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The Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the authors.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the Standard Bible Study Guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

1. Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline: The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants *understand* and *know* about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate *feeling* about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants *apply* the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.

2. The Commentary follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.

3. The Inductive Bible-Study Method emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner's investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly; understand the passage in context; avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.

4. The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.

5. The Life-Application Approach demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it is often possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.

For a listing of the individuals appointed by the General Conference to write the teachers comments for the current Bible Study Guide, please refer to page 1.

The Rest of the Story

The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). And they do, at least to a point. What Christian hasn’t looked up into the sky on a night in which the stars shimmered in a panoply of outrageous incandescence and not come away awed by the power and the greatness of God?

The heavens do have a story to tell. Or, perhaps, more precisely, they reveal that a story has already been told. By looking at the heavens, we can catch parts of the plot but not the whole narrative itself. No matter how far our telescopes peer into the cosmos, they can reveal only so much, because only so much is revealed there. The rest of the story—the story of the Incarnation, the story of Redemption, the story of Jesus and the eternal life He offers—these are not found in the heavens, no matter how much of God’s glory is, otherwise, declared there.

Yet, what the heavens do not tell us, the Holy Scriptures do. The details not written in the stars are written, instead, in God’s Word. Scripture takes us places where rocket ships and telescopes can never go. The Bible reveals things Hubble, no matter how focused and finely tuned its lenses, will never detect.

For instance, the book of Hebrews, the topic of this quarter’s Bible Study Guide, gives us a window into the universe, a view of the heavens that would otherwise remain hidden, despite the efforts of the world’s greatest astrophysicists and astronomers.

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8:1, 2).

“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:11, 12).

These are truths about the heavens that the heavens themselves—no matter how deeply and intently we peer into them—could never reveal.

Though shrouded in some mysteries (Who wrote it? When was it written? To whom was it addressed? What specific problems was it confronting?), the book of Hebrews radiates with light, truth, and details regarding salvation history, regarding what Jesus has done for us, what He is doing for us now, and what He will do for us throughout eternity. It reveals not only what Christ accomplished by His life and death (Heb. 1:3; 2:9; 7:27; 9:12, 28) but it presents the most explicit

explanation of Christ as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:15, 16; 7:25; 9:24) found anywhere else in Scripture.

Though the Scriptures do give us scattered glimpses into heaven, no other book takes us so deeply, and intimately, into heavenly places while simultaneously giving us such a clear explanation of what we see when we are there.

Before starting this quarter's Bible Study Guide, read through the entire book of Hebrews. Tremble at its fierce warnings against apostasy and backsliding, heed its emotional exhortations to faithfulness and obedience, but—most of all—rejoice in the hope, in the promises, in the assurance that exudes from every page of this faith-affirming book, which boldly declares to us “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24). And if Christ is now standing in the presence of God “for us”—what have we to fear?

As you read, notice two outstanding and undeniable truths within these sacred pages: the reality of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the importance of that ministry to His people on earth—truths that we as Seventh-day Adventists have been proclaiming unabashedly to the world. In Hebrews, we find key elements of our sanctuary message, and that message is nothing if not the Cross revealed in the only context that can fully reveal it: that of the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ now ministers His blood in our behalf, “having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:12) through His life and death here on the earth.

Hebrews is all about Jesus, a fuller and clear revelation of Jesus. That is the direction this study takes: We will focus on Jesus as He appears in Hebrews. “Jesus, Our King”; “Jesus, Our High Priest”; “Jesus, Our Assurance”; “Jesus, Our Sacrifice and Salvation”—these are some of the weekly topics we will study in the powerful exhortation to faithfulness and obedience that is at the heart of Hebrews.

This quarter's author is Dr. Ekkehardt Mueller, a native of Germany and now an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference, in Silver Spring, Maryland. A New Testament scholar, Dr. Mueller takes us on an incredible voyage into the heavens themselves, where Jesus, our High Priest, “ever liveth to make intercession” for us, a truth about the heavens the heavens themselves can never reveal.

That is why it has to be told to us, which is exactly what Hebrews does. This quarter, let us listen carefully to what it says.

Lesson 1

*June 28–July 4

Jesus and the Book of Hebrews



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S STUDY: Heb. 1:1, 2; 2:3; 4:15; 10:22, 23.

MEMORY TEXT: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The book of Hebrews was written in order to help keep faithful those who were tempted to fall away from the faith. What Christian, in what era, hasn’t faced the same temptation? Hence, the relevance of Hebrews for us even today.

WRITTEN MORE LIKE A SERMON THAN A LETTER, Hebrews points weary New Testament believers to Jesus, to His work on earth below and to His work in heaven above. The book reveals Jesus in various roles, each one helping us understand the great salvation that has been offered to the world through Him. Together they create the simple, yet crucial, message from the Lord to His people, in all ages: Don’t give up!

This week we will take our first look at this fascinating fount of revealed truth.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Who wrote the book of Hebrews? To whom was the book addressed? What problems was it dealing with? What issues were at stake, and what parallels do they have to our situation today? What roles are given to Jesus in the book, and what do they teach us about the plan of salvation?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 5.

Sunday

June 29

FROM WHOM AND TO WHOM?

If one compares the first few verses of Hebrews with the first few verses of Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Galatians (or, for that matter, James and 1 Peter), one will notice a curious phenomenon: Unlike those books, the author doesn't mention his name, not in the beginning of his letter nor, in fact, anywhere in it. Though some evidence does (and some does not) point to Paul as the author of Hebrews, Ellen White names him as such. The quarter's Bible Study Guide will follow her lead here.

The other natural question is: To whom was the author writing? Finding out to whom Hebrews was sent is not just a matter of historical curiosity. That knowledge helps us to understand the main thrust of the letter. There's a very heavy emphasis on the Old Testament, on its history and on its sanctuary, and the book is written in a manner implying that the author believed the readers knew something about that history and sanctuary.

What aspects of Old Testament history and theology and scriptures are touched upon in each of the texts?

1. Heb. 1:1 _____

2. Heb. 1:5 _____

3. Heb. 5:6 _____

4. Heb. 7:1 _____

5. Heb. 9:1 _____

6. Heb. 10:1-4 _____

The heavy concentration on the sanctuary system, the priesthood, Hebrew history, and, of course, the Hebrew Bible (which required a good knowledge of the Old Testament to be understandable) makes plausible the assumption that the recipients were Jewish Christians, a view commonly held by scholars. The author writes to them as if they knew the Old Testament quite well, not only its history but the sanctuary service revealed in its pages.

The fact that Paul writes Hebrews as a letter of admonition to people who apparently "knew their Bibles" should send a message to those who think that Bible knowledge alone is enough for salvation. What message is that?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 1:1-4.

Teachers Aims:

1. To determine who wrote the book of Hebrews and to define the audience for whom its message was intended.
2. To note the issues that were at stake when it was written and explore their relevance for us today.
3. To define and explore the roles Jesus is given in Hebrews and what they teach us about the plan of salvation.

Lesson Outline:

I. Knowledge of the Old Testament Sanctuary Service Is the Key to Understanding the Heavenly Sanctuary.

- A. Heavy emphasis in the book of Hebrews on Hebrew history, its sanctuary system, and the priesthood suggests its readers were predominantly Jewish Christians.
- B. The priest in the sanctuary serves as the intermediary between God and the people.
- C. Discuss the role of sacrifice in the temple.

II. The Work and the Ministry of Jesus.

- A. Jesus is the Son of God and the Heir to all He has created.
- B. Jesus upholds God's Word and acts as our Intercessor in God's presence.
- C. Jesus is our cleansing Savior.

III. Salvation Fulfilled.

- A. Believe and have faith in Christ as our Savior.
- B. Accept Him as our Intermediary in heaven.
- C. Through Him approach the throne of God.

Summary: The book of Hebrews was written as a reminder to all that our salvation has been purchased through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Even now, He continues His ministry in our behalf. His example inspires us to have faith, confidence, and the courage to spread His Word to all who will listen.

Commentary.

In looking at the richness and deepness of Jesus in Hebrews, we must consider the witness of both the Old and the New Testaments, which together form an indivisible unity of the revelation from God, a unity suggested by its main focus on one Savior. Looking at the Old

Monday

June 30

THE CONTENT OF THE EPISTLE.

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him” (Heb. 2:3).

Yesterday, we saw that Paul was writing (probably) to Jewish believers in Jesus. The question then arises, What was he saying to them? Why did he write this epistle?

The answer seems to be that these people were in danger of falling away from Christianity and returning to Judaism. They were losing faith in the Second Coming (they thought Christ should have been back already); and, as time progressed, they were in danger of drifting away from the great truths of the gospel. Sound familiar?

The author’s words contain large blocks of warning and admonition. Summarize on each line the essence of each warning and admonition. What things do they share in common?

Heb. 2:1-4 _____

Heb. 3:7-4:13 _____

Heb. 5:11-6:8 _____

Heb. 10:26-39 _____

Heb. 12:1-29 _____

Heb. 13:1-17 _____

These warnings and admonitions reveal what was at stake when the book to the Hebrews was written. To reject or lose salvation, to drift away from sound proclamation and New Testament teaching, to miss the divine rest by unbelief or disobedience, to become weary and sin willfully, and to live an unethical life—these were some of the dangers the Hebrews faced. No wonder Paul wrote them a long, deep letter pointing them to Jesus for who He was, for what He had done, and for what He was doing for them now. Their spiritual malaise threatened their eternal destiny.

Here we are, Seventh-day Adventists, “spiritual Hebrews,” long awaiting the second coming of Jesus. Look at what Paul warned these early “Adventists” about; in what ways do we face the same dangers today?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Testament as the preparatory revelation of God, Christians see the final revelation in Jesus Christ.

