:16-17; 14:15). W. E. Vine says the word "author" points to Christ as "the concrete and active cause of it" (our salvation). The writer then quoted Psalm 110:4 again to prove God appointed Christ to be a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He was appointed by

God and satisfied all of the requirements of this position (Hebrews 5:8-10).

### **The Failure of the Hebrew Christians to Grow Spiritually**

The subject of Christ's priesthood is one so complex it is difficult to write about. A difficulty which was complicated by the dullness of the readers' understanding. Vine says "dull"

carries with it the idea of slowness or sluggishness, which suggests, to us, a lack of use. By reason of their being Christians and having had many opportunities to learn, they ought to have been able to tell others the good news of Jesus and answer questions regarding their great hope of heaven (1 Peter 3:15). "To be a teacher meant to the ancient mind that one was able to think and act maturely" (Lightfoot, p. 112). However, they had not grown in knowledge, but had shrunk and had need that someone should show them again the very fundamental elements of God's final revelation to man. He actually said they needed to rehearse and study the ABC's of Christianity (Hebrews 5:11-12).

Just like babies, they had need of milk, which is the basic element of nourishment. The word "unskilled" means "without experience." They needed to feed on the basics of the gospel, so they could grow. Teaching others the basics they had learned should have caused them to gain strength and be ready to go beyond the basics in learning. Teaching others is one means of exercising one's knowledge. The stronger things of the gospel, or more complex, belong only to those who have exercised and grown in their spiritual bodies and are ready to receive the stronger. Such have practiced self-discipline and thereby learned to distinguish



between good and evil teaching (Hebrews 5:13-14).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are some of the characteristics and duties of a high priest?
2. How does the writer say one becomes high priest? How did Aaron? How did Christ?
3. Three times, Jesus is called God's Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Acts 13:33). Why do you suppose the Father called him Son at those particular times?
4. What things specially qualify Jesus as a priest forever?

5. What is the sign of maturity for a Christian? How does this occur?

### Lesson 7

## The Anchor of the Soul

Hebrews 6:1-20

### Building on the Elementary Principles

The writer wanted his readers to go on to a complete knowledge of the gospel. To do so, they would have to leave those simpler principles behind to build upon. They needed to go on to the construction of the superstructure of their spiritual beings. They had already repented of their past (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3-5). They had exhibited the necessary faith in God (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17; John 20:30-31). They also already knew of the "doctrine of baptisms." Fudge says, "The word here translated *baptisms* is that commonly applied to the various washings of the Old Testament (See Hebrews 9:10; Mark 7:4.) The *doctrine of baptisms* would therefore seem to involve explanations regarding the difference between Jewish washings on the one hand and the gospel baptism in the name of Jesus the Messiah on the other" (p.61; compare Leviticus 16:4, 24; 14:8-9; 6:27-28; Exodus 30:18-21; Numbers 8:6-7).

It is possible some of the readers had actually experienced the laying on of hands. It was used by the apostles to give the gifts of the Spirit (Acts 8:17, 19; 19:6).

Today, it would simply be the ordaining of one to a ministry as in Acts 6:6; 13:3; 14:23; and 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22. Of course, one must also understand the basics of the resurrection, which is a fundamental part of the gospel (Acts 2:31-32; 10:40; 13:33; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 12-23). Coupled with that must be a realization that all men will be raised and face judgment (John 5:28-29; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27). The writer believed he and his readers would gain a knowledge of all these simpler principles. He also thought they would then go on to completeness in the faith, if God permitted them to live (Hebrews 6:1-3).

### **Some Impossible To Renew**

One might ask why it is important to go on to perfection. The writer answered in a very forceful way. He said it was impossible to bring those who had fallen away back to repentance. This was especially true for those who had seen the light Christ gives the world. They would have already enjoyed the new life in Christ. They would have already been a part of the promise of the Holy Spirit. The joys of God's good news would have been theirs. The power of the truth to set a man free from sin and, therefore, make him a part of the glorious experience of heaven would already have been tasted by such enlightened ones.

When such have fallen away, it is impossible to bring them back to a repentance from the works which lead to death. Such impossibility comes from their turning against Christ after having known Him and all the joys already listed. The attitude they display shows the impossibility. They so reject Christ that they would crucify Him again, if they could. They put their Savior to an open shame by returning to sin. One who does not grow spiritually runs

the risk of becoming an apostate from the faith (Hebrews 6:4-6).

### **A Lesson From the Soil**

To give still another reason for growing, the writer made a comparison with types of soil. One type receives the rain and brings forth good fruit for those who care for it, so it is blessed of God. Another receives the rain but only grows thorns and thistles. Such land is to be condemned and burned over. The apostate is thus warned that he is headed for a punishment by burning (Hebrews 6:7-8; Matthew 13:24-30; 25:41-46; John 15:1-6).

### **A Better Expectation**

However, the writer's warnings of apostasy should not be taken to mean that he had no hope for them. He expected a better end for them than burning, since they still walked in the path of salvation. They had a hope of a promise if they endured until the end of life. He went on to assure them of the justness of God's nature. Their good works, which were done in God's name, would not be forgotten. They had shared in the afflictions and persecutions of others. They had showed compassion for the imprisoned even to the point of suffering personal loss (Hebrews 6:9-10; 10:33-34; Matthew 25:31-46).

The writer desired, or had a deep longing (compare Luke 22:15), that they would continue in those good works until the end of life. This would have given them the assurance of their hope, being eternal life. They faced the ever present danger of giving up before achieving their

purpose. He further hoped that they would not become lazy in their work. He wanted them to continue faithfully and patiently until the end where they had hope of a promise. This they were to do as others, such as Abraham, had done before them. Fudge says that the word here rendered "sluggish" is the same one translated "dull" in 5:11 (Hebrews 6:11-12).

### **The Example of Abraham**

Abraham had relied on the promise of God who swore by Himself (Genesis 22:15-18). God had promised to greatly bless and multiply Abraham. Lightfoot points out that Abraham was seventy-five years old when the promise was first made (Genesis 12:4). He waited twenty-four years, to the age of ninety-nine, before he knew it would be fulfilled by the birth of a son (Genesis 17:1-21). One more year passed before the son of promise, Isaac, was born (Genesis 21:1-7). Therefore, the author of Hebrews reminds his readers that the promise was received to its fullest after Abraham had patiently endured (Hebrews 6:13-15).

The writer says on grave and solemn occasions men have always sworn by the highest power in which they believed. An oath such as this was the end to all disagreements. This is mainly referring to a legal guarantee. For this reason, God had sworn by himself in an oath to Abraham. The promise to Abraham extends to all men of faith (Hebrews 6:16-17).

### **Trust in the Anchor of the Soul**

So, the reader could rely upon God's word since he

had both the promise and an oath stating that the promise would be kept. In fact, strong consolation is the reward of anyone who flees to Jesus for refuge and lays hold upon the hope of the eternal life He has offered. That hope serves as an anchor of the soul to securely hold us and keep us steady. As the comparison would indicate, "that behind the veil" or what the Most Holy Place is representative of, would be heaven. Our anchor is secure in that unseen realm.

Jesus has gone on before believers (John 14:1-6), like a scout. Thus, our hope is already "within the veil," or heaven. Having finished his admonition, the writer now returns our thoughts to Christ as a superior High Priest (Hebrews 6:18-20; Zechariah 6:9-13, esp. 12-13).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are the elementary principles? Give a brief explanation of each.
2. What are the characteristics of one who has been enlightened? Give a brief explanation of each.
3. What caused these enlightened ones to fall away? Why is it impossible to renew them to repentance?
4. Why do you think the writer expressed such confidence in his readers in 6:9-12?

