

Exploring Hebrews

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PREFACE

The book of Hebrews describes the deity, humanity, and redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Jesus is greater than all the prophets and all the angels. He came down to be a man to redeem his people. He shed his blood and died on the cross bearing the punishment of our sin, so that we can be saved by believing in him, trusting and surrendering our lives to him. He is the Great High Priest. He is merciful and faithful to us—merciful as he was willing to die for us and continue to be patient with our failings, and faithful as he never stops praying and mediating for us before the Father. He is the Great Shepherd. He shepherds and takes care of us as we run our spiritual race in this broken and sinful world. He is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. He will make sure that all of us—as his covenant people—will reach the finish line of our spiritual race.

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Lesson 1 – The Deity of Jesus Christ: Jesus is Greater than the Prophets and the Angels

Hebrews was a letter written to the Jewish Christians in about 60 A.D. The author is unknown to us. For sure, he had a good knowledge of the Old Testament, the Jewish culture, and the Greek language. He became a Christian through the ministry of the apostles. Hebrews explains the deity, humanity, and work of Jesus Christ. Hebrews highlights Christ's superiority over the prophets, angels, Moses, priests, and the whole Old Testament system. Hebrews tells us how God saves sinful and rebellious people through Jesus Christ and his redeeming work. Christ is *the founder and perfecter of our faith*.

Read Hebrews 1:1-14

In the Old Testament times, God spoke to the ancestors of the Jews through the prophets.

How did God speak through the prophets (v.1)?

God often times spoke to the prophets through angels, visions, and dreams. God also spoke directly to some of them, such as Moses. God spoke to them *in many ways*.

“And he [God] said, ‘Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream’” (Numbers 12:8).

How does God speak to us in these *last days* (v.2)?

Last days refer to the period of time since Jesus came, born as a man, until he returns again to this world. God has revealed himself to us through Jesus in these *last days*. Jesus is in fact *the Prophet* or the ultimate prophet, in whom all other prophets point to. The message and revelation that Jesus brought is superior to all revelations brought by the other prophets, because Jesus is superior to all the prophets. All the revelations from other prophets ultimately point to Jesus and his redeeming work.

What can we learn about the deity of Jesus (v.2-3)?

Jesus, as the Son of God, is equally divine as God the Father—the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Jesus is *the heir of all things*. This means that everything is created for him. Because everything is for Jesus, then no one has anything, except those whom Jesus will share his possession with. The significance of our union with Jesus is that all he has is ours in him.

Jesus is also the agent of creation through whom God the Father created the world—here it means the universe. Jesus is also *the Creator* of the universe, just as the Father is.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4).

We see God's divine glory in Jesus. Because Jesus is the radiance of God's glory, he is therefore God himself. He is *the exact imprint of God's nature*. The nature of Jesus is God's nature.

How does Jesus uphold the universe (v.3)?

Jesus is also the *Purifier* of our sins. He purifies us from our sins by bearing and dying for our sins as our substitute, so that by believing in him, trusting and surrendering our lives to him, our sins are forgiven. God purifies and justifies us by forgiving our sins and imputing Jesus' righteousness to us. Jesus "sat down" because he has finished his sacrificial work for us. He is now "at the right hand" of the Father, ministering and mediating for us before him. He is also governing the universe in the place of the Father in the supreme throne.

Jesus is superior to all angels and his name—the Son of God—is more excellent than all the names of the angels (v.4).

Verse 5 quotes Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. These two verses from the Old Testament are about David and his sons as kings of Israel. These verses are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, a descendant of David. David as the king of Israel points to Jesus, *the King*—the true and ultimate king, our king. God the Father declared that Jesus is his son at (1) Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:17, (2) his transfiguration in Matthew 17:5, and (3) his resurrection in Acts 13:32-35 and Romans 1:4.

Jesus is also the *firstborn* (v.6). This does not mean that Jesus was the first creation. In ancient culture, the firstborn means the heir of a family estate. This means that Jesus is the heir of all creation.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15-17).

How is Jesus superior to the angels (v.7-9)?

Verses 8 and 9 quote Psalm 45:6-7 that is fulfilled in Jesus. God the Father has anointed God the Son—Jesus—to be king, who sits on the royal throne of God forever. In contrast to Jesus, the angels are *ministering spirits*, God's servants to serve God's people (v.14). The angels are Jesus' servants.

What else can we learn about the deity of Jesus (v.10-12)?

Jesus is eternal and unchanging. His "years will have no end" and his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Jesus fulfilled God's promise for King David, that God will put all his enemies under his feet (v.13). Jesus' kingdom is where we belong. His kingdom is our kingdom.

What impresses you about Jesus from this lesson?

How can we do better in adoring Jesus in our prayers?

Lesson 2 – The Deity, Humanity, and Redeeming Work of Jesus Christ

Read Hebrews 1:1-14 for review.

Read Hebrews 2:1-4

In the Old Testament time, God often times used his angels to bring his word to God’s covenant people. The law of God brought by the angels was proved to be reliable and was binding to God’s covenant people. Anyone who disobeyed God’s law would receive a just retribution. Since Jesus is superior to the angels, we must pay much closer attention to his word. The gospel of God brought by Jesus is superior to the law of God brought by the angels.

What will happen to us if we neglect and do not believe the gospel of God brought by Jesus (v.3)?