Jesus made clear the Bible “bear[s] witness of Me” (John 5:36, NKJV) and that Moses wrote regarding Him (see vs. 46). In the Old Testament, God revealed the gospel to His people through prophecies, symbols, and types. The book of Hebrews mentions that God used “various ways” to reveal Himself to the fathers, but in our time, He revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, His divine Son (Heb. 1:2).

The Epistle to the Hebrews declares that the Messianic age has come and the Messiah has appeared. Jesus is God’s Son, and beyond Him nothing need be sought. Prophets faithfully declared the Word of God, but Jesus was God incarnate. The Son is Creator, Revealer, and Goal of the historical processes.

Two main elements need to be discussed here about Jesus’ two natures. What do we mean by two natures? Jesus was fully divine and fully human.

I. Jesus’ Divine Nature.

The Son is declared to be the “brightness,” (Heb. 1:3) of the glory of God. The Greek word translated “brightness,” *apaugasma*, means to shine, an effulgence, a bright light, a shining forth. The word is found only in Hebrews 1:3 and refers to the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus dwells in light unapproachable. He Himself is the Light of lights. Humanity cannot know God’s essential glory. Jesus, the Son, is the visible outshining light of God’s glory.

John writes, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18, NKJV). It was in the Person of the Son that God appeared to the people of Israel.

God desires to be seen, but He is visible only in the Person of Jesus. Ellen G. White points out “He [Christ] represented God not as an essence that pervaded nature, but as a God who has a personality. Christ was the express image of His Father’s person; and He came to our world to restore in man God’s moral image, in order that man, although fallen, might through obedience to God’s commandments become enstamped with the divine image.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, p. 921.

As our divine High Priest, Jesus Christ is ministering the benefits of His sacrifice to those who come near to Him. The priestly ministry of Jesus was prefigured in the Old Testament—sacrificial system, especially as it is described in the Hebrew sanctuary. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the heavenly sanctuary is genuine; Jesus Christ entered there after His ascension (Heb. 4:14-16). By the merits of His death and resurrection, He became the Minister of the “true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (Heb. 8:2, NKJV).

Jesus presents the offering in the sanctuary for every offense and

Tuesday

July 1

THE BRIGHTNESS OF HIS GLORY.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1, 2).

A ccording to the author, with Jesus a new era has come (actually “the last days”). Right in the beginning of this letter Jesus is presented in His various roles.

Study Hebrews 1:1-4. What roles does Paul put Jesus in? What are the various roles and descriptions used for Jesus here?

Notice the shift of emphasis in these verses. God the Father is the center of attention in verses 1 and 2, though in the midst of verse 2 the focus shifts upon Jesus and upon whom He is and what He has done. Notice, too, the sequence: Jesus is Creator and Sustainer (vss. 2, 3), and then suddenly He becomes the Savior.

Which words specifically talk about the Cross in these four texts? What do they say? What hope and promise are found in those words?

Thus, not only does Hebrews begin with Jesus as Creator, it quickly moves to His role as our Savior. Yet, instantly linked with His role as our Savior is His role as our High Priest in heaven, a key element of the book of Hebrews. This is seen in the final clause of verse 3, where, after talking about His purging our sins, it says that He “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,” a clear reference to Christ’s ascension to heaven after His work on earth was complete. Thus, almost within one breath (verses 1-4 are one sentence in the Greek), we are given the essence of the book of Hebrews: the work and ministry of Jesus Christ in our behalf.

The first four verses of Hebrews are deep and complex. After praying and meditating over them, paraphrase them in your own words. Share with the class what you have done.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

every shortcoming of the sinner. For the apostle, the new system is better than (superior to) the old, because its Mediator is the divine Son of God (Heb. 8:6; 9:15). Jesus, who is human (Heb. 2:5-18) and divine (Heb. 1:1-4), is able to bring God and humans into a special covenant association. The question then arises, How can a divine Priest in heaven understand a fallen human being?

II. Jesus' Human Nature.

The Epistle to the Hebrews also sets forth the full divinity and the full humanity of Jesus in a special contrast. Hebrews 2:9 describes Jesus' full humanity: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor,

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Matthew 11:27, Luke 4:2, 24:27, John 5:39, Galatians 3:19, Hebrews 4:15, 10:12.

1. Why do you think it is necessary for God to reveal His truth to us by means of special revelation? Is it necessary? Do you think it might be possible to understand God and His plan for His creation by studying the creation itself? Why, or Why not?
2. The book of Hebrews is unclear about its own authorship. Is it important to know who wrote it? Specifically, is it important to believe it was written by Paul? How might such a belief influence our response to the messages of the book?
3. Hebrews concentrates quite heavily on the priestly practices and sacrificial system of the Old Testament, largely (it is believed) because the material was familiar to the Jewish Christians to whom the letter was written. Given that most people today—Christians included—find the Old Testament somewhat bizarre or foreign, does this approach help or hinder our understanding of the plan of salvation? How about of the Old Testament itself?
4. Like the high priest of Old Testament times, Jesus is the Mediator between God and the human race. Why is it necessary to have a mediator? Does Jesus (God the Son) have to negotiate on our behalf to a merciless and angry God the Father to prevent us from being squashed? What is wrong with this point of view?
5. Hebrews describes Christ's sacrifice as having taken place once for all. Does this contradict the Adventist concept of a continuing ministry in the heavenly sanctuary? Why, or Why not?

Wednesday

July 2

THE MULTIPURPOSED GOD.

Jesus, of course, does not appear in the first four verses of chapter 1 and then disappear. On the contrary, who He is, what He has done, and what He now is doing are themes that recur all through the book. After each of these texts, write down the names and/or role He is given.

Heb. 1:5-10 _____

Heb. 2:10, 17 _____

Heb. 3:1 _____

Heb. 4:14; 5:6, 9, 10 _____

Heb. 6:20; 7:22 _____

Heb. 9:15; 10:10 _____

Heb. 12:2; 13:20 _____

Jesus is described in a number of ways: the Son, Christ, the Captain of our salvation, our Surety, our Mediator, our Shepherd, our High Priest, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, and so forth.

An extremely positive picture emerges. Although Jesus is God, He has turned toward us. He has secured our salvation. He serves as our Mediator. He is the One who will bring us to the final goal.

With all that we have through Jesus, no wonder Paul early on says to the Hebrews (and says to us now), “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3).

“No greater gift can be bestowed upon man than that which is comprehended in Christ. . . . The peril of indifference to God and neglect of His gift is measured by the greatness of salvation. God has done to the uttermost of His almighty power. The resources of infinite love have been exhausted in devising and executing the plan of redemption for man. God has revealed His character in the goodness, the mercy, compassion, and love manifested to save a race of guilty rebels. What could be done that has not been done in the provisions of the plan of salvation?”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 37.

Look at the various titles and names of Christ. Which ones appeal the most to you, personally? Placed together, what do they tell us about Jesus and His desire to save us?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (NKJV).

The book of Hebrews argues that Jesus’ status as lower than the angels was in a limited manner. A contrast is drawn between the nature of angels and that of the Son. According to the laws of Hebrew parallelism, the *angels* and the *ministers* must be related terms. Angels are ministers, servants of God. Jesus, however, is Deity: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom” (Ps. 45:6, NKJV). Jesus Christ took this position, because it was necessary for the plan of salvation. By becoming a human being, Jesus won for us the victory that could not have been possible had Jesus chosen to remain eternally separated from humanity.

As William Johnsson observes, “The humanity of Jesus, therefore, is to be understood on the basis of necessity and appropriateness.” —*Blessed Assurance* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1985), p. 65. The redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ formed a prelude to the glorification of the Son “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3, NKJV); Jesus became human in order that He might die for our sins.

WITNESSING

Taking a test can bring on a certain amount of anxiety, especially if you have not studied. Even someone who knows all the answers might be a little worried about forgetting something. One of the easiest tests to pass is an open-book test. However, even an open-book test can be tricky sometimes. Finding an answer may take time when time is limited. But if the answer is in the book, it can be found with a little searching.

We are all being tested and tried, and Jesus is our open Book. With Christ, we cannot fail. But for many, the spiritual test is a very difficult one. And there are some who don’t know Christ or don’t understand fully His work and ministry for us.

When we witness to others, we must let them know who Christ

is, what He has done for us, and what He now is doing in heaven above. He *is* the Son of God. He paid the penalty for our sins and gave us new life. He now stands before the throne of God as our High Priest, and He gives us the power every day to overcome all our sins. This is the equivalent of the teacher who is giving the open-book test, also turning the pages of the book and pointing to the answers.

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 24). Let Jesus be your open book.

Thursday

July 3

“SO GREAT A HIGH PRIEST.”

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

Hebrews 4:14-16 and 10:19-23 use almost the same wording. What is the significance of the respective statements? What are both sets of texts admonishing us to do, and what reasons do they give for us to obey their admonitions?

In Hebrews 4:14, 16 we read (1) “Let us hold fast our confession” (RSV) and then (2) “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” (RSV). In 10:22, 23 we find the same imperatives reversed: (1) “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (NIV) and (2) “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (RSV). In both cases, the message is the same: Hang on to your faith in Christ.

These words, of course, are so important for us today, as well. Jesus died for us. The Cross is the turning point of history and of our fate. Jesus serves as our High Priest; He is intervening in heaven in our behalf. He is our great High Priest. Therefore, we have confidence and assurance, because Someone now stands in heaven in our stead, Someone who, in fact, knows what it is to be tempted by sin (see Heb. 4:15). He knows how it feels to be human, to be tempted, to be hungry, to be tired, to be assaulted, abandoned, and to face death, because, as a human, He went through it all.