5. What hope is described as an anchor of the soul? Why do you feel it is sure and steadfast?

### Lesson 8

# The Melchizedek Priesthood is Superior

Hebrews 7:1-28

## Melchizedek, the Man

Melchizedek was both priest and king, just as Christ was, so it could be said that Christ was like him. Remember that Melchizedek was introduced in 5:10-11 (Genesis 14:18-20). Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek to maintain his worship and support the true religion. Melchizedek is called "King of righteousness" because that is the meaning of his name. Fudge states, "To the Hebrew, 'righteousness' meant the faithful performing of all duties proper to a relationship."

As far as the scriptural revelation concerning him, we know nothing of his parents, his beginning, or his end. Melchizedek was without father and mother in the priesthood. Christ was of the tribe of Judah and did not, therefore, have parents, or ancestors, who were priests. Because he had no one before him or after him in the priesthood, Melchizedek is said to be a priest forever. Thus, he was made like Christ, who is eternal (Hebrews 7:1-3).



### **Melchizedek's Superiority to Abraham**

Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham from the best of the spoils. There is a clear distinction between his priesthood and that of Levi. The priests of Levi were the Hebrews' brethren and were commanded to collect tithes. "But Abraham's act of tithing was voluntary and spontaneous, a tribute to Melchizedek's personal greatness" (Lightfoot, p. 139). He was not of Abraham's kindred and, seemingly, had no legal right to force Abraham to tithe, yet Abraham gave him the tithe and received the blessing. Every nation will be blessed through Abraham's seed (Genesis 12:3). Yet, he received a blessing of Melchizedek. It is always true that the one who is blessed is lesser than the one doing the blessing. Sons are blessed of their father (Genesis 27:1-29) and nations are blessed by kings (Hebrews 7:4-7; 2 Samuel 6:18-19).

### **Melchizedek's Superiority to Levi**

The scriptures would also show one that the Aaronic priests died, but there is no record of Melchizedek's so doing. He did not receive his priesthood by birth, nor did he pass it on to his descendants. On the other hand, the Aaronic priesthood was passed on through the family (1 Chronicles 6:49-53). Levi received tithes under the law. Yet, Levi was in the loins of Abraham at the time that Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek, so, being a part of Abraham, Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek. The writer offers this as proof of verse 9. Similar statements would be familiar to the Hebrew reader (Hebrews 7:8-10; Genesis

35:11; 46:26; 1 Kings 8:19).

### **The Imperfections of Levi's Priesthood**

If the end of God's plan for the redemption of man was to come under the Levitical priesthood, there would not have been a need for another priest of the order of Melchizedek. Parenthetically, the writer reminds the reader that redemption under the old law stands or falls with the Levite priest (Galatians 3:21-24). Since the priesthood changed under Christ, the law must also have changed. Priests were important in the Mosaic system. Without their sacrifices, there would be no law. The change in law and some of its effects are noted elsewhere in scripture (2 Corinthians 3:6-14; Galatians 3:19-29; 4:19-31). In Colossians 2:10-17, Paul shows that the order of the priesthood was changed at the cross, since in Christ's crucifixion the law of Moses was nailed to the cross (Hebrews 7:11-12).

Under the law, only those of the house of Aaron could serve at the altar (Numbers 16-28:7). Psalm 110:4 indicates a change was to one day come. Since Jesus was not of Aaron's house, He could not, by law, wait at the altar. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, which was not the priestly tribe (Isaiah 11:1-5; Micah 5:2; Revelation 5:5; Matthew 1; Luke 3). The priesthood of Christ is that of the order of Melchizedek and represents a change from the Aaronic priesthood. Christ was also of the tribe of Judah, which shows a change in the priestly tribe since it was that of Levi. Jesus did not receive his priesthood from a fleshly, perishable, line of men, but from the eternal power of God.

The law of Moses just gave the priesthood to descendants with no thought of other qualifications. Christ received the office of priest because He was eternal. Melchizedek's priesthood was totally uninterrupted, so Christ could only be called a priest after his order once He was raised from the dead and could serve without interruption (Hebrews 7:13-17; Psalm 110:4).

The law of Moses had to be set aside, made void, or abolished before a new law could take effect. The law had to be replaced because it could not bring anything to perfection. The new law is better as it allows one to draw closer to God through the blood of Christ. God's oath in connection with Christ's priesthood stresses its importance. It also shows that this law was to last forever, since God fully keeps his oaths and a Melchizedek priest has no end (Hebrews 7:18-20).

### **The Superiority of Christ's Priesthood**

The Aaronic priesthood was not guaranteed to last forever, since it had no oath. Jesus was made a priest forever by the power of God's oath. A Testament is a will, while a covenant is an agreement, usually between equals. However, if there are conditions in a will there is an element of an agreement. Lightfoot says the word translated "has become" is in the perfect tense, with the sense of "has made and is now making." Jesus is the "surety", or "bondsman" of this agreement. Vine says, "He is the personal guarantee of the terms of the new and better covenant, secured on the ground of His perfect sacrifice" (Hebrews 7:21-22).

The writer next contrasted Christ's priesthood with that of the high priests, who, under the law, were limited in

time of service by the length of their lives. All of the high priests under the Law of Moses died. Christ's priesthood is unchanging since He lives forever. Thus, in the Christian Age there is only one High Priest in contrast to many under Moses' law. Then, Christ will always be ready to help those that seek God through him. He stands ready to plead our case (1 John 2:1), or intercede at God's throne on our behalf. He is able to save completely and eternally. Jesus is just the High Priest man needs. He came to earth as a man, yet remained spotless, without sin. He is now on the throne in heaven and is thus separated from sinners as the High Priest had to be before the Day of Atonement. Now, on that throne, Christ rules with all things under his authority (Hebrews 7:23-26; Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:22-23).

A stark contrast between Christ and Levitical High Priests is made clear when one remembers they had to offer daily sacrifices for their own sins and the sins of the people. Christ, as our High Priest, has sacrificed Himself for our sins once and for all. Under the old law, the High Priest was a man and was subject to human weaknesses. We now have Jesus Christ the perfect Son of God as a High Priest (Hebrews 7:27-28).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. List and discuss some interesting facts about Melchizedek.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What happened between Abraham and Melchizedek? Why is this important?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Explain why you feel it is important for Jesus to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Why do you think God swore when appointing Jesus as a priest?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Why was the law of Moses annulled? How does that hinder or help us?

5. List and discuss some of the key differences between Christ as our High Priest and the Aaronic priesthood.

### **Lesson 9**

# **The New Covenant**

**Hebrews 8:1-13**

## **Jesus' Work As Our High Priest**

Jesus has finished making the only offering necessary and is now seated at the right hand of God in heaven. He is the High Priest in heaven, described here as the sanctuary. He also serves as High Priest in the church, which is the greater part of the true tabernacle. The tabernacle Moses was instructed to build was a shadow of the true tabernacle, or the church (Hebrews 8:1-2).

Since the duty of a priest is to make offerings, Jesus must have something to offer and a place to offer it. He did not make His offering within the sphere of this earth, as the priests of the material tabernacle did, but within a heavenly sphere. He continues to intercede for us, but does not continue to "offer gifts and sacrifices." He could not make His offering on this earth, as the only priesthood authorized on this earth was the Aaronic priesthood. Only the Levites could offer sacrifices on earth (Hebrews 8:3-4; Numbers 18:1-7).

The priests under Moses' law and the tabernacle in which they served were only a shadow of the true substance to come. Exodus 25:40, which is quoted by the writer of Hebrews, proves the tabernacle was built according to a

pattern. The word translated "pattern" primarily means the impression left by a blow. The tabernacle had to be built according to the pattern so it could be a good shadow of the archetype. Christ's ministry is better than that of the Levitical priests by virtue of the better covenant under which He serves. Jesus is the mediator, or go-between for God and man, for this covenant (Hebrews 8:5-6; 1 Timothy 2:5).