After Jesus died, rose from the grave, and went back to heaven, the gospel was testified by the apostles. They are witnesses of God. God himself also bore witness by giving signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit that accompany the gospel ministry of the apostles (v.3-4).

Read Hebrews 2:5-13

To whom did God not subject “the world to come” (v.5)?

Verses 6-8 quote Psalm 8:4-6 written by King David. David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote about Adam and mankind as God’s special creation.

How is man a special creation (v.6-8)?

God has created man with glory and honor and has appointed him to be a caretaker of this God-created world. However, Adam failed. He sinned against God and destroyed his own glory and honor. Consequently, all human beings, born in Adam, continue to sin against God. However, humanity is restored in Jesus, who is *the true Adam*. This text is a messianic statement that points to Jesus. What Adam could not do—consequently all other human beings cannot do—Jesus fulfilled and accomplished for us. Therefore, while the text describes humanity in general, it describes Jesus in particular.

“At the present time, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Jesus” (v.8). It is the will of God that the Devil and his demons are given a time and limited authority to attack and give temptations to God’s people, while at the same time God is using his people to bring the gospel to all nations, until all that the Father has given to Jesus are saved and gathered in him.

Why was Jesus *made lower than the angels*—born as a man with immortality and perishable earthly human body (v.9)?

What else is the purpose (v.10)?

Verse 10 also emphasizes the deity of Jesus Christ as the Creator God, *for whom and by whom all things exist*. Jesus is also *the Founder* of our salvation. He is *made perfect through suffering* by being born as a man with perishable earthly human body and dying for the punishment of our sins. He suffered the wrath and judgment of God upon our sins as our substitute, so that we will not need to suffer the wrath and judgment of God. By believing in Jesus, trusting and surrendering our lives to him, we can receive forgiveness from God. Jesus came from heaven and was born as a man to taste our death, so that we may taste the grace of God, become God's sons, and share in the glory of Jesus.

Who does the work of our sanctification (v.11)?

Sanctification is the work of God's free grace renewing us completely after the image of God, enabling us more and more to die to sin and to live to righteousness. Jesus Christ is our Purifier and Sanctifier (see also 1:3). The Holy Spirit purifies and sanctifies us as the Spirit of Christ.

Verse 12 is a quote from Psalm 22:22. The first quote in verse 13 is from Psalm 18:2, Isaiah 8:17, and Isaiah 12:2. The second quote is from Isaiah 8:18. These quotes are messianic texts, which fulfillment is found in Jesus. Jesus identifies himself as our brother.

Read Hebrews 2:14-18

What is the purpose of Jesus being born like us with a perishable earthly human body (v.14-16)?

The power of death is given to the Devil by God from the effect of sin in us. We will surely die physically, because the curse of our sin is death. God punishes those who sin against him by death—both physical and spiritual (Romans 6:23). We are born dead spiritually and will experience physical death. However, the Devil's power of death is no longer upon us, because our sin has been punished by God in Jesus, who sacrificed himself as our substitute. God makes us spiritually alive in Christ when we give our lives to him. We are already in union with Christ for eternity. Our physical death is a stepping stone for our souls to enter heaven and to be given a new heavenly body when Jesus returns (for further study, read 1 Corinthians 15:26, 50-58).

What else is the purpose of Jesus being born like us (v.17)?

Why (v.18)?

Jesus became a man, so that he could identify himself with us. He is a merciful and faithful High Priest for us. He is merciful to us as he was willing to die for us and continue to be patient with our failings. He is faithful to us as he never stops praying and mediating for us before the Father.

What impresses you about Jesus from this lesson?

Lesson 3 – The Eternal Rest for God’s People

Read Hebrews 2:1-18 for review.

Read Hebrews 3:1-6

According to verse 1, there are three things about our identity as Christians.

1. We are *holy*. We are holy people of God. We have been justified by God and set apart for him.
2. We are *brothers*—or brothers and sisters. We are all sons of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14-16). We are a family in Christ.
3. We *share in a heavenly calling*. 1 Peter 2:9 “ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

What does it mean to “consider Jesus” (v.1)?

The author of Hebrews admonishes Christians to fix their eyes and minds on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith (12:2). Jesus is *the apostle and high priest of our confession* (faith). Jesus is the ultimate apostle and high priest, in whom all other apostles and high priests point to and are a type of.

What are the similarities and the differences between Jesus and Moses (v.2-3a)?

How is Jesus being greater than Moses illustrated (v.3b-6a)?

What is the admonition for us as “God’s house” (v.6b)?

Read Hebrews 3:7-19

Verses 7 to 11 are quotes from Psalm 95:7-11 describing Israel’s unfaithfulness and rebellion against God after he led them out of Egypt. The people of Israel provoked God for forty years. Because of their sin and unbelief, God did not allow them to enter the Promised Land and let them die in the wilderness. God gave the Promised Land to their children.

Why are scriptures the words of the Holy Spirit (v.7)?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

What is a lesson we can learn from Israel’s unfaithfulness (v.8, 15)?

What else should we do (v.12)?

“Take care” means to be very careful and pay attention seriously (v.12). Learn from the past and do not make the same mistake. John Calvin said, “The human heart is a factory of idols.” The reason we are unfaithful to God is because there is an idol in our hearts. Something else has become a god—an idol—and more important than the true and living God in our hearts.