Therefore, we are called to draw close to God and receive mercy, grace, and help from Someone who can relate to us. The way to the heavenly sanctuary, the way to the throne of God, is now open! God is our Father, we are His children, and He treats us as such (Heb. 12:7-9). Jesus’ sacrifice is once-for-all and is sufficient for all. We just have to accept it.

Hebrews 10:22, 23 may be the summary of the book, and together with 4:14-16, it may present the aim of the epistle: Do not give up on Jesus! The best has come. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament types and the guarantee of salvation.

Dwell on Hebrews 4:15. What does it mean to you to know that our heavenly High Priest has been “touched with the feeling of our infirmities”? What hope does this truth give you?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Frank went through the public-school system, all the way from kindergarten through high school, with no real exposure to religion. But when it was time to head for college, to pursue a career, Frank was at the doors of a seminary. During the interview, he was asked why he wanted to become a minister. He responded, “It was because of a sermon I once heard.” Wondering who the speaker was that made such a great impression on the young man, the interviewer asked him the name of the preacher. The young man responded, “I don’t remember his name or his face. But I do remember the message that took me to Jesus.”

Thought Questions:

1. What does the story in the “Icebreaker” say about true leadership? The memory verse for this week is Hebrews 13:8 (“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” [NIV]). Read the verse that precedes it. What does it mean to be a “true” leader of the church? What kinds of things does a true leader bring to his followers? (*Possible answers: an example, inspiration, a clearer picture of Jesus.*)
2. The Bible is filled with many

“strange” people whom God called to be His voice, to do things that were out of the norm (for example, Noah, Hosea, Queen Esther). Yet, God’s leaders today are often conscious of what people will think of them. How can leaders be willing to take risks with their public image? Is this characteristic truly necessary? Explain.

Application Questions:

1. Our lesson tells us that one of the primary purposes of Hebrews is to help keep faithful those who were tempted to fall away from the faith. How does knowing that Jesus is the same *all* the time help keep you faithful? How can a focus on Jesus keep you faithful in an atmosphere of seeming mismanagement, selfishness, worldliness, and mixed-up priorities? What elements of this week’s lesson will help you focus on Jesus as the true Leader of this church?
2. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. What does it mean to “hang on to your faith”? How do the many titles and functions of Christ help you do this? Share moments from your life when Jesus played a role other than Savior? What does it mean to have Jesus as both Savior and Friend?

Friday

July 4

FURTHER STUDY: See Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 614, 615.

Avoid every question in relation to the humanity of Christ which is liable to be misunderstood. Truth lies close to the track of presumption. In treating upon the humanity of Christ, you need to guard strenuously every assertion, lest your words be taken to mean more than they imply, and thus you lose or dim the clear perceptions of His humanity as combined with divinity. His birth was a miracle of God. . . .

“Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption. He was tempted in all points like as man is tempted, yet He is called ‘that holy thing.’ It is a mystery that is left unexplained to mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin. The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain a mystery. That which is revealed, is for us and for our children, but let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1128, 1129.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Without getting into needless, divisive, and usually futile discussions over the exact nature of Christ, why is His humanity so important to us as followers of Jesus? What has His humanity offered to us?**
- 2. Sometimes Jesus is presented as a rather rigid and strict Lord; other times, Jesus is portrayed as very tolerant, loving, lenient, and merciful, who condones every lifestyle whatsoever. Both positions distort the picture of the biblical Christ. How can we make sure to present and to understand Jesus as correctly as possible; that is, in a clear biblical way?**
- 3. Hebrews 1:1, 2 talks about God speaking to us. What are the various ways He does that? The statement is made in the context of Jesus. How did God speak to us through Jesus?**

SUMMARY: Concerned about the backsliding of some Jewish believers in Jesus, Paul points them to the ministry of Jesus Christ, to His death in their behalf, and now to His high-priestly ministry, all of which should give them the faith, the courage, and the confidence to press on and not turn back.

Jesus, Our King



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 1.

MEMORY TEXT: “He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Though Hebrews repeatedly presents Jesus as our High Priest, Jesus also is pictured as King.

KINGS HAVE A LONG AND CHECKERED ROLE IN WORLD HISTORY. Because they often wielded power, their characters could determine the fate of nations. Israel, dissatisfied with the judges as their leaders, wanted a king, instead. They got one; in fact, they got many kings.

The Bible presents Jesus as a King. Jesus is even the King of kings (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). In Hebrews, Jesus the Priest-King is even more than a benevolent Ruler. He is able to do so much for us because of the nature of His rule, the nature of His reign, and the nature of the ministry involved in that rule and reign. This week we will take a look at His role as King.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: How is Christ’s kingship depicted in Hebrews? In what ways was His role as King prefigured in the Old Testament? Why is the character of a king so important? What does Jesus do for us in His role as King?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 12.

Sunday

July 6

JESUS, THE KING (Hebrews 1).

Hebrews 1 contains a “hymn” describing our Lord Jesus Christ. God has spoken to us in Him (vs. 1). He is the perfect representation of God the Father (vs. 4). In verses 2, 3, Christ’s existence is summarized: It starts with His preexistence, covers His earthly sojourn, and reaches up to His exaltation. He partakes in God’s government and kingship and far surpasses the angels in superiority (vs. 4).

The rest of Hebrews 1, verses 4-14, praises Jesus in higher and higher terms: (1) Jesus is the Son (vs. 5); (2) Jesus is to be worshiped (vs. 6); (3) Jesus is King and God from eternity to eternity (vss. 8, 9); (4) Jesus is Creator (vss. 10-12); (5) Jesus participates in God’s rule, and all will be subject to Him (vs. 13).

Although the kingship idea occurs throughout Hebrews, the clearest portrayal is obtained in Hebrews 1. “In this language is represented the omnipotence of the Lord Jesus.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 921.

In various places in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 1:3, 4, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2), the author mentions Jesus’ being at the “right hand” of God (expressed in various ways). After looking up the texts, ask this question: Is this emphasis in these texts on the exact *geographical* or *spatial* position of Jesus, or is the emphasis, instead, on Christ’s heavenly authority? Give reasons for whichever position you take.

Interestingly enough, Jesus is never specifically called “King” in Hebrews. Nevertheless, His kingship is made apparent by the various terms and references in the book in regard to Him. What specific references are found in the first chapter that point to His kingship? Look up these other texts, as well (Heb. 2:7, 8; 7:1-3, 17; 10:13). What do they say that prove that, according to Hebrews, Jesus is our King?

The allusions to Jesus’ kingship are quite strong in Hebrews. Jesus has an everlasting throne. In His hand He holds the scepter of uprightness and justice. He is crowned, and everyone is and everything is subject to Him. King Melchizedek is a type of Jesus. Clearly, Jesus is, according to Hebrews, the King of the universe.

The character of a king, someone who in ancient times often wielded unchallenged authority, is crucial. A cruel, depraved king can wreak moral and physical devastation over his kingdom. Knowing what we know about Christ’s character, why is the thought of His being King of the universe so comforting?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Acts 2:33, 34.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore the depiction of Jesus' kingship in the book of Hebrews.
2. To define the character of a king and provide an outline of Jesus' role as King, as described in the Old Testament.
3. To provide examples of what Jesus' role as King means for us.

Lesson Outline:

I. Establishing Jesus' Sovereignty.

- A. Jesus sits on the right hand of God.
- B. Jesus possesses an everlasting throne.
- C. He holds the scepter of uprightness and justice.

II. The Making of a Divine King.

- A. What did Jesus lose in order to save humanity?
- B. His death and resurrection guarantee His right to ascend the throne of God as Heir-apparent.
- C. The results of Christ's salvation are as eternal as His throne.

III. The Character of King Jesus.

- A. He is a King who upholds righteousness and justice.
- B. He is a loving and self-sacrificing Monarch.
- C. He is a humble and true Servant toward His subjects.

Summary: Christ is not just a King but a Priestly King whose reign is closely tied to humanity. Through Him, as a Leader of the people and for the people, we receive strength, understanding, and salvation.

Commentary.

Prophet, Priest, and King are descriptions that appear in the book of Hebrews to describe Jesus' role in heaven. Jesus the Son, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3, NKJV). It was a sign of exaltation and honor.

The position "at the right hand" was the preferred position in any gathering where people were classed according to status. The one who sat at the host's right hand at a banquet, for instance, was the guest of honor. In the ancient Near East, it was customary for people to recline when they ate. The person at the host's right hand reclined so that his head was near the host, where he and the host could converse most easily.

In early protocol, there was no person of higher status than the

Monday

July 7

JESUS, THE PROMISED PRIEST-KING (Psalm 110).

The kingship motif in Hebrews is based on a number of Old Testament passages, which include Psalms 2, 45, and 110. In fact, not only is Psalm 110 used throughout the book of Hebrews, but it also provides the backbone of Hebrews 1. An allusion to Psalm 110:1 is found in Hebrews 1:3, and the next-to-the-last verse of the chapter (vs. 13) comes from Psalm 110:1. Between these two references to Psalm 110:1, six other Old Testament quotations dwell on the kingship of Jesus.

Read Psalm 110. What are the major lines of thought developed here? What is the psalmist saying? Paraphrase it in your own words.

Psalm 110 (written by David) is quoted extensively in the New Testament. Verse 1 mentions the enthronement of the King and verse 4 the bestowal of the priesthood on Him; other verses talk about the world dominion of this King. God will subdue His enemies. The King will partake in Yahweh's reign. This King will also be a Priest forever, a Priest-King—a remarkable concept, because a Davidic king legitimately serving as a priest cannot be found in Israelite history. There was none.

Thus, we find here a direct Messianic prophecy. The promise refers to the Messiah only.

Read Matthew 22:41-45. Why does Jesus quote Psalm 110? What was Jesus telling the leaders about Himself?