### **The Need For A New Covenant**

If the first covenant had been without fault, there would have been no need for a new one. The fault of the first covenant was that man could not find justification before God under it (Romans 3:30; Galatians 2:16; 3:11). When fault was found with the first covenant, a new covenant was promised by the grace of God. The old covenant could not change those people who remained stubborn in their disobedience. A quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34 clearly demonstrates a new covenant was promised. Of course, both covenants come out of the one covenant made with Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. Milligan suggests that the old covenant was a fulfillment of the physical elements of that promise, while the new is a fulfillment of the spiritual elements (Hebrews 8:7-8).

God determined He would no longer deal with the people who wanted to come to Him through the covenant made at Sinai, or the fleshly fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. He could not deal with man through that covenant because man continually broke it. In breaking the covenant they rejected Him as Lord. Once they had rejected Him, God was forced to reject them as His people (Hebrews 8:9).

### **The Better Qualities of the New Covenant**

While continuing to refer to the quotation from Jeremiah, the author shows the better qualities of the new covenant. For instance, the law of Moses was written on tables of stone (Exodus 34:1, 23), but this new covenant would be implanted in the mind of man and written on his heart. In 2 Corinthians 3, the writer explains the advantages of this. No longer will man be just obeying the written letter of the law. Now man will be obeying the spirit of the law which he will know from within himself. Man would no longer need some physical image to worship. Under the new covenant man would have a God, seen through the eye of faith (Hebrews 8:10; 11:1-6).

Under a physical covenant, each member of the kingdom had to be taught to know God. This is not true under the new spiritual covenant. To become a part of Christ's kingdom one must already know God's will and be taught of God (Isaiah 54:13; John 6:44-45). Now, one must know God to be a part of the kingdom (John 14:1-6, 15; Hebrews 11:6) and everyone is invited (Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17). Sin could not be removed under the old covenant (9:9; 10:4), but under the new, God cannot remember our sins, as Jesus' blood washes them all away (Hebrews 8:11-12; 9:9; 10:4; 1 John 1:7-9; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 1:5).

As history, the Old Testament is still valuable and full of lessons concerning God's dealings with man (1 Corinthians 10:12), but as a covenant its usefulness to man is past. Jesus took it out of the way as a religious institution (Colossians 2:14) and, as Milligan would point out, it died



as a civil institution at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Where does Jesus serve as a priest? Why is he seated?
2. Why did God tell Moses to "make all things according to the pattern?"
3. Explain the role of Jesus as a mediator.
4. In what sense did God find fault with the first covenant?

5. The law of Moses is called the old covenant. List some of the things that are different under Christ's new covenant.

### **Lesson 10**

## **The Better Atonement**

**Hebrews 9:1-28**

### **The Earthly Sanctuary Under Moses' Law**

The author of Hebrews tells his readers that the first covenant had rules and regulations for the worship of God that were of Divine origin. Also, the holy dwelling place of that covenant (the sanctuary) was a material one made with hands. "Sanctuary" refers to the tabernacle as a whole. For proof, the writer says there was a tabernacle, which would be the sanctuary. The first room the High Priest would pass through on his way to the Holy of Holies would be the Holy Place, which was the east room of the tabernacle. On its south side stood the lampstand covered with gold (Exodus 25:31-40). On the north side was the table of shewbread (Exodus 25:23-30). The shewbread was made of fine flour and baked into twelve cakes, representing the twelve tribes (Leviticus 24:5-9). They were placed in two rows on the table every sabbath and the old loaves were eaten by the priests (Hebrews 9:1-2).

The first veil covered the doorway), while the second divided the Holy Place and Most Holy (Exodus 26:36-37, 31-34). The Most Holy contained the golden censer (Leviticus 16:12) and the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:10-16). Inside the ark was a golden pot containing an omerful of manna (Exodus 16:31-34), Aaron's rod that had budded (Numbers 17:1-11), and the two tables of the

covenant (Exodus 25:16; Deuteronomy 10:1-5). Only the tables of stone were left in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 8:9). On the ark was a cover which was called the mercy seat (Hebrews 9:3-5; Numbers 7:89). "The protective wings of the two cherubim provided the place where, symbolically speaking, God dwelled among his people (Psalm 80:1; 99:1)" (Lightfoot, p. 165).

### **Lessons from the Service in the Tabernacle**

Having finished this brief description of the tabernacle and its furniture, the writer began to tell about some of the things done there. There were daily ministrings in the Holy Place (Exodus 27:21; 30:7-8). The Most Holy Place was entered only on one day during the year and then only by the High Priest. He performed the duties listed in Leviticus 16. His main purpose was to offer a sacrifice for the unwitting and ignorant sins of the people and himself (Numbers 15). All these things were done by and through the direction of the Holy Spirit "indicating," in order to make plain, that the way into the Most Holy Place was not yet opened to man. Such should have caused anticipation of the new covenant which was designed by God to open the way. It was only after Christ had died, nailing the old covenant to the cross, that the way was made clear (Hebrews 9:6-8).

The sacrifices of the tabernacle were symbolic. It would seem that the tabernacle and worship system of the Jewish people is compared to the Holy Place of the tabernacle. The world had to go through this period of Jewish history in order to reach the Christian age and the way to heaven, represented by the Most Holy Place. So, the old law leads to the new and not until the old law is gone can

one reach the new. Sacrifices and gifts were offered under that system, but perfection could not be obtained until the new went into effect. "The Levitical code contained many instructions with reference to clean and unclean foods. (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14:3-21). There were also laws as to drink (Leviticus 10:9; Numbers 6:2-3). There were numerous laws on washings. There were washings for the high priest (Leviticus 16:4, 24), washings for the priests (Exodus 30:18-21; Leviticus 8:6), washing for the Levites (Numbers 8:6-7), washings for lepers and unclean persons (Leviticus 14:8-9; Numbers 19), and washings of garments and vessels (Leviticus 6:27-28)" (Lightfoot, p. 168). Despite all these outward washings, no one was made inwardly clean. These external laws were in effect until the "time of reformation." Jesus said there would be a new age and He would bring about a regeneration, which I believe would mark the time spoken of previously. Thus, we are forgiven of our sins when we are regenerated (Hebrews 9:9-10; Colossians 1:13-14).

### **Christ's Blood, His Sacrifice**

The Old Testament pointed to Christ's coming when all the things of the past were to change. Christ has a more perfect tabernacle which is his church, as Milligan states. Christ entered heaven once with His blood to make an offering for all the people's sins. This would be in contrast with the annual entry into the Most Holy with the blood of a calf or young bullock already mentioned as a part of the old law. Then, under the new covenant the ransom price has been paid and will be valid eternally.

Under the old law, the people were cleansed by the blood of bulls and goats. The blood of bulls and goats was

used in several different sacrifices, including those on the Day of Atonement. The ashes of a red heifer were kept for the water of separation (Numbers 19). Those who were unclean, especially because of touching the dead, had to use this water to be cleansed. This cleansing was only ceremonial and outward, thus a purification "of the flesh." In contrast, the writer describes the cleansing effect of the blood of Christ. He gave His own body in complete obedience to God (Philippians 2:5-8). With the "conscience" man understands the will of God. While the blood of bulls and goats could only cleanse flesh, Christ's blood cleanses the conscience. Jesus offered Himself through His own divine and eternal spirit. The cleansing under the old law was only temporary. Christ's pure blood stands as an effective sacrifice until the end of time (Hebrews 9:11-14).