What should we do for one another (v.13)?

Give examples of the deceitfulness of sin (v.13)!

“For we have come to share in Christ” is a reminder of our salvation and union with Christ (v.14).

What does “we should hold our original confidence firm to the end” mean (v.14)?

Read Hebrews 4:1-13

Canaan was the Promised Land that God gave to the people of Israel. Canaan was the place of their rest. Canaan points to the eternal Promised Land for all God’s people. God’s promise for us to enter his eternal rest—heaven/God’s kingdom/God’s country—still stands. This promise is given only to those who are faithful to God. The warning of unbelief and rebellion against God in 4:1 echoes 3:12.

We receive salvation from God when we repent from our sin and put our faith in Christ, trusting and surrendering our lives to him. Believing about God and Christ as head knowledge does not bring salvation to a person, but repentance and faith in Christ do. Those who never repent from their sin and put their faith in Christ will not enter *God’s eternal rest* (v.2-6).

The promise of *God’s eternal rest* or the final Sabbath rest (v.9) echoes back to the time God created the world and he rested on the seventh day (v.4). It was not that God needed to rest, but rather he gave rest to the creation. Adam’s sin has brought suffering and death to mankind and the creation, and there is an inward groan within us and the creation to be freed from the curse of suffering and death (Romans 8:22-23). However, God has promised a day of glorification and renewal. God’s people will be given glorified bodies and the creation will be renewed, free from the corruption of sin. When Christ returns, he will bring us to a new heaven and earth, where we will rest and spend time with God for eternity.

What should we do with this perspective in mind (v.11)?

How does the author of Hebrews describe *the word of God* (v.12)?

The word of God exposes and judges our hearts and sins.

How should we live our lives in light of “all [things] are naked and exposed to the eyes of God to whom we must give account” (v.13)?

Lesson 4 – Jesus is the Great High Priest

Read Hebrews 3:1—4:13 for review.

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

After Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, where he ministers to us as our great High Priest. The author of Hebrews admonishes us to hold fast to our confession (v.14).

How is Jesus a special high priest for us (v.15)?

How does Christ sympathize with your weaknesses personally?

What should we do then (v.16)?

How does Christ make you confident to approach God the Father in prayer?

Read Hebrews 5:1-10

What is the responsibility of a high priest (v.1)?

How should he do his responsibility? Why (v.2)?

What is he obligated to do (v.3)?

The calling to be a priest of God and a mediator between him and his people is an honor and privilege given by God (v.4). Similar to the Old-Testament high priests, Christ's calling to be a high priest is also appointed by God the Father (v.5).

Verse 5 has a quote from Psalm 2:7, where David spoke of his and his descendants' kingship that is fulfilled in Jesus. Verse 6 has a quote from Psalm 110:4, where David spoke of the coming of the Messiah (the Christ), one of his descendants who would be a king and a priest.

The Messiah (from the Hebrew word *mashiach*) or the Christ (from the Greek word *christos*) means *the anointed one* or *the chosen one*. He must fulfill three offices: prophet, priest, and king. Jesus fulfills these three offices as the Messiah or the Christ. As a prophet, Jesus reveals the will of God for our salvation by his word and spirit. As a priest, Jesus offered himself as the sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile us to God, and to make continual intercession for us. As a king, Jesus subdues us to himself, rules and defends us, and restrains and conquers all his and our enemies.

What did Jesus do as our high priest on our behalf (v.7)?

How does Jesus give us a good example of obedience to the Father through suffering (v.8)?

Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the Father. He sacrificed himself to die as our substitute for the punishment of our sins. Having completed his mission through suffering, Jesus was *made perfect* to be our high priest—completely qualified to be our high priest (v.9-10).

What does Jesus “became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” mean (v.9)?

In chapter 7, we will learn about Melchizedek and his priestly order. In summary, there are two main roles of a high priest: (1) as a mediator, he mediates between God and his people; and (2) as an intercessor, he intercedes for God’s people before God. Jesus Christ is our merciful and faithful high priest (2:17). He is merciful to our failings and sins. He is faithful to us and never stops mediating and interceding for us before God the Father.

What does it mean to you personally knowing that Christ is merciful to you and intercedes for you daily?

Lesson 5 – Exhortation to Spiritual Maturity

Read Hebrews 4:14—5:10 for review.

Read Hebrews 5:11-14

Apparently the author of Hebrews knew that some of his Jewish Christian readers were lazy and had become *dull of hearing* (v.11).

What was their condition (v.12-13)?

Christians are supposed to continuously grow in spiritual maturity and in understanding of God's word, capable to learn deeper teachings of the Bible—*solid food*.

What is one evidence of a mature Christian (v.14)?

Mature Christians possess godly wisdom which comes from understanding and applying the word of God in their lives.

Read Hebrews 6:1-12

What should we do as growing Christians (v.1-2)?

To the lazy and immature Christians, there is a warning of apostasy—abandoning faith in Christ. Not all who claim to be Christians are born-again Christians. Born-again Christians are true Christians—those who have repented from their sins and put their faith in Jesus, trusting and surrendering their lives to him alone. Repentance and faith in Jesus make someone a born-again Christian and united with Christ.