In ancient Jewish thinking, there were to be two messiahs: one royal messiah (from the tribe of Judah) and a priestly messiah (from the tribe of Levi). In Hebrews they are united into one Messiah, the Priest-King, Jesus, a theme that is developed all through Hebrews.

Read Psalm 110 in the context of Hebrews 1. In both sections, the superiority, the assured victory, of “my Lord” (Ps. 110:1) and of “the Son” is assured. How can we, amid the seemingly intractable trials of life, draw comfort and hope from these promises? What do these promises of His victory mean for us?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

king. He would always be at the head of the gathering, with the princes and closest allies at his right and left, but he was also thought to be the one closest to God. Therefore, he was called God's "son" or "chosen one." Jesus is the only One worthy to share this position of honor next to the Father in heaven.

Jesus was exalted in heaven as a King. The point of this statement is that the Son sat down in exaltation at the right hand of the Majesty. That Jesus is enthroned at the right hand of God is one of the earliest affirmations of Christian faith. It goes back to Jesus' own application to Himself in the opening words of the divine oracle in Psalm 110: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand'" (vs. 1, NKJV).

It is clear that this language denotes the exaltation and supremacy of Jesus. Jesus was totally qualified. Paul can speak of the same idea in different language by saying that Jesus Christ has "ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:10, NKJV), that "God . . . highly exalted Him and [gave] Him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9, NKJV). Psalm 110 comprises the main passage of the epistle, and the importance of Jesus Christ's being seated as High Priest is clearly set forth in Hebrews 10:11, 12, where He is contrasted with the Aaronic priests, who remained standing, because their sacrificial service never came to an end. He is the Priest who has accomplished a perfect work of cleansing His people's sins; He is the King who sits enthroned in the place of chief honor alongside the Majesty on high.

The author of the book of Hebrews was interested in the royal enthronement character of Psalm 110, because he wanted to present Jesus as a King. Like other kings, Jesus held the position of favor with God, "at the right hand" (Heb. 1:3). Jesus, the Son, was a true replica of the Father, acted as His agent, and spoke with the authority of the Father. As King, He has a special place of honor with the Father that was even greater than that of the angels. The concept of the enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God gives the modern mind the idea of unparalleled power and glory.

The book of Hebrews tells us Jesus is the King of heaven, but what does His kingship *mean* for us? We can begin to answer this question by defining key aspects of any earthly king to show how Jesus not only fulfills but exceeds all these requirements. In doing so, we will be able to grasp better the superior services His kingship offers us, starting first with a look at the aspect of enthronement.

Monarchs in ancient times often received gifts in honor of being enthroned. In keeping with this tradition, God asks Solomon what he desires for a coronation present. Solomon desires wisdom and knowledge, and, in turn, God gives these to him, along with all else he does *not* ask for: riches, wealth, and honor above all kings (2 Chron. 1:7-12). Likewise, it was also customary in those days for foreign monarchs to visit other rulers and offer gifts. This is exactly what the Queen of Sheba does (2 Chron. 9:1). So impressed is she with the

Tuesday

July 8

JESUS' KINGSHIP.

As Christians, we believe in the eternal preexistence of Christ. He is not a created being. From eternity, He lived with the Father in some capacity as Ruler. However, the author of Hebrews is not interested in discussing the nature and extent of the Son's rule *before* His incarnation.

For him, instead, what is important is that the final realization of Christ's reign has begun after His death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, when Jesus sat down at the right hand of God after "he had made purification for sins" (Heb. 1:3, NRSV). Christ's humiliation through Incarnation and death was followed by Resurrection and exaltation (2:6-9); first the Cross, then the crown (Heb. 12:2).

Study these three verses carefully (in context): "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool" (Acts 2:33-35). What is Peter saying here about the enthronement of Christ? What have we received because of that heavenly enthronement? Why, then, is this event so important to us?

Notice, too, that Peter quotes Psalm 110:1, which is interpreted as Jesus' exaltation as King after His resurrection and ascension. The visible sign of that event on earth was the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. In Acts 5:30-32, Peter returns to the same topic.

Thus, Jesus became King after He brought about salvation for humankind. Salvation and kingship are, therefore, linked. As the results of salvation are never ending, so is His kingship. His throne is forever and ever.

Yet, although Jesus reigns over His angels, His saints, and the heavenly world right now, enemies exist, which will eventually be made subject to Him. The cosmic realization of His reign is still future. This will come at the end, when sin and sinners are no more, when all the questions of the great controversy have been resolved, and when God and His government will stand vindicated forever.

What does the linkage between kingship and salvation mean for us? In what ways does Christ's being King help give us assurance of salvation? Or does it? For example, What should give us more hope: to believe that the angels want us saved or that the King of the universe does? Explain your answer.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

reputation of the fabled wisdom of Solomon she journeys to see the king, who makes “silver in Jerusalem” as common “as stones” (vs. 27). She brings him spices, the gold of Ophir, jewels, and algum wood (vss. 9, 10). Solomon, in turn, offers her “all her desire” (vs. 12).

Like Solomon, Jesus receives and bestows gifts upon becoming King. It is the occasion of His heavenly enthronement that entitles Him to do this. According to Acts 2:33-35, He receives the gift of the Holy Ghost after He is enthroned. What does He do with this gift once He receives it? He gives it away to us—as though pouring out His life for us were not enough.

But the gift giving does not end there. Jesus is not content to offer only His body and His blood to save us; He wants us to share in the rest of the coronation riches of His enthronement. Not only is He given the gift of the Holy Spirit, which He then bestows upon us, He gives us the unprecedented privilege of calling Him Brother. Imagine hailing a modern-day monarch—Queen Elizabeth of England, for example—as “Sister Elizabeth.” The queen probably would be taken aback at the breach of etiquette. What monarch other than Jesus would be willing to die for you and let you call him Brother? Surely no earthly monarch.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Judges 8:23, Matthew 11:11, Luke 17:21, John 1:1, Philippians 2:7.

1. Hebrews presents Jesus as a King. What does the image of kingship suggest to us? Is it possible for our experience of earthly kings and rulers to cause us to have a distorted view of what kingship and rulership mean as applied to Jesus?
2. In what ways is the kingship of Jesus different from kingship as seen in earthly history? Why do you think the author of Hebrews went to such lengths to portray Jesus as a royal figure? In what ways is Jesus the ideal King?
3. The description of Jesus' elevation by God to the level of kingship has been taken by some to mean that God somehow adopted the Man Jesus to be His Son. How do we know Jesus, in fact, was the Son of God, not only before His life on earth but from all eternity?
4. Hebrews suggests Jesus' kingship is tied in with His eventual victory over the forces of evil. Does this mean the kingdom of God is something that will exist in the future, or is it possible to say, in some sense, it exists now?
5. Do you find it paradoxical that Jesus proved His claim to kingship by performing the seemingly unkingly acts of self-sacrifice and servanthood? Do you think the original readers of Hebrews might have found this fact hard to grasp?

Wednesday

July 9

THE CHARACTER OF JESUS, THE KING (Heb. 7:1-3).

What are some of the attributes of King Jesus as presented in Hebrews? Heb. 1:8, 9, 12; 2:9, 10, 11; 7:1-3; 12:2, 3.

Because the title of king can arouse different feelings (sometimes good, sometimes bad), we must understand what kind of king Jesus is.

Five basic characteristics are mentioned below:

The King of peace (Heb. 7:1, 2). Like Melchizedek, Jesus is the King of peace. The name *Salem* is connected to the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, “peace.” It describes peace, completeness, and welfare. It includes good health, prosperous relations to others, friendship, and even the idea of salvation. Jesus is the Peacemaker par excellence. Peace is His character.

The King of righteousness and justice (Heb. 1:8; 7:2). Jesus is just and absolutely fair. He shows no partiality. He is righteous, and His righteousness puts us in the right relationship with the Deity. Furthermore, Jesus loves righteousness and hates sin (Heb. 1:9). “To love righteousness is a higher virtue than merely to do righteousness. . . . Work, with duty as a motive, is commendable. Work, with love as a motive, is a still higher experience. . . . Love is what prompted God to action.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 400.

Self-sacrificial love and kindness (Heb. 1:3; 2:9, 10; 12:2-6). In Jesus there is no selfishness and egocentrism. He lives for others. He does not avoid suffering and death, not when that suffering and death will lead to the salvation of untold numbers.

Humility and servant leadership (Heb. 2:11). Jesus is Sovereign Lord of the universe. Nevertheless, He calls us brothers and sisters. Although being the King of kings, He is called a Servant on our behalf. He is the Supreme Example of servant-leadership.

Immutability (Heb. 1:12; 13:8). This concept does not mean that Jesus is unaffected by our joys, sorrows, and decisions. It means that His love, kindness, and justice never fail or change. We can rely upon Him—always.

Take the qualities listed above and write a paragraph (or however much you can) about what hope exists for us in these qualities. How do they help us fulfill the first and most important of all commandments? (Matt. 22:37, 38).

TEACHERS COMMENTS

The titles of earthly kings are reminders of the distance between the subjects they rule over and themselves. But the King of heaven bids us call Him Brother and banishes the breach between the Divine and fallen humanity.

Further, Jesus outstrips, outranks, and outperforms in power and in principality any other sovereign who ever has ruled. The sovereignty of the reigning Queen of England or of Charlemagne is, or was, limited to land. Jesus' sovereignty is not landlocked or limited to physical realms. His authority occupies a dimension beyond space and time. His territory encompasses the realm of peace, and He governs the geography of grace. People, places, ideas, thoughts, emotions, time—the Lord reigns over all.