### **The New Covenant Was Validated by Christ's Death**

Since it is a better sacrifice, Christ is the mediator of a new and better covenant, or will. It is through His death that the people of the old covenant will receive an actual (not ceremonial) cleansing from their sins. All of those from the past who were children of God can only receive the final promises of their covenants if Christ's blood ratifies their agreements, which it does. It is a fact that Christ had to die so that all of the promises of God's covenants with man could go into effect. No one could claim eternal life as a part of his inheritance until Christ died, since His death ratified all past and present covenant promises.

Summing up what he has already said, the writer tells his readers blood has to be shed for a testament, or covenant, to be in effect (see comment on 7:22). To prove the point,

the writer related the story of the sprinkling of blood performed by Moses in the dedicating of the first covenant (Exodus 24:1-8). That sprinkling was with the blood of oxen, which could not take away sins (10:4). That is why the blood of Christ still had to be shed for the sins of those who died under the first covenant. Further, Moses had said that the blood sprinkled ratified the testament. The fact that God "commanded" them shows that this covenant was proposed by God and agreed to by the children of Israel. The importance of blood is further seen in the sprinkling of the tabernacle and all its vessels. Indeed, most acts of purification were by blood, under the law, and all atonement for sin was made with blood (Hebrews 9:15-22; Exodus 40:9-11; Leviticus 17:11).

### **Results of Christ's Entrance Into Heaven**

The very existence of Israel and all of the promises that she was to receive was dependent upon blood. The superior sacrifice of God's only Son was intended to cleanse all of the anti-types of the Jewish Tabernacle. Also, Christ's shed blood was used for the cleansing of heavenly things. Therefore, it had to be shed. While the blood of the old covenant was sufficient for its purpose, only the blood of Christ could purify the anti-types of the Jewish tabernacle and the heavenly things. The sanctuary Christ entered was heaven, the home of spiritual beings. Thus, a spiritual sacrifice was required. Christ is now before God's throne and will represent sinful man (Hebrews 9:23-24; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1).

Having seen Christ's blood is needed, it is important to recognize continual sheddings of it are not required. If there were a need for yearly sacrifices to cleanse man's sins,

those sacrifices would have been required from the fall of Adam to the present. The single offering of Christ was all that was needed and is able to cleanse the sins of man from the time of his fall to the end of the earth. Christ came at the "completion of the ages," thus the last age of God's dealings with man. Jesus made His sacrifice at the beginning of this last age (Hebrews 9:24-26; 1:2; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 Peter 1:2).

While the High Priest had to make an annual sacrifice to cleanse his own sins and the sins of the people, Christ, who was without sin, has no need of those yearly cleansings. Also, His sacrifice was perfect for the task and only needed once. So, like all men, He had to die once and face the consequences of sin. Of course, the sin He bore was not His own. "Appointed" means "reserved for," or "laid up." Jesus came as a sin bearer, or sin offering, the first time, but He will not do so the second time. We as Christians are like the people under the old law who awaited the return of the High Priest from the Holy of Holies. Jesus will come again as He promised (John 14:1-6) and as the writer assures his readers (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Christ's second coming is also mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, where we learn of the reward Christians will receive and the punishment non-Christians will receive (Hebrews 9:27-28).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Give a brief description of the tabernacle and its contents.
2. Describe the services performed in the tabernacle and some lessons which can be learned from the same.
3. What differences do you see in Jesus' service?
4. How is the statement about the death of a testator significant to you?
5. Explain the importance of blood in our relationship with God.
6. What facts make you appreciate the sacrifice of Christ?



## Lesson 11

# The Better Sacrifice Calls for Faithful Service

Hebrews 10:1-37

### Sacrifices Under Moses' Law Were Insufficient

The blood of the law was not sufficient to cleanse men of sin. The law was just a shadow, or vague outline, of the good things that were to come under the new covenant. Since it was not the image, or true body, the law and its sacrifices could not continually cleanse man. The power was simply not available, under that system to cleanse man of sin. If the blood of the old covenant had been sufficient, there would have been no need to make a sacrifice every year to wash away the same sins. Once sin has been washed away, there is no need to cleanse man of that sin any longer. Yet, the sins of the people under the law of Moses were the cause of many sacrifices. Certain sins caused sacrifices to be made daily, weekly, monthly and at the three yearly festivals (Exodus 29:38-46; Numbers 28:9-10, 11-15; Leviticus 23).

Beyond that, there was an annual day of atonement on which sacrifices were offered for the sins of the priests and the people. Even after the cleansing of that day, a scapegoat had to be sent into the wilderness bearing the iniquities of the land (Leviticus 16:11-15, 20-22). Moses' law did not have a provision allowing for the complete cleansing of man from sin. In fact, its repeated sacrifices

served only to remind man of his sinfulness. The benefits of any sacrifice seem to have lasted only till the next annual Day of Atonement. Hence, remembrance was made of sin, the same sin, every year and a new atonement made. Such is the case because the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin (Hebrews 10:1-4).

### **Christ, the Better Sacrifice**

Since Christ, the better sacrifice, was needed to cleanse man, He came into the world saying the words of Psalm 49:6-8. David recognized burnt offerings did not fulfill his needs. Milligan notes the exact quotation in the King James Version had the words, "ears hast thou digged out for me." It means He was made a fit servant, as Exodus 21:5-6 indicates. For Christ to be a fit servant, He had to have a body to offer as His sacrifice. Thus, our reading, "a body You have prepared for Me." The great weakness of burnt offerings and sacrifices was that God had no pleasure in them. Milligan and Delitzsch agree David spoke "from the very soul of the Antitype," that is Christ himself, when he said he came to do God's will. The Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible, are the volume of the book which spoke of Christ.

God did not want sacrifices instead of obedience to His will (1 Samuel 15:22). So Christ came to do His will in sacrificing Himself. In contrast to the sacrifices of the old law, Christ could fulfill the will of God. It was for this cause that Christ did away with the old law and established the new. It is this second, or new, law which is the will of God. By it we are sanctified through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ. This sacrifice completed the job of sanctification "once for all" (Hebrews 10:5-10).

### **Christ Is Now Seated At God's Right Hand**

The many priests of the old covenant stood performing sacrificial duties day after day. The desired result of cleansing from sin was not attained. In contrast, Christ only made His sacrifice once and sat down with His work completed. There was no need for numerous offerings since God's will was accomplished when the one sacrifice was finished. Thus, Christ sat down at God's right hand when the sacrifice had been made. He now awaits the fulfillment of Psalm 110:1. He will sit in His position of authority until all His enemies are subjected to Him (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). He does not need to make daily offerings for sin because the one offering of Himself was enough. It is through that one offering that Jesus was able to perfect all those who would come to Him and subject their will to His commands. This would, of course, include all of those who had already lived in subjection to God's commands, such as the patriarchs and the children of Israel (Hebrews 10:11-14).

For further proof of his point, the writer quoted the Holy Spirit's words from Jeremiah 31:33-34, which clearly indicates he thought it was inspired. This loose quotation shows that during days gone by, God had intended there should be a new covenant. Under it people's sins would be fully blotted out. Where such complete forgiveness is obtainable, as is the case under the new covenant, there is no further need for further sin offerings. (Hebrews 10:15-18).

### **Entering Heaven Through The Veil of Christ's Flesh**

Clearly, Christians should have confidence they will one day enter heaven. They are able to enter, not through a lifeless law, but through a living Christ. The only way to enter is through the torn veil of Jesus' flesh. The Christian has a Great Priest, which Milligan says is a better rendering than High Priest. His greatness comes from His position. The house over which He serves is God's, the church. Ultimately that house is also heaven (1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 8:2).