Having understanding or even believing certain things about Jesus does not make someone a born-again Christian. The devil understands the Bible and knows who Jesus is, but he will not repent from his sin and put his faith in Jesus alone. Likewise, there are many people who understand and believe certain things about Jesus and even claim to be Christians, but will not repent from their sins and put their faith in Jesus alone. They are not born-again Christians. There is no fruit of faith in Christ in their lives. They can easily be among the lazy and immature born-again Christians. The author of Hebrews gives a warning to the lazy and immature Christians that there may be unsaved people among them.

How does he illustrate his warning (v.7-8)?

It is possible for unbelievers to be among born-again Christians in the church and experience the grace and power of God in the life of the church, such as in worship services and ministries of the church. However, they will produce *thorns and thistles* out of their sin and unbelieving hearts. Their end is certain—*is to be burned* in hell.

Born-again Christians will certainly produce fruits of their faith in their lives. The Holy Spirit continues to sanctify them. Therefore, it is impossible for born-again Christians—those who have been united with Christ—to fall again under the power sin and have their union with Christ undone. If that was not the case, Christ would have to sacrifice himself again on the cross as our substitute in order to save us—which is irrational. It means the Father fails to raise us as his children, the Holy Spirit fails to sanctify us, and the Son fails as our High Priest—which is impossible.

What are we reminded of concerning God’s promise in our salvation (v.9-11)?

Born-again Christians or true believers are those who are in union with Christ. We are God’s *beloved* (v.9). God’s love for us is everlasting. There are *better things* in our salvation, including the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in our lives, our sanctification, Christ being our merciful and faithful High Priest, our future glorification, and heavenly rewards in God’s kingdom. We have *the full assurance of hope until the end*. Let us be earnest—be serious and sincere in our conviction of God’s promise for us—for we have the full assurance of hope in our union with Christ. All Christ has is ours in him.

What should we do then (v.12)?

Read Hebrews 6:13-20

While human beings swear by someone greater than themselves, God swore by himself, since there is no one greater than God (v.13).

What is the purpose of an oath (v.16)?

Why did God guarantee his promise to Abraham with an oath (v.17)?

God is unchangeable and unchanging. God is perfect and does not get better or worse.

“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind” (Numbers 23:19a).

“For I the Lord do not change ...” (Malachi 3:6).

What does “a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain” mean (v.19)?

“Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf” as our high priest (v.20). Only through him can we enter God’s holy kingdom. Jesus is now preparing a place for his people in God’s holy kingdom. Our union with him guarantees our entrance to the kingdom. Jesus says, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3).

How should we prepare ourselves to be with Jesus in his holy kingdom?

Lesson 6 – Christ and the Priestly Order of Melchizedek

Read Hebrews 5:11—6:20 for review.

Read Hebrews 7:1-3

What can we learn about Melchizedek (v.1-2)?

In Hebrew word, *melek* means king, and *zedek* means righteousness. Melchizedek was not only a king, but also a priest of the Most High God. He led his people in worshipping the true and living God. As a king, Melchizedek ruled his people. As a priest, he was their mediator and intercessor before God. Long before Israel, there was already a nation worshipping the true God in Salem. Salem was an ancient name of Jerusalem. “In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel. His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion” (Psalm 76:1-2). Both Salem and Zion are names for Jerusalem, which points to the future Jerusalem. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:1-2).

What can we learn about Melchizedek as a priest of the Most High God (v.3)?

As a person, Melchizedek surely had a father and a mother. The context here is about his priesthood. As a priest, his priesthood was not passed from his father nor passed to his descendants. He was specially appointed as a priest by God. His priesthood is forever, no beginning and end. Melchizedek resembles Christ, the Son of God. He is a type of Christ.

Read Hebrews 7:4-17

Genesis 14:17-20 describes the story of Abraham defeating several kings in a war. Abraham took the spoils from the war and gave a tithe to Melchizedek. A tithe is returning to God a tenth portion of what he has given us. Our tithe is for the work of God’s kingdom and must be channeled properly through God’s appointed workers (OT priests or NT ministers) and places (OT temples or NT churches). Abraham gave God’s tithe through Melchizedek, because Abraham knew that Melchizedek was a priest of God.

After receiving the tithe, what did Melchizedek do to Abraham (v.6)?

Abraham was aware that Melchizedek was superior to him (v.7). Abraham is the first Jew. He fathered Isaac, who fathered Jacob, who fathered Levi, who fathered Aaron, who was the first high priest of Israel. All high priest of Israel were descendants of Aaron. The other descendants of Levi helped the high priests to do God’s work, including collecting tithes from other Israelites (v.5). All the Levitical priesthood was mortal, but Melchizedek’s priesthood is forever and fulfilled in Christ (v.8).

How is Melchizedek’s priesthood superior to the Levitical priesthood (v.9-10)?

Why could perfection not be attainable through the Levitical priesthood (v.11)?

From which tribe is Jesus from (v.13-14)?

Under the old covenant law, all the high priests of Israel must be descendants of Levi. Jesus is a descendant of Judah and there has never been a high priest from the tribe of Judah. Jesus is a high priest of a different priesthood and not of the Levitical priesthood.

Which order of priesthood is Jesus from (v.17)?