The realm of His power, the coronation gifts He receives and bestows on us, and His royal title all express His character and what kind of ruler He is. These very qualities of His kingship give us assurance of salvation. He is the King of peace, of righteousness, of

WITNESSING

When Hezekiah became king of Judah, he “did that which was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Chron. 29:2). And during his reign, the nation prospered. The Bible speaks of the rise and fall of many kings, some with upright characters, others with hearts full of wickedness. We read of kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah who honored the Lord. Others, such as Ahaz, defiled the temple of God and led the people to worship heathen gods. And kings such as Manasseh “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord” and “shed innocent blood” (2 Kings 21:2, 16). From one king to another, God's messengers went about speaking the truth and proclaiming judgment on those who did wickedness in the sight of the Lord.

As God's messengers today, we must go forth and proclaim the good news that someday the kingdoms of this world will pass away,

and a new kingdom will arise where Christ, the King of kings, will be Ruler. In that day, we will no longer be oppressed with the evils of this world. Sin and suffering will be banished forever. And all will worship the true God.

Throughout earth's history there have been kings who have been great warriors, seizing kings and conquering territories. We can let others know that Christ, the Eternal King, has defeated Satan, the ruler of darkness, and conquered sin and death. He has freed us from bondage, the bondage of substance abuse, sexual immoralities, violence, selfishness, hatred, and fear.

Many earthly kings ruled with iron fists and oppressed those who dwelled in their realm. But Jesus, Lord of all, will rule with a scepter of love. His kingdom will be filled with joy and peace, and He will reign forever.

Thursday

July 10

JESUS, KING FOR US.

Yesterday, we studied the qualities of Jesus the King. Today, we are interested in His work in our behalf. Actions grow out of the character; they are, then, naturally related to each other. We saw the wonderful characteristics that are ascribed to Jesus. The question then arises: What does that mean for us?

Write down what the verses are saying concerning each listed topic:

Salvation. See Heb. 2:3; 5:9; and 7:25.

Faith. Heb. 12:2.

Peace. Heb. 7:2.

Sanctification. Heb. 2:11; 10:14.

An example. Heb. 12:2, 3.

Closeness. Heb. 2:14, 17; 4:15; 7:25.

Help. Heb. 2:16; 4:16.

Providing a better future. Heb. 11:16; 13:14.

Look at all this. Though Hebrews is about Jesus, it is not about Jesus in a vacuum. It is about Jesus in His roles and work of saving us from the horrible consequences of sin. It is not only about Jesus redeeming us from eternal death but about what He is doing for us now; to help us cope in this world; to give us peace, power, and assurance as we fight the fight of faith and seek to hold fast to the end, where a crown of glory is awaiting us.

This is, in so many ways, the message of the book of Hebrews. It was what Paul wrote to the believers back then, and it is what he has written for us today.

Think about your own spiritual needs at this very moment. Is there any particular area where you are struggling? Look at the list for today. More than likely, you will find something there from which you can draw comfort. If so, write down what it is and how it has helped you. Perhaps you could share it with your class.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

love. His monarchy is unshakeable, unchangeable, and absolute. But unlike worldly monarchies who often abuse sovereign rights and need to be curbed, no Magna Carta ever needs to be drafted in order to limit His powers. This is because Jesus did not seek the glory of a king while on earth but became a subject. He exchanged His crown of heaven for one barbed with briars and thorns, a diadem of mockery fit for a criminal, a cruel crown that reminds us that obstacles, thorns, and briars shadow the path of life. Yet, if we choose to walk such paths in this life, crowned with sorrows and suffering, He promises to crown us with immortality in the next. Until then, this same Monarch stands enthroned as King, at the right hand of God, living ever to make intercession for us.

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: There is a palace in Peterhof, Russia, just outside St. Petersburg. This palace is known for more than five hundred water fountains in the gardens that surround it. Some of the fountains are large and vigorous, others small and gentle. But the most intriguing are the “surprise” fountains, which are triggered when a visitor steps on certain rocks and steppingstones. Fountains we all know and appreciate. But surprise fountains that squirt water on you unexpectedly? The surprise would either be pleasant or startling, depending on your preparedness. Throughout the book of Hebrews, portions of Jesus’ job description keep popping up. And every now and then, it presents a facet of Jesus that is “surprisingly” different.

Thought Question:

There are many clues in Hebrews that tell us the book was probably

written for a group of Jewish Christians. Considering their heritage of rulers and kings, what kind of images do you think they associated with a king? How is the image of Jesus as King similar to the images they were familiar with? How is it different? Why do you think they might have been surprised by the author’s presentation of Jesus as King?

Application Question:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 15:16). These are the words of the King to you! How does that make you feel? What would be your response to an earthly king who gives you a high-profile assignment? What is your response to Jesus the King? What are the differences between the two responses? The similarities?

FURTHER STUDY:

And I saw another field full of all kinds of flowers, and as I plucked them, I cried out: ‘They will never fade.’ Next I saw a field of tall grass, most glorious to behold; it was living green, and had a reflection of silver and gold, as it waved proudly to the glory of King Jesus. Then we entered a field full of all kinds of beasts—the lion, the lamb, the leopard, and the wolf, all together in perfect union. We passed through the midst of them, and they followed on peaceably after. Then we entered a wood, not like the dark woods we have here; no, no; but light, and all over glorious; the branches of the trees waved to and fro, and we all cried out: ‘We will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.’ We passed through the woods, for we were on our way to Mount Zion.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 68.

“The way to heaven is rugged. Briers and thorns are in the way; but we can with cheerfulness tread the rough pathway, knowing that Jesus, the King of glory, once trod it before us.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 10, 1852.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Why is Jesus described as a King in Hebrews? Some Christians do not like this title and want to replace it by other terms. What do you think about this issue? What basic ideas does the concept of Jesus’ kingship communicate?**
- 2. Kingship includes authority on the part of the king and subordination on the part of his subjects. Authority is challenged in many societies today. Some prefer to relate to God as a friend, even a buddy, rather than as the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. How would you want to relate to God? What does it mean in practical terms to accept God as Lord? How is our everyday life influenced if we do that?**
- 3. This week we were given a taste of all that Christ has done in order to save us. And yet people, even with the knowledge of these things, will be lost. With so much done for us, why will people still be lost?**

SUMMARY: Jesus is not simply a King or even the most powerful King. Christ is Priest-King, and His kingship, as well as His priesthood, are related to all human beings. With His ministry as Priest-King for our sake, Christ enters another stage of the plan of redemption. The readers of Hebrews can rely on Him in every respect.

Jesus, One of Us



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 2.

MEMORY TEXT: “Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Jesus came in human flesh, was tempted in human flesh, suffered in human flesh, and died in human flesh; yet never once did He sin in that flesh. Now He is our High Priest in heaven.

CONDUCTOR AND COMPOSER LEONARD BERNSTEIN once was asked: “Mister Bernstein, which is the most difficult instrument?” Bernstein replied: “The second violin. I can get many first violinists, but to find one who with the same enthusiasm plays second violin or second French horn or second flute, is a real problem. Yet, if nobody would play second violin, we would not have harmony.” It is not always easy to be second, especially if one deserves to be first. It is even more difficult to step down after having been first; and it's more difficult still to be ridiculed and humiliated after having stepped down from being first. This, however, is exactly what Jesus did, and our lesson this week takes a look at what His condescension means for us.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why the emphasis on Christ's humanity? Why does Scripture present such a cruel picture of Christ's sufferings? What does His humanity have to do with His high-priestly ministry?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 19.

Sunday

July 13

JESUS' HUMILIATION.

“But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one” (Heb. 2:9, RSV).

Hebrews 1 shows the superiority of Jesus over the angels (vss. 5-14). Then, the next chapter, in the context of His earthly ministry, says that Jesus “for a little while was made lower than the angels.” What a contrast!

Read Hebrews 2:5-18. Summarize in a few lines the essence of the verses:

Whatever you wrote, one thing is certain: This section is adamant about the humanity of Jesus, that though He was King and greater than the angels, He took upon Himself “the seed of Abraham” (vs. 16), human flesh, and He not only tasted death for every man (vs. 9), but He also became a “merciful and faithful high priest” in our behalf (vs. 17).

Notice, too, that Hebrews 1 refers to Jesus’ exaltation, while Hebrews 2 focuses on His humiliation. Chronologically, at least in the context of His work of Redemption in our behalf, the humiliation came first and then the exaltation. Perhaps the author of Hebrews wanted to depict Jesus in His majestic role so the readers would immediately notice in whom they believe and would be reconfirmed in their faith.

The role of Jesus as the Creator points to His preexistence (that is, before He stepped into humanity); the role of Jesus as King points to His ascension (that is, after His earthly ministry). Although His incarnation, including the substitutionary death, are of extreme importance, they must be seen against the background of Jesus’ eternal existence as God. Only then can the depth of His humiliation be truly appreciated.

Jesus, the Creator, God Himself, the King of the universe, had taken upon Himself a humanity in which He suffered more than any of us ever could. Dwell upon what this means. Pray over it. Ask the Lord to help you grasp the hope, the promise, and the good news in this amazing truth.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 2:9.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore the importance of Christ's humanity.
2. To explain the significance of Christ's sufferings, both in His life and on the cross.
3. To define how His humanity and divinity work together.

Lesson Outline:

I. Christ Before His Humanity.

- A. Christ existed before the world was created.
- B. Christ held the heavenly office as the Right Hand of God.
- C. Christ was exalted above all the host of heaven.

II. Christ Embraces Humanity.

- A. Christ chooses to take human nature.
- B. He becomes a true Representative of humanity.
- C. Only by assuming human nature and dying for us could He, the perfect Sacrifice, lead us to salvation.

III. Christ's Suffering and Death.

- A. Christ suffered at the hand of humanity.
- B. Christ accepted upon Himself God's wrath for humanity's sins.
- C. Christ accepted our punishment, so we might receive the gift of salvation.