The Christian is to draw near to God with a true heart, which does not contain sin and deceitfulness. He must have complete trust in God and His word. All the evil which would cause him to have a guilty conscience before God must be washed from his heart (Hebrews 10:19-22). When the writer says hearts must be sprinkled, it appears he refers to the sprinkling of Christ's blood. To become a Christian, one must be washed in Christ's blood. Washing must refer to the act of baptism (Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5; Acts 22:16). To remain free from sin, he must walk in the light, thereby receiving constant cleansing (1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 1:7).

### **Holding Fast the Confession of Hope**

A home in heaven is the sincere hope of every Christian. The writer encouraged his readers toward faith in the one who promised such a home. He urged them to hold fast to Christ and His teachings since He is the object of the Christian's confession of faith. As Christian brothers and sisters, we should think about one another with the goal of finding ways to encourage each other to love and good works. Indeed, love will bring one to do good works (John 14:15).

One means of encouraging one another would be public worship, the purpose of which is to edify (1 Corinthians 14:26). Therefore, the writer told his readers to attend those assemblies and not forsake them. It was an ideal time to stir all the people and encourage them along the road to heaven. This was especially important as they could see the coming "day" (Hebrews 10: 23-25). This writer believes the "Day approaching" refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. The writer obviously believed the day was imminent and warned his first century readers of that fact. Today, we need to be constantly aware of the approaching judgment day. While we cannot know it is imminent, we can be sure we will all face judgment (Matthew 25:13; Hebrews 9:27).

### **The Danger of Willful Sin**

Forsaking the assemblies was a willful sin which, along with other willful sins, pushed away the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, there was no more sacrifice available to the one who did such. Instead, he could only look forward to judgment and eternal damnation. Lightfoot points out that God's judgment of the wicked is often pictured as fire (Isaiah 66:15-16; Zephaniah 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

People who openly rebelled against Moses' law were unable to receive forgiveness (Deuteronomy 17:2-7). Since we have a covenant that is so much better, the punishment should be much worse (Luke 12:47-48). We know God and are assured He will keep His promises. God will reward man according to the deeds done in the flesh, as He promised. We also know that God will judge all people, including His own (Deuteronomy 32:35-36). Knowing

these facts makes us know it would be a terrible thing to be a condemned sinner (Hebrews 10:26-31; Matthew 25:46).

### **Believing To The Saving Of The Soul**

Just as he did in chapter 6, the writer turned to encourage the Hebrew brethren. He wanted them to remember the days of persecution they previously endured. This was because they had turned from being children of darkness to being children of light. They had become the subjects of public insults and reproaches, or reproachful names. They also endured afflictions, including several kinds of abuse. They had even become friends with those who were suffering such trials, knowing it would mean like sufferings for themselves. Milligan says verse 34 should begin, "For ye sympathized with them who were in bonds." Not only did they do that, but they also joyfully endured the losses which they had to suffer for being Christians. The reason they were able to endure all of these earthly losses was the heavenly reward awaiting them (Matthew 6:19-21). The writer did not want them to become afraid and cast away their only hope. That hope was the way to receive the promised reward of heaven. Patient endurance in times of trial would cause them to continue in God's will. It also would allow them to receive the promise of eternal life (Hebrews 10:32-36; Galatians 6:9).

The Hebrew brethren had apparently cried out asking, "How long will our suffering last?" In answer, the writer quotes from Isaiah 26:20 and Habakkuk 2:3-4. God promises those who will patiently wait an imminent end to the suffering. This could well refer to the coming of Christ at the destruction of Jerusalem, as in verse 25. This coming is one of providence, not necessarily a literal, physical

coming. Historians tell us unbelieving Jews were taken captive or slain on that day, but the whole congregation of the Lord's church at Jerusalem had left the city and escaped unharmed. The just man will be justified by his faith. However, the one who has been just, but has drawn back from the faith will not please the Lord. The writer then encouraged his readers by saying he and they were not members of that group which would turn from the faith. Rather, they were of the group that is strong in the faith which is able to save the soul. They were of the group that would keep on believing till salvation "to the uttermost" (Hebrews 7:25) has been received (Hebrews 10:37-39).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think the sacrifices under the law of Moses were not adequate to take away sin?
2. Explain the importance of the sacrifice of Jesus' body.
3. What significant difference do you see between the Old Testament sacrifices and that of Christ? Between the Old and New Covenants?
4. Why and how should we hold fast the "confession of our hope?"



5. List some reasons for not drawing back from faithful service.

## Lesson 12

# The Hall of Faith Part 1

Hebrews 11:1-16

### Understanding Faith

"Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1 A.S.V.). It appears the King James translators got the full meaning of the word "substance" from the rest of the chapter. They said that it is the substance of things hoped for and, to the man of faith, it is like a substance that can be grasped. Similarly, the word "conviction," which suggests something based on firm evidence, presents the fuller meaning of the word translated "evidence" in the King James. Notice, the "elders," or people of older times, such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, etc., received a good report from God by exhibiting faith. Through faith men who trust in God know how the worlds came into existence. By it, such men also know this earth was made out of nothing. All that was created came from God. God spoke everything into existence (Hebrews 11:2-3).

### Faith From Creation to the Flood

The faith of Abel is seen through his actions (Genesis 4:3-5; 1 John 3:11-12). Since Paul says faith comes by hearing God's word (Romans 10:17), it is clear

that Abel was obedient to God's command. Milligan believes it was this obedient attitude which made Abel's sacrifice a better one (1 Samuel 15:22), causing him, in the words of Milligan, to act "strictly in compliance with the will of God." It was through that faith that Abel obtained his witness and God acknowledged that faith. Abel still speaks today through his example of faith (Hebrews 11:4).

Enoch is spoken of in Genesis 5:21-24 and Jude 14-16. Genesis says that "God took him." Coupled with Hebrews 11:5, it would appear that he was translated to heaven much as Elijah was (2 Kings 2:1-12). Enoch did not have to experience death as other men do, but was taken up from the earth, not to be found on it any longer. God could testify to the fact that Enoch had pleased him. One must believe, or have faith, in God before he can set out to please Him. I would not obey someone who was not my superior or someone that I did not think deserved my obedience. One would simply not obey God if he did not believe in Him. Also, our coming to God is based on our belief in his promises of a reward (Hebrews 11:6; John 14:1-6).

The story of Noah is found in Genesis 5:32-8:22. It is pointed out that Noah's faith caused him to act as God told him to and build an ark. There was no sign at that time that there would be a flood. By his actions of trust, or faith, in God, Noah saved his household. By those same actions, he condemned a world that did not believe God's word. Noah also became the "heir of the righteousness" through his actions of faith (Hebrews 11:7; Genesis 9:8-17).

### **The Faith of Abraham**

Like Noah, Abraham displayed actions of faith when

he received the call from God (Genesis 12:1-3), even though he was to leave the safety of his homeland and go to a place unknown to him. He moved by faith and was promised the land as an inheritance (Genesis 12:7). Fudge says Abraham's faith is mentioned in other Bible references (see Genesis 15:6; Nehemiah 9:8; Romans 4; and Galatians 3:6-9). He acted by faith as he lived in a land that was not truly to become his people's homeland for generations (Genesis 15:12-21; Acts 7:5). Isaac, his son, and Jacob, his grandson, also lived in tents, which were not permanent dwellings, accepting that homeless life so that they could receive a better one. They chose not to live in the cities of their day and chose to be a semi-nomadic people (Genesis 16:11; 33:17) looking forward to a better city (Hebrews 11:8-9; Genesis 16:11; 33:17).