Read Hebrews 7:18-28

Through Jesus Christ as our Mediator and High Priest, we can draw near to God. The new covenant brought by Jesus is a much better covenant than the old covenant (v.18-19, chapter 8 explains more).

What is the difference between the Levitical priesthood and Jesus' priesthood (v.21)?

The quote comes from Psalm 110:4. God made an oath to David that the royal priesthood of David's family is permanent. This is fulfilled ultimately in Jesus, as a descendant of David from the tribe of Judah.

How is Jesus a better priest than the Levitical priests (v.23-24).

What does Jesus do as our High Priest (v.25)?

What are the characteristics of Jesus as our High Priest (v.26)?

What is the difference between the sacrifice made by Jesus and the sacrifices made by the Levitical priests (v.27)?

The sacrifices in the old covenant under the Levitical priesthood point to the ultimate sacrifice by Jesus. Jesus offered himself as *the sacrifice*, the Lamb of God, to bear the punishment of our sins as our substitute. God crushed Jesus on the cross, so that he will not need to crush us, if we put our faith in Jesus, trusting and surrendering our lives to him.

Jesus is the ultimate High Priest, whom all the high priests point to. Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice that all sacrifices point to. God gave the old covenant and the Levitical priesthood system to teach his people about his Son—Christ—the one who would come and who would fulfill all these (v.28).

How should we appreciate and adore Jesus for what he has done and continues to do for us?

Lesson 7 – Christ’s New Covenant

Read Hebrews 7:1-28 for review.

Read Hebrews 8:1-5

We have learned in chapter 1 that Jesus “seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” means that he has finished his sacrificial work to make atonement for our sins, and he is now ministering and mediating for us before the Father. The heaven is “the holy places” or “the true tent”—sanctuary or worship center—that Jesus has set up as a place of worshipping God. Jesus is the High Priest and the Minister in this sanctuary (v.1-2).

What is a minister?

What is the responsibility of a high priest in the old covenant (v.3)?

“Now if he (Jesus) were on earth, he would not be a priest at all” (v.4). Jesus came from the tribe of Judah (7:14) and could not be a priest according to the old covenant’s Levitical priesthood.

Why was the old covenant’s sanctuary, including the priests who minister in it, “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (v.5)?

When God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai, God revealed to him the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary. Then, Moses built a tent as a sanctuary for the people of Israel accordingly (v.5).

Read Hebrews 8:6-13

Why is the new covenant better than the old covenant (v.6)?

The fault of the old covenant is that the people cannot keep the law of God, and the covenant does not provide the solution to save them, other than revealing their sin and condemnation (v.7). The people keep making fault—keep sinning before God (v.8).

Verses 8-12 are quotes from Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jeremiah prophesied of the new covenant, which Jesus would be the mediator.

The old covenant has a limitation that it is only for the people of Israel—*the house of Israel* (the northern kingdom) and *the house of Judah* (the southern kingdom). In contrast, the new covenant is for *spiritual Israel*—God’s holy nation with people from all nations, where every person is a royal priest and a minister. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (Revelation 7:9).

Under the old covenant, God’s people kept sinning and could not obey God perfectly (v.8-9). Jesus, however, kept God’s law and obeyed him perfectly. Under Jesus’ new covenant, his obedience and righteousness is imputed (credited) to all his people. When we repent from our sin and put our faith in him alone, trusting and surrendering our lives to him, God forgives our sins, imputes the righteousness of Jesus to us, and justifies us. We are no longer sinners condemned to death. We have a new life in Jesus. We are in union with Jesus. Everything he has is ours in him. This is the new covenant that Jesus has made for us.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in [union with] Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In the old covenant, God put his law in writing—external writing.

Where does God put his law in the new covenant (v.10)?

What is the significant result of this (v.11)?

In the new covenant, Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to work in our minds and hearts. The Holy Spirit, who has inspired the human authors of God’s word, internally enlightens our minds and hearts of his word. He helps us to remember and apply his word in our lives. He strengthens and sanctifies us by his word.

What will God do in this new covenant (v.12)?

In the new covenant, Jesus has sacrificed himself once and for all (7:27). Those who repent from their sins and put their faith in him are justified and completely forgiven by God.

God has made the old covenant obsolete and replaced it with the new covenant (v.13). Although the old covenant system is obsolete, the word of God that has been given during that time is eternal, because it bears the eternal, unchanging, and perfect characteristic of God. There are three uses of God’s law.

(1) God’s law serves as a force to restrain sin. (2) God’s law shows our sins and need of God’s mercy and grace. (3) God’s law serves as a norm of conduct for those who have saving faith in Christ and are in union with Him.

In the new covenant, Jesus is our Mediator and High Priest and we—as God’s holy people—are his ministers. As Jesus ministers to us, he wants us to follow his example to minister other people around us, ministering to their needs and sharing the good news of salvation in Jesus.

How would you share to a non-Christian friend that salvation is impossible by works, and is only by God’s grace alone through faith alone and in Jesus Christ alone?

Lesson 8 – Redemption through Christ’s Sacrifice

Read Hebrews 8:1-13 for review.

Read Hebrews 9:1-5

In the old covenant, God gave regulations concerning how to worship him and how to build the worship center.

In the worship center, what are the first section and the second section called (v.2-3)?

What are the things inside the second section (v.4-5)?

Read Hebrews 9:6-14

Who goes to the first section to perform ritual duties (v.6)?