Summary: Christ was both fully human and fully divine. To redeem us, He chose to come in human flesh, endure the weakness of human flesh, face temptation in the flesh, and overcome sin. Only then could He serve as the High Priest of humanity in the presence of God.

Commentary.

In Hebrews, chapter 1, we learned that Jesus Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets and to the angels. In chapter 2 we learned that He became the Originator and Deliverer of salvation, not for the angels but for His elect brothers and sisters in the human race.

The Jewish audience to whom this epistle is addressed is made to understand why God had to become a Man in order to make reconciliation and offer propitiation for our sins. Jesus became a Man in order to save humanity.

Monday

July 14

JESUS, THE HUMAN PAR EXCELLENCE.

“For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour” (Ps. 8:5).

Compare Hebrews 2:6-8 and Psalm 8:5-7. How does the author of Hebrews use that psalm? What application does he give it? What point does he make by interpreting it as he does?

The use of Psalm 8 is . . . interesting, for this passage was never considered to be Messianic. The original context is man, yet not in his ordinary state but in his ideal state. . . . At creation man was given dominion over the earth, but ever since the fall that authority to subject has been lacking. The psalm is only perfectly fulfilled, therefore, in the ideal Man, Jesus Christ, who alone has that authority. The writer sees a fulfillment of this psalm in a way that the Jews never foresaw. The same psalm is cited by Jesus (Mt. 21:16) and Paul (1 Cor. 15:27), both in a way which points to its fulfillment in Jesus himself.”—Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 84, 85.

Jesus is the true Representative of humanity, and in Him the psalm found true fulfillment. As humanity’s Representative, He must share in the same conditions as humanity. To truly represent us, He had to be One of us. That makes sense. Only then could He blaze the trail of salvation for us and be an effective High Priest in the presence of God in behalf of humanity.

Though the basic meaning of Psalm 8 was to deal with humanity in general, Hebrews applies it in particular to Jesus, who was the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), the new Representative of the race depicted in Psalm 8. By applying the psalm in this manner, the author helps establish clearly not only the humanity of Jesus but the efficacy of His role in redeeming us from sin.

What we see in Hebrews 1 and 2 is the idea that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. However difficult it is to understand this from a purely naturalistic perspective, what does the humanity and divinity of Christ tell us about the link between heaven and earth? How does this reality (the humanity-deity) of Christ help us trust in the salvation we have been offered?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

He took all our problems on Himself, becoming one with us, in order that He could deliver us. He descended and condescended, humiliating Himself in service to win the world.

How can these things happen? How can God become Man? In order to understand better this issue, we should study two main concepts: Jesus' status and Jesus' human nature in relationship to us.

I. Jesus' Status: From the Highest to the Lowest.

When the Son, the Creator and Lord of angels, humbled Himself, He passed by angelic estate and stooped lower still, becoming Man for men's salvation. Angels are not God's crowning achievement in creation. Adam was, and thus the race is. Angels were not given sovereign control over all else He created; humanity was, at least in the context of the earth.

When Adam fell, he became a victim of the world system that was to have been his. But no angel is destined to rule the world system. On the contrary, the angels, in addition to being God's subordinate workers in the administration of universal affairs (Heb. 1:7), are also assigned to be servants to the saints (Heb. 1:14).

It would hardly serve the divine purpose, therefore, for the *Logos* to become incarnate as an angel. He became a Man, because He had to become in eternity past for humanity He never had for angels. He became a Man in order to save humanity, not an angel.

No one, however, can become a man without thereby becoming a member of some specific human group or family. So, when the Son of God took our nature upon Himself, He became "the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). In doing that, however, He became the Helper and Liberator of all the children of Abraham, and here, quite certainly, we are not to confine the scope of "the seed of Abraham" to his natural descendants; we are, rather, to understand the whole family of faith. Jesus became of the Seed of Abraham, and this was the only way Jesus partook of the human nature in order to save the whole humanity.

II. Jesus' Human Nature and Priestly Role.

Having thus emphasized Jesus' solidarity with humanity, the author of the book of Hebrews now introduces the special aspect of His solidarity with them. The author especially is concerned about explaining Jesus' human nature and His high-priestly ministry in behalf of the humanity to which Christ so closely associates Himself now.

In order to serve them in this capacity (His people's High Priest), Jesus was obliged to become like His brethren, without sin, of course, as is pointed out in Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (NKJV). Jesus, who became Man; who was made "a little lower than the angels"; Jesus, who endured death; was raised to the place of highest exaltation and honor.

Tuesday

July 15

JESUS' SUFFERING.

Hebrews 2 contains strong language in regard to Christ's suffering. The author talks about "the suffering of death" and states that Jesus by the grace of God might taste death for everyone (vs. 9). Death and suffering are again mentioned in Hebrews 2:14, 18; 5:8; 9:26; 12:2; and 13:12.

It is, in many ways, a cruel picture: the innocent Son of God suffering for the sins of the world. Jesus took upon Himself the wrath of God for sins He never committed, tasting death for every man, woman, and child, even those who, in the end through disobedience and rebellion, have to taste it themselves anyway.

Sure, it's cruel, but that's what it was meant to be, to help show us not only the cost of sin but what it cost to redeem us from that sin.

What are the results of Christ's suffering?

Heb. 2:9-11 _____

Heb. 2:14-16 _____

Heb. 2:17, 18 _____

However great that suffering, look at what it wrought for us. Though much about Christ's suffering and death eludes our experiences and is beyond our comprehension, we can only marvel at the results of that death, which include (1) the exaltation of Jesus, (2) the defeat of Satan, (3) the surety of salvation for us, (4) the closeness of Jesus to humanity, (5) His efficacy as our High Priest, and (6) His aid for us now when we ourselves face temptation. What else do we need?

Look at verse 14. It says that Jesus came so that by His death He might destroy the one who has the power over death. How do you understand this verse, given that we still die?

Some psychologists believe that the fear of death is the dominating force in our lives and that much of what we do, consciously or unconsciously, stems from this fear. Look at verse 15. According to this text, what has Jesus done that should give us the answer and the solution to this fear?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Moreover, it is exactly because of His humiliation, suffering, and death He has been invested with heavenly glory. This interpretation is in agreement with Paul's statement that "therefore God also has highly exalted Him" (Phil. 2:9, NKJV). Jesus suffered with humanity and for humanity and through His sufferings was made perfect, qualified in every way to be our High Priest. He is merciful, because through His own sufferings and trials He can sympathize with ours; He is faithful, because He endured to the end without sin.

Most crucial among these matters is the matter of sin. How can sinners approach the throne of God, either personally or through a representative? They can come to Him with confidence, only if their sin has been dealt with. And this, above all else, makes Jesus so

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:4, 5; Matthew 4:1-11; John 17:5; Philippians 2:7.

1. Why were Jesus' abasement, suffering, and ultimate death necessary and sufficient to redeem us from our own sin and ultimate death? How is it possible for one being to bear guilt for another? What part (if any) does Jesus' divinity play in this? What does this tell us about God in that He was willing to do this for us?

2. In what sense is humankind "lower than the angels"? Does this apply to the human race before the Fall as well as after? If it applies to humankind only after the Fall, what

does it say about the nature of Jesus' humanity?

3. What does the fact that God—in the form of Jesus—became human tell us about the relationship between God and humanity? Might it have anything to do with humanity being created in God's image? How does your understanding of the humanity of Christ help you relate to Jesus? If He weren't human, what difference would that make for us in how we relate to Jesus?

4. Hebrews mentions Christ being tempted, in a sense tested. Was it a foregone conclusion that Jesus would pass this test? Did the possibility of failure exist? Why, or Why not?

Wednesday

July 16

JESUS, OUR BROTHER.

Read again all of Hebrews 2, focusing particularly on verse 11. In the context of the whole chapter, what does the word *brother* indicate? What point was the author trying to make?

It is amazing that Jesus indirectly calls Himself our Brother. As the Creator and the King of the universe, He is, nevertheless, still willing to be the Brother of His creatures; that is, His fallen, sinful, and, oftentimes, pernicious creatures. Amazing!

The term *brother* in this context points to an intimate closeness and relationship. Jesus and His followers are one family. Because of what He went through and suffered, Jesus is one of us, and He will stay one of us in spite of His royal dignity. Verse 14 emphasizes that He became a partaker of our flesh and blood, of our nature and of our experience. There's no question: By having become one of us, He can relate to us and we to Him, in a manner differently than were He to have never lived as a human being. What better way could there have been for God to become close to us other than by what Jesus did?

Closeness may contain certain dangers. We can, for instance, turn Jesus into nothing but our buddy. Though there is the friendship element (John 15:15) in our relationship with Christ, it isn't the only term used to depict that relationship. What other images and terms does the Bible use to define that relationship? Matt. 22:36; John 10:11; 20:28; 1 Tim. 1:1.

When it comes to the Bible and to God Himself, we often talk in paradoxes or contrasting pairs. There are three divine Personalities and yet one Godhead. God is far away, unreachable yet present and close to us. Though not limited to time, He reveals Himself in time. We are already saved, and we still will be saved.

It is not either/or but one and the other. We must keep these different truths together, balanced with each other the best we can. Let us neither exclusively view Jesus as the distant Ruler of the universe nor treat Him just as a pal. Let us approach Him as our Brother in all due respect and love, because, no matter our intimacy, He's still the Creator, and we are still the creature—and a great distance exists between the two.

Caroline grew up abused by her brothers. Thus, the image of Christ as her "Brother" hardly evokes a positive response. How do you present Christ to someone like her?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

incomparable a High Priest and Representative of His people; not only is He sinless Himself and, thus, entitled to enter the presence of God on His own account, but He deals effectively with His people's sins and can, therefore, enter into the presence of God on their account too.