Abraham left his own home and was willing to live in tents because he looked forward to a heavenly home, not an earthly one. Since Isaac and Jacob also lived in tents, it seems they too had this goal in mind. Remember, Abraham and Sarah lacked the needed faith to believe they would have a child. Despite God's promise to make of him a great nation in Genesis 12:1-3, Abraham questioned whether a servant would be his heir (Genesis 15:1-4). Abraham and Sarah tried to help God out by using Sarah's handmaid Hagar in Genesis 16. In Genesis 18:12-15, Sarah laughed to herself at the thought of bearing a child. However, the writer of Hebrews indicates that Sarah's doubts were overcome by her faith. Remember, all of this occurred when she was barren and past child-bearing age (Hebrews 11:10-11; Genesis 17:15-21).

Because of Abraham and Sarah's faith (Romans 4:18-21), they, though dead in the reproductive sense, were

able to bear that son of promise. His descendants were to be many and would obtain the land of promise (Hebrews 11:12; Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5; 22:17; Isaiah 51:1-2; Ezekiel 33:24).

### **The Hope of Heaven**

Milligan points out the meaning of the expression "these all died in faith," saying, "they died as they had lived, in faith." He goes on to say that the all referred to includes Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. God had made several promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), but he only saw their fulfillment in the future, through the eye of faith. Through their actions, these said that they were seeking a country of their own. Every man desires a place to call home and these were no exception. There was nothing to prevent them from returning to their earthly home, but they never exhibited that desire. In fact, they did not seek an earthly home, but a better place than any earthly home, heaven. Because of their faith and the things they sacrificed through that faith, God prepared a home for them. God was not ashamed of them, as he identified himself with them (Hebrews 11:13-16; Exodus 3:15; Matthew 22:32; Revelation 21:3).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Explain what faith is and what it does for us.
2. What in the life of Abel makes one know he had faith?
3. What about the life of Enoch demonstrates his faith?
4. How did Abraham display faith in his life?

5. Why did the faithful consider themselves strangers and pilgrims on earth?

### Lesson 13

## The Hall of Faith Part 2

Hebrews 11:17-40

### The Faith of the Fathers

God asked Abraham to take that son of promise, Isaac, and offer him up as a sacrifice (Hebrews 11:17; Genesis 22:1-14), thus causing his faith to be tested to its fullest. Yet, Abraham was ready to obey God completely, even to the sacrificing of this son of promise. Remember, Isaac was the only son of his kind (Genesis 17:14-21) and only through him could the promises of God be kept. Lightfoot writes, "The word translated offered is in the perfect tense, while the expression was ready to offer up is in the imperfect. The imperfect tense vividly portrays unfinished action: Abraham was in the act of offering Isaac when God intervened. The perfect tense expresses the idea that the demands in the sacrifice were fully met, and that, from an ideal standpoint and as far as Abraham was concerned, the offering was a completed action."

Though Abraham had other children, God had decreed Isaac would be the only one considered as being from the regular line of descent (Genesis 21:12; 25:4-5). The greatness of Abraham's faith is seen in his belief that God could raise Isaac from the dead. Milligan suggests, in agreement with other commentators, that Abraham did receive Isaac figuratively raised from the dead and this is

that of which the end of the verse speaks (Hebrews 11:18-19). In Abraham's mind, or figuratively, Isaac was already dead, so he figuratively received him back alive. I would say that Jesus Christ was very much like Isaac and could very well serve as the antitype of Isaac who was thus raised up.

Isaac did indeed bless his sons through faith (Genesis 27:27-40), since he could not see the way his sons' lives would be lived. It was also in faith that Jacob blessed Joseph's sons (Genesis 48:1-20) setting Ephraim, the youngest, before Manasseh. He also worshipped, believing that Joseph would bury him as promised (Genesis 47:29-31). Joseph died in faith, just as his father had. He believed that God would deliver His people as promised and, because of that belief, made his relatives promise to carry his bones with them (Hebrews 11:20-22; Genesis 50:22-26).

### **Moses and Faith**

At his birth, Moses' parents displayed a great faith in God. They knew Pharaoh had commanded all male children be thrown in the river, but they hid their son three months (Exodus 1:22; 2:1-3.) God rewarded their faith by allowing their son to be spared (Exodus 2:4-10). When Moses grew up, it was out of faith that he rejected the Egyptians in favor of his Hebrew brethren (Exodus 2:11-12). Rather than turn away and let the Egyptian beat the Hebrew slave, Moses chose to throw off the pleasures of the sinful Egyptians and risk the suffering of the Hebrews (Hebrews 11:23-25).

Moses gave up these luxuries and chose to suffer the reproach Christ and all believers in God have to bear. He

did this so he could receive the reward of heaven. Milligan believes this to be the reproach that Christ bore while on earth and the reproach that he bears through the person of all true believers. Christ is the righteousness of all the redeemed (2 Corinthians 5:21) and the writer indicates he believes Christ suffered afflictions in his body. When Moses left Egypt, he was afraid because others knew he had slain the Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-15). However, the Hebrew writer says he did not abandon Egypt out of fear, but faith. Through the eye of faith, Moses was able to see Christ, the invisible (1 Timothy 1:17; 6:14-16), and take courage in the fact that Christ is faithful in keeping his promises (Hebrews 11:26-27).

Moses and the children of Israel kept the passover, as God had commanded, believing that God would destroy the firstborn of Egypt and save the Israelites (Exodus 12:1-36). It was by faith that the Israelites were able to pass through the Red Sea and the Egyptians were drowned (Hebrews 11:28-29; Exodus 14:10-31).

### **Those Who Overcame by Faith**

It is by faith that the walls of Jericho fell (Joshua 6:1-21). Only faith that obedience of Jehovah and his servant would work could have destroyed such a city in such a way. They showed faith by obeying God and believing He would keep His promise. Because she believed in God's power and hid the spies (Joshua 2:1-21), Rahab was not destroyed along with the city of Jericho. She became the wife of Salmon and bore a son named Boaz, both of whom are included in the Messianic line (Hebrews 11:30-31; Matthew 1:5).



The writer then explained he could go on but would stop for lack of time. He then listed several men of faith who would be familiar to his readers (Judges 6:11-18; 4:1-5; 13:1-16; 31; 1 Samuel 16:1-1 Kings 2:12; 1 Samuel 1:1-7). Through faith Barak conquered the Canaanites (Judges 4:4-24), Gideon defeated the Midianites (Judges 7:1-23), Jephthah subdued the Ammonites (Judges 11:1-33), and Samson slew the Philistines (Judges 13:24-16:31). Fudge says Samuel and David both "wrought righteousness by the public administration of divine justice." (2 Samuel 8:15; Psalm 101). Canaan was received because of faith (Joshua 21:43-45; 1 Kings 8:56.) The lions mouths were stopped because of Daniel's faith (Daniel 6).

Fire's violence was quenched for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3.) Elijah "escaped the edge of the sword" (1 Kings 19), as did Elisha and Jeremiah (2 Kings 6; Jeremiah 36). Gideon would fit the remainder of the descriptions (Hebrews 11:32-34). Fudge notes the case of the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:17ff.), the Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4:17ff.), and Eleazar, the scribe of 2 Maccabees 6:18-31, as some of the characters referred to in Hebrews 11:35. These could have escaped the pain and suffering they endured had they been willing to deny God. Instead, they chose to suffer and be raised to a heavenly home later. Some of the hardships they had to endure are listed in verse 36. This could have been an encouragement for people who were also to face times of trial. Milligan mentions the mockings of Samson (Judges 16:25) and the beatings, bonds, and imprisonment of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:2, 7; 32:2-3). He then went on to cite 2 Chronicles 24:20-22; the works of Josephus; Jeremiah 26:23; 1 Kings 17:3-9; 19:3-14; and other accounts of the prophets' lives to show some of the other things described by

the writer (Hebrews 11:37).