Who can go to the second section (v.7)?

How often did he go and what did he do there (v.7)?

In the old covenant, God’s people needed to offer sacrifices repeatedly for the atonement of their sins. Their guilt of sin was never removed from their conscience permanently. Their sacrifices were not perfect. However, Christ came to bring a reformation to the old covenant—that is, to bring a new covenant (v.8-10).

What did Christ appear as in the new covenant (v.11)?

Christ is also the new spiritual *temple of God* in the new covenant. He is the “greater and more perfect tent, not made with [human] hands” (v.11). In Christ’s new covenant, he is the tent or temple of God as well as the high priest. He entered into the holy places as our high priest by sacrificing himself to die for the atonement of our sin (v.12).

What is the result of Christ’s sacrificing his own blood for the atonement of our sin (v.12)?

In the old covenant, if a person helped in the burial of a dead person and touched the body, he became ceremonially unclean and needed to purify himself according to the ceremonial law before entering the holy temple of God. God was teaching his people that holiness and cleanness before God were a necessity. No one who was unclean could come before God. All these ceremonial purifications pointed to the once-and-for-all purification made by Christ by his own blood for us (v.13-14, 26, 10:14).

What is the result of the Holy Spirit purifying our souls with the blood of Christ (v.14)?

Many people in this world believe that salvation is achieved by our own works. After the Holy Spirit makes us spiritually alive in Christ from being dead in sin, he will help us to understand that salvation is received from God by his grace alone. If we are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, we can live our lives and serve God simply out of love for him. In our union with Christ, we already have all things in him.

Read Hebrews 9:15-28

What is Christ's role in his new covenant (v.15)?

The author of Hebrews uses an illustration about a will to emphasize his point. If someone makes a will indicating whom he wants to give his inheritance to when he dies, the will has no effect as long as the person is still alive. Similarly, the new covenant with the promise of eternal inheritance is Jesus' will for us. Jesus' death has put the will in force (v.16-17).

The old covenant was inaugurated with the blood of animals (v.18).

Whose blood is the new covenant inaugurated with?

In the old covenant, the blood of animals has three functions (v.19-22). (1) The blood is to seal the covenant between God and his people. (2) The blood is a symbol of purification. All the vessels in God's temple used in worship needed to be sprinkled with blood. (3) The blood is for the temporary atonement for the sins of the people, so that forgiveness is given by God to them.

What does the old-covenant temple and all things in it are copies of the heavenly things mean (v.23)?

How is Christ compared to the old-covenant high priests (v.24-26)?

"The end of ages" is the time between Christ's first and second coming (v.26).

What will come after we die (v.27)?

What will Christ do at his second coming (v.28)?

2 Corinthians 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

How are we supposed to live our lives in light of Christ's second coming?

Lesson 9 – Our Covenant Responsibilities

Read Hebrews 9:1-28 for review.

Read Hebrews 10:1-4

The law of God in the old covenant points to Christ and the new covenant he has brought to us. The annual sacrifices were not perfect and could not atone for the sins of the people.

What did the annual sacrifices bring to the people (v.3)?

Why is it impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins (v.4)?

God taught his people in the old covenant that he would provide a Savior who would sacrifice himself to take away the sins of his people.

Read Hebrews 10:5-18

Verses 5-7 is a quote from Psalm 40:6-8. When Christ came, he explained that he came to fulfill what had been prophesied about him in the whole Old Testament. The whole system of sacrifices and offerings in the old covenant points to Christ. He came to do the Father's will to sacrifice himself as an atonement for the sins of his people and to establish a new covenant for his people (v.9).

How are we sanctified (v.10)?

Sanctification is the work of God's free grace renewing us completely after the image of God, enabling us more and more to die to sin and to live to righteousness.

How is the work of the old covenant priests compared to the work of Christ (v.11-14)?

Verses 16-17 are quotations from Jeremiah 31 that the author of Hebrews has quoted in chapter 8. He emphasizes that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice brings our justification—an act of God's free grace, where he forgives all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone—as well as our inner transformation or sanctification.

Because God has justified us in Christ, there is no longer need for making an offering for sin (v.18). Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Read Hebrews 10:19-39

The author of Hebrews gives the picture of the old covenant's temple. In it were the holy places and the holiest place behind the curtain. Christ, through his sacrifice, has given all his people confidence to enter the holiest place, where only the high priest could enter once a year (v.19-20).

Who is the “great priest over the house of God” (v.21)?

Having been justified in Christ, what should we do (v.22)?

In the old covenant, the high priest needed to clean his body with water before entering the holiest place in the temple. For Christ’ people, we have been sprinkled clean with the blood of Christ. Both our hearts (souls) and bodies have been cleansed by God. We are clean from the inside out.

What else should we do (v.23)?

What else should we do (v.24-25)?

What is the warning for us (v.26-27)?

In essence, a person who keeps sinning deliberately after the gospel has been explained to him, deliberately rejects Christ. This has an eternal consequence for him. He will receive an eternal punishment from Christ. Those who reject Christ, will be rejected by him forever.

In the old covenant, those who turned from God to worship idols would be punished by death. The punishments for those who have received the knowledge of the gospel and have experienced God’s blessing in his work among his people, but still refuse to make Christ as their Lord and Savior would be worse in scale (v.28-29).