Jesus, our High Priest, not merely removes His people's sins but also removes the barrier they erected between themselves and God.

WITNESSING

Imagine a young man bowing before the throne of God, his face to the ground. He trembles in the presence of holiness. The whole universe watches in utter silence. Suddenly, a shadow hovers over him. He timidly lifts his head and looks into the loving face of Jesus. A strong hand reaches down and lifts him up (he has no strength of his own). Standing in front of the young man, the Savior turns to the Father and says, "He is with Me."

It is easy to identify with someone with whom you have something in common. Jesus can identify with us. He assumed human nature and was tempted "in all points" as we are, "yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He experienced what we experience, and He overcame. So, we can be sure the One who stands before the throne of

God to speak in our behalf is a "faithful witness" (Rev. 1:5), and He has the power to save us.

One innocent Man stood against a mob of hate-filled people. They spat upon Him and cursed at Him. They accused Him falsely. He had done no wrong, yet He was scorned, beaten, and finally killed by the hands of those He had come to save. The same cruelty and hatred have caused the death of millions of innocent people since the beginning of earth's history. Jesus experienced what we experience, and He overcame. And because He now lives, we, too, can live, eternally.

As we witness, let us speak of how Jesus became one of us, so we could be one with Him. And now when the heavenly Father looks at us, He does not see us; He sees Jesus.

Thursday

July 17

JESUS, OUR HIGH PRIEST.

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

Hebrews 2 culminates in the high-priestly office of Jesus, our Brother. It lists qualifications for that office. It describes Jesus in this function and briefly points to the ministry He performs. And one of the qualifications of Jesus was that He had to face temptation to sin, just as humans have, as well.

That Jesus was tempted is mentioned only two times in Hebrews (2:18 and 4:15). Look up the texts. How do they complement each other? What does the second one say that helps us understand what the first one says? Also, how can we understand the statement that Jesus “has been tempted in every way just as we are—yet was without sin”? (Heb. 4:15, NIV).

British author Oscar Wilde once said that the only way to deal with sin is to succumb to it. In contrast, it has been said that the one who falls never knows the full force of temptation, because he or she fails before the test ends. If true, then Jesus is the only One who has known the extremity of temptation, because He alone remained “without sin.” He never gave in to it; therefore, He felt its tug worse than any of us have.

Even more so, He faced all that we face and so much more. When was the last time any of us were tempted to turn stones into bread or to command a legion of angels to bear us? And, considering the issues at stake in the great controversy, Satan must have been much more interested in causing Jesus to commit a sin than he is interested in getting us to. And yet, in the midst of all this temptation, Jesus never fell, never sinned, and this experience was one of the things that qualified Him to be our High Priest.

Read Hebrews 2:16-18. As we saw earlier in the week, Christ’s humanity is likened to His high-priestly ministry. Look at the two words in verse 17 that describe the kind of High Priest He is. What did His humanity have to do with these two characteristics becoming descriptive of His ministry?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: In Laurie Beth Jones’s prologue to her book, *Jesus in Blue Jeans*, we read: “Many years ago I dreamed that I was standing in a meadow. Suddenly I saw a man approaching me. As he got nearer I gasped to realize that it was Jesus in Blue Jeans. When he saw the expression on my face he said, ‘Why are you surprised? I came to them wearing robes because they wore robes. I come to you in blue jeans because you wear blue jeans.’”

“I fell in love with him at that moment. There is something so familiar—and so powerful—about a man in jeans.”—*Jesus in Blue Jeans* (New York: Hyperion, 1997).

Thought Question:

In every facet of His life, Jesus sought to find common ground with humanity. He could have come to earth as a glimmering giant with a superwide halo to impress the world with His greatness. But He didn’t. Think about His life—where He lived, how He lived, what He spoke. List the ways in which He was “one of us.” Why do you think it is important to have common ground

with God, the Supreme Being?

Application Questions:

1. Finding and having common ground between one another removes barriers. The more you have in common with your neighbors, the more likely you are to associate with them. Consider someone who is your “enemy.” Now, find at least ten things you have in common with him or her. How does this help you to be more forgiving? To be more like Jesus? If Jesus, the Son of God—in an effort to be our “Brother”—could find things in common with us, how must we reflect this “unity”?
2. In retrospect, Jesus’ life and mission on earth were a success. Before He equipped His followers to continue His work, He revealed to them His divinity. How does our work convey the humanity and divinity of Jesus? Why is it important for people to understand the human side of Jesus? What difference does the dual function of Jesus (as Man and God) make to our spiritual growth?

FURTHER STUDY: Read the chapter on “Gethsemane” in Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 685–697. It highlights Jesus’ temptation and suffering.

In Christ were united the divine and the human—the Creator and the creature. The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and the nature of Adam, the transgressor, meet in Jesus—the Son of God, and the Son of man. And having with His own blood paid the price of redemption, having passed through man’s experience, having in man’s behalf met and conquered temptation, having, though Himself sinless, borne the shame and guilt and burden of sin, He becomes man’s Advocate and Intercessor. What an assurance here to the tempted and struggling soul, what an assurance to the witnessing universe, that Christ will be ‘a merciful and faithful high priest’ (MS 141, 1901)!”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 926.

“The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; He gave proof of His humility in becoming a man. Yet He was God in the flesh. When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground’ (Ex. 3:5). We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth.” —Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Dwell on the thought that Jesus Christ as a human being—that is, in human flesh—never sinned. Imagine a whole life in which He never, even once, succumbed to temptation. What does this truth do to all our excuses for sin?**
- 2. How do you understand Ellen White’s statement that the humanity of Christ is the “golden chain” that binds our souls to Christ? What does that mean?**

SUMMARY: Hebrews 2 portrays Jesus in His humanity and describes His accomplishments. He tasted death for us, became the pioneer of our salvation, conquered Satan and death, freed us from existential fear, makes atonement for our sins, and aids us when tempted. A heavy emphasis is on our salvation and the closeness of Jesus with us. We can be confident, because He is our Brother.

Jesus, Higher and Better



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Heb. 7:7-26; 11:1-26.

MEMORY TEXT: “For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Christ's superiority paves the way for the foundation of His entire ministry and the blessings that we receive from it.

FEW PEOPLE LIKE SNOBS. Snobbishness is difficult to stomach. Do we like being around those who look down their noses at us? Self-superiority, besides being the original sin, is just plain hard to deal with. Yet, the thrust of Hebrews is all about superiority; that is, the superiority of Jesus Christ. In His case, there's nothing offensive, nothing snobbish, nothing that would turn us away.

On the contrary, as we'll see this week, Christ's superiority is manifested in a way that should draw us to Him in faith and obedience, for in that superiority comes the great hope of salvation.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: In what ways does Hebrews depict Jesus as superior? Why is Jesus superior? What are the results of Christ's superiority, in terms of His life, death, and ministry in our behalf? How do we respond to what Christ has accomplished for us?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 26.

Sunday

July 20

JESUS' SUPERIORITY.

What does Hebrews tell us about Jesus' superiority?

Heb. 1:4 _____

Heb. 3:3 _____

Heb. 7:26 _____

Heb. 12:24 _____

Although Jesus is superior to the angels, to Moses, and to the high priests; although His blood is better than Abel's blood; and although He is higher than the heavens; Jesus never strived for superiority while on earth.

On the contrary. Consider what Hebrews writes about Jesus in contrast to the Jesus depicted in all four Gospels. It's hard to imagine they are talking about the same Person. And yet they are.

According to the Gospels, He lived His life in simplicity and humility, serving others before Himself. There was no self-promotion in Christ, even though He certainly had reasons to boast, as Hebrews clearly shows, had He wanted to.

Look at Jesus' attitude in comparison to so much of what's in the world today, where self-promotion is the key motive behind so many of our actions. How unfortunate, too, that Christians are not immune to these influences, even in the context of our faith. Like the disciples, we may discuss the question of who is the greatest among us (Luke 22:24). Like the Pharisees, we may look down on the tax collector (Luke 18:9-12). We compare ourselves to others, preferably to those who are worse off or "lower" than we are. Then we end up "superior" (at least in our own minds) to them and believe we have the right to climb the ecclesiastical ladder.

In contrast, the texts in Hebrews that we looked at today clearly establish the superiority of Christ to angels, to Moses, and so forth. And yet, when we look at His life on earth and how He expressed His character, we see only humility, self-denial, self-renunciation, all for the good of those who were, without a doubt, inferior to Him. The same One who was superior to Moses was the same One who stooped to wash the feet of His disciples.

Superior to all yet servant of all. This was Jesus. How do we feel when confronted with His example? How should we feel? Dwell more on the contrast between the Jesus depicted in Hebrews and the Jesus of the Gospels. What message does that send to us?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 7:15, 16.

Teachers Aims:

1. To discuss the depiction of Jesus in Hebrews.
2. To define Christ's character and ministry in our behalf.
3. To accept what Christ has accomplished, and is still accomplishing, for our salvation.

Lesson Outline:

I. Christ's Greatness Is Manifested in His Superiority.

- A. Christ set a pattern for humanity.
- B. Christ's life exemplified unparalleled service to others.
- C. He fought openly for those oppressed by the devil and his forces.

II. A Life Overflowing With Results.

- A. Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, we are offered hope and the promise of a renewed covenant with God.
- B. He offers the promise of everlasting life.
- C. We are offered a salvation beyond our comprehension.

III. Humanity's Reaction to Christ's Superiority.

- A. God does not use His superior strength to force anyone to partake of what Christ offers.
- B. The choice to obey or reject God remains ours.
- C. The book of Hebrews is a call to those who know Jesus and do not reject what He has done for them.