### **A Better Thing Is Provided for Those Following Christ**

The way the men and women of faith lived set them above the people around them, much like Noah who was also a man of faith (Genesis 6-9). The writer went on to conclude this brief commentary on their lives by noting all of these people lived by faith, yet none of them saw the promised coming of the Messiah. Despite that fact, they lived lives of good report and were known for their acts of faith.

So, the Hebrew Christians who read this book had a better thing provided for them. They had seen, or knew of, the coming of the Messiah and they had a better covenant (Luke 10:24). Their sins could not be completely removed without Christ, but neither could the men of faith fully reach perfection until Christ had died. So, the men of faith were faithful to the end, yet we have something better than they. For this reason, the writer called on his readers to be, at least, as faithful as the men previously listed (Hebrews 11:38-40).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Briefly explain why the following are considered to be faithful.

A. Abraham -

B. Isaac -

C. Jacob -

D. Joseph -

E. Moses' parents -

F. Moses -

G. Children of Israel -

H. Rahab -

2. In what sense has God provided something better for us?

## Lesson 14

# The Challenge of Faith in the Christian Age

Hebrews 12:1-29

### Reasons to Endure Suffering

Since there have been so many men of faith before, the writer asked his readers to follow their example. The men and women of the previous chapter are witnesses of the faith and are now watching us to see who will be faithful. They are described as a "cloud of witnesses" because, like a modern stadium, the Hebrew people were familiar with the amphitheater from which spectators watched the athletic games of those days. The people would be like a cloud looking down upon those competing. Much like those competing, the writer called upon his readers to lay aside anything that would slow their progress. He again warned against the sin of unbelief, which would not only slow, but probably stop the Christian runner. Finally, he encouraged all those Christian runners to endure all of the trials and persevere to the end (Hebrews 12:1).

Christians can be encouraged by the faithful of the past, especially Jesus. We should look to Christ as the One who leads the way in faith and brought the faith to its completion. By keeping Jesus ever in our mind's eye, our best example will constantly be before us. Christ is especially a good example since He came to this earth to

seek and save the lost and was willing to give up His life to that end. In fact, that is the reason Jesus died a shameful death upon the tree. A death which was set aside for the worst members of society was chosen for Jesus, who was without sin. Jesus bore the contradiction, or opposition, of the very sinners that He came to seek and save. If Jesus could do that, it should be an encouragement to those of us running the Christian race. We can look to Jesus, who has already run a very hard race, and be encouraged to keep on running (Hebrews 12:2-3).

Another sport in the games of the first century was very similar to boxing. However, they used heavy pieces of metal in their gloves to draw blood and kill. The Hebrew Christians had not yet resisted sin, both in others and in self, to the point of a bloody death. Others, such as Stephen, had done so. Likewise, Christ, our supreme example had suffered to the point of a bloody death and was likely still in the author's mind (Hebrews 12:4).

### **Suffering Can Be a Form of Discipline**

There is a hint the Hebrews were slowing in their fight or race and had forgotten the exhortations of their childhood. The author quoted Proverbs 3:11-12 as an exhortation, reminding the Hebrews God was not angry with them. Instead, He was showing His love by "chastening" them. That is, He corrects and disciplines, as one would a child, in order to help educate them. Without such chastening, the Christian would not know God loved him. Discipline helps the Christian to grow up in the right way (Hebrews 12:5-6; Revelation 3:19).

The child that goes without discipline knows he is

really not God's child. Rather, he would be an illegitimate child, whose education is often neglected. The writer emphasized that discipline is a part of true sonship. Without it one would be a spiritually illegitimate child, which would be a disgrace. So, instead of murmuring because of chastisement, Hebrew brethren should have been happy (Hebrews 12:7-8).

The penalty for disobedience to parents under the law was death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Parents were to be held in a position of respect and honor (Exodus 20:12). Yet, it was their job to chasten the child so that it might be properly educated. The Hebrews had obeyed these fleshly parents, who could make mistakes. So, the writer reasonably expected them to obey God, who is perfect and able to rule in a perfect way. Earthly parents only correct for a short time then leave the grown child to go his own way, making his own mistakes. Yet, God stays with His children, constantly guiding them so they might one day reach an eternal reward. Of course, no one enjoys discipline when it is being given, but it is intended to bring forth good fruit. However, this good fruit only comes if the person who is disciplined lives by the law that is established through the discipline (Hebrews 12:9-11).

### **An Exhortation to Continue to the End of the Race**

The writer urged the Hebrews to take strength from knowing God loved them and continue the race. To aid in this, he encouraged them to choose as straight and even a path as possible. Following such a course prevents jostling weaker ones and making it more difficult for them to run the race to its end. They were also encouraged to maintain peaceful relations with all those around them. This would

make the running easier both with fellow runners and through a country that could be hostile if provoked (Hebrews 12:12-14).

The writer exhorted them to carefully watch so no one would fall behind to the point of not being able to complete the race. He warned against sin in the camp that might cause the whole group to fall out of the race. Particularly, he warned against one who might become so wrapped up in the lusts of this world that he would throw off the religion of God and sell his birthright as a Christian. One who did this would be like Esau, who sold his birthright for some meat to eat. By doing this, Esau showed how lightly he thought of the promises from God that were included in his birthright. Later, when he wanted the blessing that was a part of that birthright, he was rejected. There was no way to change the effects of the selling of his birthright, even though he sought the blessing sincerely in tears (Hebrews 12:15-17).

### **Better Access to God than Was at Sinai**

So, a careful watch should be kept to avoid the kind of attitude that would cause one to give up his birthright. This is especially true since we labor under a new covenant. Esau lived during the Patriarchal Age, when God spoke to the fathers and directed the family. In the Mosaic Age, God spoke on the mountain, but the people were not allowed to approach Him. The awe inspiring events on Mount Sinai actually caused the people to beg that they should not hear any more (Exodus 19:16, 19; 20:1-7; 20:19). The people were very much afraid at that time and the writer revealed the reason for their fear by quoting Exodus 19:12-13. Even Moses was afraid, as the writer reveals through the



inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 12:18-21).

Christians do not come to a mountain in fear, but to the throne of God, which is heaven. Believers also were described as coming to a general assembly, which Milligan says is one of angels around the throne of God. It is representative of the joyous multitude that will assemble around God's throne and celebrate His praises (Revelation 5:11; 7:11-12). The assembly, or church, of the firstborn is a reference to the faithful saints who will, as the firstborn does, receive their birthright at the coming of Christ. That they will receive these rights is indicated by Luke 10:20 and Revelation 21:27. All of the redeemed will also be before the throne of God and they shall receive a just reward (Hebrews 12:22-23).

Just as Moses was with the people at Mount Sinai, so will Christ be at the throne of God as mediator for His brethren. In being close to Christ, we are also close to his blood. Abel's blood, being shed by Cain, called for vengeance. Christ's blood, which was shed voluntarily, calls for mercy. So, the writer exhorted the Hebrews to heed the voice of God who now speaks through Jesus, His Son (Hebrews 1:1). The people who did not listen to God under the old covenant, when he spoke through Moses, did not escape. So, we should especially not expect to get away with rejecting the voice of God under this new covenant (Hebrews 12:24-25).

### **An Invitation to Come to the Unshakable Kingdom**

The earth shook when God spoke to his people at Sinai. The reference to a second shaking comes from Haggai 2:6-9. This shaking would be directly related with

the coming of the Messiah, who is represented as the desire of all nations. It is to continue until all the things that can be shaken, or are perishable, have been removed and only the unshakable, or eternal things, remain. Christ's kingdom is the main unshakable thing that will be left. This is in contrast with the kingdom of fleshly Israel constituted at Sinai, which was removed with the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 (Hebrews 12:26-27).