How would you feel if you faced God’s anger and judgment on you (v.30-31)?

What are some evidences of a true Christian (v.32-34)?

2 Timothy 3:12 “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” True Christians will experience some sort of persecution or struggles in life because of their faith in Christ. In times of struggles, God sustains us and his grace works in us. We can have confidence in God. God will reward us with a heavenly home when Christ returns (v.35-38).

Verses 37-38 are quotations from Habakkuk 2:3-4. The author of Hebrews teaches us that faith: (a) always fixes its sights on Christ and his future return (v.37), (b) receives God’s verdict of righteousness (v.38), and (c) perseveres in the midst of suffering (v.39).

Have you ever experienced a trial when your faith in God was strengthened as a result?

Lesson 10 – Examples of the Life of Faith

Read Hebrews 10:1-39 for review.

Read Hebrews 11:1-3

Faith in Christ and his redeeming work on the cross for us is the basis of how we are justified by God. We are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Faith in God is not a blind faith. It is believing in God because of who he is and his characteristics—sovereign, loving, faithful, holy, just, etc.

What is faith (v.1)?

What are the “things not seen” (v.1)?

How did the people in the old covenant receive their commendation from God (v.2)?

How do we believe and understand that God has created the universe out of nothing and simply by his word (v.3)?

Read Hebrews 11:4-22

How was Abel commended by God as righteous (v.4)?

In Genesis 4, we learn that Cain killed Abel, his brother, out of envy. God told Cain that his brother's blood cried out to him for justice from the ground.

How was Enoch commended by God (v.5)?

Why is it impossible to please God without having faith in him (v.6)?

How was Noah commended by God (v.7)?

How did Abraham demonstrate his faith in God (v.8)?

Abraham lived by faith as a foreigner in the land that God promised him for his descendants to dwell—the land of Canaan. By faith, he looked forward to live in the heavenly city built by God himself (v.9-10).

How did Sarah receive supernatural power from God to conceive Isaac, although she was past the child-bearing age—she was 90 years old (v.11)?

Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. He was “as good as dead” as to his ability to produce a child. Yet, God made possible what was impossible. Through Isaac, God fulfilled his promise to Abraham to make his descendants numerous. Abraham became the first Jew.

How did all the people above die (v.13)?

These heroes of faith lived their lives as “strangers and exiles on earth.” They were refugees living in a foreign land and did not return to the land where they were from (v.13-15).

What did they desire and what had God prepared for them (v.16)?

How did Abraham demonstrate his faith in God again at another time (v.17-19)?

How did Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph demonstrate their faith in God (v.20-22)?

Read Hebrews 11:23-40

How did Moses’ parents demonstrate their faith in God (v.23)?

How did Moses demonstrate his faith in God (v.24-28)?

How did the Israelites demonstrate their faith in God (v.29-30)?

How did Rahab demonstrate her faith in God (v.31)?

The author of Hebrews mentions more Old-Testament people with their acts of faith in God. Through their acts of faith, some achieved victories (v.32-35) and some suffered persecution to their death (v.36-38). Until now, God still allows some of his people to suffer persecution to their death. God gives more grace to sustain his people who suffer persecution.

All these heroes of faith in the Old Testament died without receiving what was promised—the coming of Christ, his kingdom, and the new covenant in him. They did not receive these during their lives on Earth, but saw and *greeted from afar* (v.13, 39). They saw Christ’s kingdom by faith. Likewise, although we are in the new covenant with Christ and see the work of Christ’s kingdom in this present time, we will not yet see its perfection until Christ’s return. By faith, we can see and greet our lives in the new heaven on earth from afar. God’s people in the old covenant are made perfect together with God’s people in the new covenant. Together we wait for the perfection at Christ’s return (v.40).

How should we strengthen our faith in Christ together and live in light of his return?

Lesson 11 – Keep Looking at Jesus as We Run Our Spiritual Race

Read Hebrews 11:1-40 for review.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3

The author of Hebrews uses a picture of a race, where Christians as athletes are running to the finish line. The race here is more like a marathon, a very long-distance run. The heroes of faith mentioned in chapter 11 surround us—*a cloud of witnesses*—to watch us run, cheering for us to endure and complete the race to the finish line.

How should we prepare for our spiritual run (v.1)?

When athletes run, they do not put on unnecessary weight, such as coats or jeans that can prevent them from running effectively. Spiritually speaking, unnecessary weight means any unnecessary attachments to this world that can prevent us to be fruitful and effective Christians.

What kinds of attachments to this world may Christians have?

We need to lay aside all these things, as well as our sinful thoughts, words, and actions that are still attached to us—*clings so closely*—in our sinful nature. We need to obey God as he sanctifies us.

How should we run our race (v.2-3)?

The world gives us temptations to look at the things it has to offer us, trying to take our focus away from Jesus. We need to persevere and endure all temptations and struggles in this broken and sinful world by looking at Jesus, fixing our eyes on him alone. Considering or thinking about Jesus is what gives us strength to keep running and finish our race.

Jesus is the founder and perfecter of our faith. He is our champion, model, and leader. He himself has finished the race to the finish line. His biggest challenge was the cross. He endured it. He fixed his eyes on us. We are his joy. Our salvation is his joy. He would not let anything distract him from finishing his race to save us. On the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished.” He has redeemed us on the cross. He has finished his race and will make sure that each of us will go to the finish line of the race as well.

Read Hebrews 12:4-17

Verses 5-6 are quotes from Proverbs 3:11-12. As our heavenly Father, God loves and disciplines us.

What is the purpose of parental discipline?

What is the difference between our earthly fathers’ discipline and our heavenly Father’s discipline (v.9-10)?

Often times, our earthly fathers lack wisdom in disciplining us, because they also have many weaknesses just like we do. However, our heavenly Father is perfect in wisdom. He disciplines us in order for us to grow in holiness and to be more like him.

Why does discipline seem painful rather than pleasant? What will it yield (v.11)?

What should we do for our spiritual race (v.12-13)?

Healing spiritual injuries and preventing future hazards are necessary to complete our race. How should we do that (v.14-17)?

Read Hebrews 12:18-29

God delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt and gathered them at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive his commandments that would guide their lives as his covenant people. God appeared to them with all sorts of wonders. God also told them not to touch the mountain for they would die. The people were terrified to death because of God's holy presence at the mountain (v.18-21). The gathering of God's people at Mount Sinai in the old covenant is contrasted with the gathering of God's people in the new covenant.

Where will the gathering of God's people in the new covenant be and what does it look like (v.22-24)?

Because of our union with Christ, God the Father considers us as firstborns and joint heir with Christ, *the firstborn*. All Christ has is ours in our union with him. We are already "enrolled in heaven" (v.23).

There is a warning for rejecting God. The same God, who appeared with wonders and spoke at Mount Sinai, speaks to us from heaven. There will be punishment for those who reject God and his word (v.25).

When will be the final judgment of God upon the world (v.26-27)?

The world tries to take our focus away from Jesus by offering us so many options of worldly pleasures. When Christ returns, he will destroy the world and all its corruptions. Our destiny in the everlasting kingdom of Christ is certain. We are already enrolled in his kingdom. Christ will make sure that we finish our spiritual race to the finish line. He will lead us to his everlasting kingdom.

What is the admonition for us (v.28-29)?

We need to worship God with gratefulness, reverence, and awe. Our God is graceful and loving. He is also "a consuming fire." It is only by his grace that we are accepted by him and are able to worship him with a right manner. How would you improve your manner before God?

Lesson 12 – Acts of Spiritual Worship and Sacrifices Pleasing to God

Read Hebrews 12:1-29 for review.

Read Hebrews 13:1-6

In chapter 1-12, the author of Hebrews has explained the deity, the humanity, and the work of Jesus Christ. In this last chapter, he gives several exhortations for us in order to finish well our spiritual race.

What are some exhortations for us (v.1-3)?

How can we exercise biblical hospitality?

What are some other exhortations for us (v.4-5)?

Sex, money, and power are powerful idols that many people, including Christians, are falling into. We fall into these temptations when we look away from Jesus and look into and give ourselves to them.

What should we remember when we are tempted (v.6)?

Read Hebrews 13:7-19

What should we do for our church leaders (v.7)?

Our church leaders deserve our prayers, love, and care, because they labor for us. We need to learn from them and imitate their faith, as they imitate Jesus, who is our *true Leader* and is eternal and unchanging (v.8).

What should we be careful of (v.9)?

In the old covenant, the people of Israel celebrated the Day of the Atonement once a year, where the high priest would enter the most holy place in God's temple to mediate for the people before God. There were animal sacrifices performed to atone for the sins of the people, and the remainder of the animal bodies would be burned outside the camp (v.10-11). Jesus, who suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem, was compared with these animals. Jesus suffered and died for the atonement of our sins. His blood was shed to sanctify his people. He endured the cross for us. Even though he received all kinds of reproaches from people, he would not let anyone take his focus away from saving us. He fixed his eyes on us to complete his race, sacrificing himself for the punishment of our sins, so that by believing in him, trusting and surrendering our lives to him, we can be saved (v.12-13).

What is "the city that is to come" (v.14)?

What should we do as Christ's covenant people (v.15-16)?

Why should we obey our church leaders and submit to them (v.17)?

How should a church leader do his responsibility to shepherd God's people (v.17)?

What should we do for our church leaders (v.18-19)?

Read Hebrews 13:20-25

Our God is the God of peace (v.20). He will give us sufficient peace that we need while we are running our spiritual race. There will be a lot struggles in our lives as we run, but the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Why is Jesus called "the great shepherd of the sheep" (v.20)?

How does God "equip us with everything good to do his will" (v.21)?

The author of Hebrews appeals to his readers to seriously do and obey his exhortations. Throughout his letter, he has explained the deity, humanity, and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus has made a new and eternal covenant with his people by the shedding of his blood. He is the Great High Priest. He is merciful and faithful to us—merciful as he was willing to die for us and continue to be patient with our failings, faithful as he never stops praying and mediating for us before the Father. He is *the Great Shepherd*, who will shepherd and take care of us as we run our spiritual race. He is *the true Leader*, who has sacrificed himself for us and guides us on our spiritual race. He is *the Founder and Perfecter of our faith*, who will make sure that all of us—as his covenant people—will reach the finish line of the race.

How can we support one another as a covenant community of believers in our spiritual race in this broken and sinful world?

Resources

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