Since Christians abide in a kingdom that is unshakable, we should strive to obey God in love so that we might continue to receive His grace and remain in the kingdom. Note: The kingdom is spoken of as already present, which is contrary to premillennialism. The writer quoted Deuteronomy 4:24 to give a further incentive for remaining in the kingdom that is immovable. Those who become disobedient and are found outside that kingdom will be punished by God as the apostates they are (Hebrews 12:28-29)!

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What things can a Christian racer do to better run life's race?
2. What purpose might the Lord have in chastening us?
3. Explain how our relations with fellow Christians and other men might effect our race.
4. To what mount does the writer say we have come? What encouragement does he suggest we can find there?

5. Give some reasons we should pay attention to God's words today.

### Lesson 15

## **An Exhortation to Faithful Living**

Hebrews 13:1-25

### **The Christian's Daily Duties**

The author exhorted the Hebrew brethren to continue loving one another as members of the Christian family. He seems to assume that they are aware of the instruction of the law of Moses (Leviticus 19:34) and exhorts them to continue in such loving displays of hospitality. He reminds them that some have entertained angels without knowing it, (Genesis 18:2-10; 19:1-3) thus showing that there are advantages to such hospitality. The greatest advantage would seem to be the display of love that must have gained a good name for Christians (Hebrews 13:1-2).

Further, they were encouraged to be mindful of those who were bound and in prison. They, especially those who were prisoners because of wearing the name of Christ, deserved the sympathy of a loving people (Hebrews 13:3).

It was also important for followers of Jesus to exhibit proper conduct in marriage, since God established it as the proper place to satisfy natural sexual desires. At the same time, the writer of Hebrews warned against the sins that so often slip in on those who do not keep their marriages honorable in all points (Hebrews 13:4).

The author exhorted his readers to stay away from the world's greed. He asked them to be happy in the state in which they found themselves. This is more readily done when one remembers God will not forsake the righteous (Psalm 37:25). All things will be for the best as long as God is on one's side (Romans 8:28, 31). This realization should help one to affirm the bold statement of Psalm 118:6, which displays the same total trust as Psalm 23 (Hebrews 13:5-6).

### **Further Duties In Christ's Service**

The Hebrew brethren were instructed to keep their rulers, which Milligan says would be better rendered "leaders," in mind. After all, they had taught the word of God to the believers, thereby displaying a faith worthy of imitation. They were especially to do so after considering the type of life these men led (Hebrews 13:7).

The author encouraged the brethren to imitate the constancy of Christ and to be constant because He is dependable. He also told them to remain steady in the faith since its foundation is firm and unchangeable. After showing the firm foundation upon which Christians stand, it was natural to plead for the brethren to hold tight to the firm doctrine of Christ and not go off into a strange, unstable, doctrine. The gracious doctrine of Christ is good to hold to and is much to be preferred over the doctrines of men and the Judaizing teachers. Remember, these brethren were not the first to face false teachers (Hebrews 13:8-9; Galatians 1:6-9.)

The altar around which Christians gather seems to be

the sacrifice of Christ for us (1 Corinthians 10:18; 9:13). To eat of the altar would seem to be to partake of the Lord's Supper, whereby Christ's sacrifice is remembered. It would likely also include active participation in Christ's covenant (John 6:44-58). In an apparent reference to the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:27), the author reminded them of the beasts whose blood was brought into the sanctuary by the high priest. The bull for a sin offering was carried outside the camp to be burned. This presents an interesting parallel to the death of Jesus outside the camp of Jerusalem (John 19:20). Jesus was crucified outside of the gate, or camp, of Jerusalem. This was symbolic of His being outside of the camp of Israel. For this reason, Christians were encouraged to go without the camp and be with Christ, always ready to bear any reproach that might come as a result of so doing (Hebrews 13:10-14).

### **Offerings for Jesus**

No city on this earth will last forever, but there will be a city without end. This city would seemingly be the one spoken of in Hebrews 11:10, 16, which is a heavenly city. Through Jesus, Christians can offer a continual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. The fruit of anything is that which it produces, therefore, the fruit of our lips is the words we speak. Since Jesus is the high priest of our confession, part of our lips' fruit would be the confession that Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 10:9-10). The other fruits would be the praise and thanksgiving previously mentioned (Hebrews 13:15).

In conjunction with the fruit of their lips, Christians need to offer up the good they can do in their lives, which includes telling others what they possess. It also entails

obeying the leaders, or elders, since they have been given the task of watching over the flock, or congregation, and see that each sheep receives the proper spiritual food (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). As members of the flock, they should be subject to the elders' authority. They are to be in subjection because the elders have the job of watching over the souls of the flock. Elders rejoice in knowing some under their authority are truly in subjection to the truth (3 John 4). If they have to render a final account of a soul in grief, then it certainly would not be profitable for that soul (Hebrews 13:16-17).

### **Personal Matters and Concluding Comments**

The writer asked the brethren to pray in his behalf, as well as in behalf of the apostles and other proclaimers of the gospel. He preached the one true gospel, as did they, in opposition to all else, including the Judaizing teachers, because he believed it was what God would have him to do. He wanted their prayers and seemed to hope that they would help speed his return to them (Hebrews 13:18-19).

God can be described as the "God of peace" because He was the one that sent peace into the world (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:14). He was the God who raised His Son from the dead (Acts 2:24; 3:15; Romans 4:24; 2 Corinthians 4:14; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 1:21). The Jesus that God raised is also the "great Shepherd of the Sheep." That is, He is the leader of the church and the One everyone follows, including the shepherds, or elders of the local flock. Christ's resurrection was possible through the shedding of His blood. What else could have washed away the sins of the world? It is by virtue of that shed blood that Christians will also be raised one day (Hebrews 13:20).

The author prayed God would equip the Hebrew brethren and make them ready for all of the good works they needed to do. To a God of such power and goodness truly should be the glory of all men forever. Additionally, he prayed the Hebrew brethren would receive with patience and kindness the letter which had been written in the same manner. He could have written much more on such a vast subject, but did not. It appears he made the letter as brief as possible so he would not make them mad on these points that were touchy for them. This might be taken as a good warning for all preachers to present the word in truth, but not to browbeat the brethren solely on one sore spot (Hebrews 13:21-22).

The writer went on to tell his readers that Timothy had been set free, probably from prison, and if he came to him soon, they would be able to see the Hebrews. He sent his regards to the elders and teachers of the Hebrews, who had the rule over them. He also sent his regards to all of the saints, as did some Italian brethren. Finally, the writer prayed God's favor would be upon all of them (Hebrews 13:23-25).



### **Discussion Questions**

1. In what ways might we show our love for one another?  
How might hospitality fit into such a goal?

2. How might we remember those in bonds?

3. What does the writer mean when he says the marriage bed is undefiled?

4. How does covetousness interfere with the Lord being

my helper?

5. What instructions are given to help Christians go toward the eternal city?

6. After reading Hebrews 13:18-25, list some things we should ask God for in our brethren's behalf.

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## **Dedication**

When I entered Freed-Hardeman College in the fall of 1971, I was blessed with many fine teachers who loved God's word and His people. Among those was a man named Cecil N. Wright. Brother Wright was a man with vast experience. He was very thorough in his studies and urged his students to follow that same path. He also was a man with great insight into the nature of people and the functioning of the local church. On more than one occasion, I found his advice to be both sound and useful.

Even after I left college and went into local work, brother Wright continued to be a good advisor and trusted friend. When he died, the church lost a great warrior and I lost a faithful counselor.

Brother Wright taught me the book of Hebrews when I was still a student at FHC. He was the one who first required us to write a commentary on this great book. I am thankful for his encouragement and gratefully dedicate this book to his memory.



*Christ Is  
Superior*

A Study of Hebrews

By Gary C. Hampton

### *About the Author*

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