Summary: The book of Hebrews depicts the superiority of Christ. He proved His superiority by living the ideal human life God intended for us to live. However, His superiority serves not as a wedge to drive humanity away from the throne of God but as a cord to draw us to it.

Commentary.

The core of the message of the book of Hebrews is that we have a better High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. This idea is important, for the character of our Lord Jesus Christ's intercession has, at times, been grotesquely misrepresented in popular Christian thought.

We need to make clear the new priesthood is better, because the new Priest is Jesus—Jesus, who endured sore temptations on earth; Jesus, who poured out His heart in earnest prayer to God; Jesus, who

Monday

July 21

THE REASON FOR JESUS' SUPERIORITY.

One reason for Jesus' superiority is, of course, that He is God and Creator (one isn't more superior than that). And, no question, Hebrews clearly refers to Him in this capacity. However, His superiority seems not to be derived primarily from His preexistence and deity. Instead, the apostle links His superiority to, interestingly enough, His "inferiority."

Look at Hebrews 2:9. What does it teach us about the link between "inferiority" and "superiority"? See also Phil. 2:4-9.

In Acts 10:36, Peter presents Jesus as Lord of all. But two verses later, He tells us about how the Lord of all acted while in the flesh: He "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (vs. 38, NRSV). This is real greatness, greatness in "inferiority," and this internal greatness becomes manifest in superiority.

What biblical examples show that true lowliness and humble service are rewarded with exaltation?

Joseph in Egypt performed his tasks faithfully, whether as a slave or a prisoner. Eventually, he was exalted to leadership. Even after Moses tended the sheep of his father-in-law in Midian, he still did not have any ambitions to become the leader of Israel. "Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3, NRSV). David was a shepherd who later became king. Peter quotes the Old Testament and declares: " 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble' " (1 Pet. 5:5, NRSV). Jesus tells us in Luke 22:26 that " 'the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves' " (NRSV).

Jesus' unparalleled service on earth led to His superiority in status, which led to superiority in His present ministry. In Jesus, both aspects—superiority in status and superiority in ministry—unite. The readers of the letter are encouraged to remain faithful to this Jesus who, although being the King, serves us in a way nobody else can.

When was the last time you took the role of servant? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

interceded for His disciples that their faith might not fail when the hour of testing came.

In contrast to the earthly priesthood, Jesus was one, the Levites were many. Josephus mentions there were 83 high priests from the time of Aaron until the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. (See *Jewish Antiquities* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965], book XX [227], p. 121.) All these priests were mortal human beings (Heb. 7:8), and thus the Levitical priests needed many replacements, in contrast to Christ, who is all we ever need.

The Levitical order could not bring perfection, but the new order, which is better, most surely can. Hebrews 8 to 10 show that it does, because the new Priest is Jesus, who endured in our behalf many painful temptations while on earth.

As we look carefully at the reasoning of Hebrews 7:26, we discern another point in which Jesus Christ, as a better High Priest, breaks the Aaronic pattern. Aaron and his successors, before they presented a sin offering on behalf of the people, had to present one for themselves. Jesus is the better High Priest, who does not need a sacrifice for His sins because He Himself was sinless, without sin or even a taint of sin.

We shall observe, also, that sympathy with temptation does not require the experience of sin. On the contrary, He whose sympathy will be fullest is the One who has known the extremes of temptation, because He has conquered sin in the flesh. Only One who never has succumbed to sin can know fully the lure of sin, because it is always pressing against Him. Had He succumbed, the pressure would have, at least for a while, been taken off. No wonder we are told He can give us power to resist when we are tempted by sin, because He knows not only temptation but how to overcome that temptation.

Thus, Jesus has no need to present a daily sacrifice or, for that matter, a yearly sacrifice for His people's sins. He presented a permanently valid sin offering on their behalf when He offered up His own life. Jesus was the Perfect Offering; His sacrifice was so efficacious it did not need repetition.

Our better High Priest provides the solution to the sin problem. He was, as Hebrews 7:26 says, "separate from sinners." Under the old system, the high priests needed to offer sacrifices, not only for the people but also for themselves, as well; but not Jesus, our High Priest, the One ministering in our behalf in heaven now.

Fully equipped to discharge an intercessory ministry at the right hand of God, this is no high priest subject to all the conditions of earthly frailty; this is the One whom God calls His Son, whose high priesthood is efficacious and eternally suited to meet His people's needs. Jesus Christ's perfect life makes it possible for Him to fulfill to the letter the words from the Psalms, "You are a priest forever" (Ps. 110:4, NKJV).

Tuesday

July 22

THE RESULTS OF JESUS' SUPERIOR MINISTRY.

What are the results of Christ's superior status and ministry for us as described in Hebrews?

Heb. 7:19, 22 _____

Heb. 8:6 _____

Heb. 10:34 _____

Heb. 11:16, 35 _____

Most results of Jesus' superiority—a better hope, better promises, a better covenant, a better and lasting possession, a better country, and a better resurrection—are oriented toward the future. Jesus provides a bright future for His followers. Included in that future is a better resurrection, the final resurrection. This is different from previous resurrections in both testaments, because in these, the people returned to temporary mortal life. In contrast, the final resurrection is to endless life in a world made new.

However future oriented the promises, they still have force for us today. Even as a prelude to eternity, this life is still important, because it provides the opportunity to gain eternity with Jesus. Thus, the better promises and the better covenant affect us here and now, as well. It is here and now that the Lord puts His law into our minds and gives us the desire to keep it; it is here and now that we receive the power to obey, to love Him, and to reflect His character.

Read Hebrews 11:13-16. What is the specific point the author is making here? How does it fit in with the gist of his whole letter to the Hebrews? In what ways does it speak even to us now?

God, through Christ, has revealed wonderful truths to His people. However, do they grasp these truths in faith, trusting in the better promises, the better hope, the better country, or do they take their eyes off these things and return to where they once were? This is the challenge to the Hebrews; it's the challenge to us, as well.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

This same High Priest lowered Himself in order to elevate His subjects. He forsook His throne and took the blood, the skin, the bones, the lungs, the heart, and the face of a fallen race. Stable born, homeless during His ministry, sentenced to die like a murderer, Christ abdicated the throne of heaven not out of personal gain for Himself but out of love for sinners. In a radical role reversal, the King became a Subject. How many rulers ever live, eat, sleep, and serve as Jesus did, among their people?

History, however, does give us the story of a man destined to be king, who abdicated the throne of England for the love of a commoner, and Western literature is not without fanciful examples of role reversal, as in Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*, in which a prince and his mirror twin, a penniless beggar, change places, so that the pauper is elevated to a princely state and the prince becomes a street urchin. In other examples of role reversal, this idea of sovereign becoming subject is reflected imperfectly in the ancient Babylonian festival called the Sacaea. According to Sir James Frazier, who studied the origins of cultural practices and beliefs worldwide, during the five-

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Isaiah 55:9; 64:6; John 1:12-14; Romans 2:18, 19; 3:27; 12:1, 2.

1. When we say Jesus is superior to angels, humans, and other examples of His creation, what do we mean? Is superiority even a meaningful concept when we are discussing such a seemingly unbridgeable gap?
2. Given that Jesus is so far above us in every sense, how is it possible for Him to communicate His intentions to us, or vice versa? Will we ever be capable of fully understanding His nature or intentions?
3. If Jesus is superior to His followers, does this mean His followers are somehow superior to other people? Why, or Why not? What does Jesus' example suggest about how we should interact with people who don't have the knowledge we may have?
4. How precisely should Jesus' promises to bring us closer to Him at some point in the future affect our lives now? What relation does the short life we live in this world bear to the eternal one we will live in the next?
5. What does Jesus' gift of free will to His creation tell us about His character? Why are our individual choices so important in the light of God's overwhelming power and love?
6. Why do you think some people do not acknowledge Christ as Lord, even though they know all the reasons why they should?

Wednesday

July 23

OUR REACTION TO CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY: PART 1.

However superior Jesus is in all things, however broad, complete, and efficacious the plan of salvation is that centered on Him and His superiority, one thing God does not do: force anyone to obey, force anyone to partake of what Christ offers. The issue, as always, remains our response. “ ‘Choose this day whom you will serve’ ” (Josh. 24:15, NRSV). Even after thousands of years, Joshua’s imperative to the Hebrews back then is the same as to the Hebrews in Paul’s day and to the “Hebrews” today: Choose whom you will serve.

Though Hebrews has been talking about the superiority of Jesus, it also uses comparisons in regard to people, as well. Read Hebrews 11:4. What is it saying here about Abel? What was his “better” sacrifice? See Genesis 4:1-8.

Abel is found twice in Hebrews. Abel honored God in bringing a better sacrifice than what Cain offered (11:4). In Hebrews 12:24, Jesus’ blood is compared to that of Abel, who had a faith relationship to God and is called righteous. And although (in spite of his death) Abel still “speaks,” the blood of Jesus speaks of better things, better than even Abel’s did. Abel is the first hero of faith in Hebrews 11 and the first martyr. Jesus, nevertheless, far surpasses him.

Read Hebrews 11:25. Here, too, the issue of comparisons arose. What was it? What choice did Moses make between these two options?

Similar to Abel, Moses made a decision for Jesus. He rather (lit., “much more”) chose to suffer with God’s people than to enjoy sin. Moses had a clear vision and had his priorities straight. For him the reproach of Christ was greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

However different our individual situations are from Abel or Moses, we still face the same choices they did. In what ways, large and small, do we make our choices every day?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

day festival of Sacaea “masters and servants changed places, the servants giving orders and the masters obeying them. A prisoner condemned to death was dressed in the king’s robes, seated on the king’s throne, allowed to issue whatever commands he pleased, to eat, drink, and enjoy himself.”—*The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1922), p. 328. The custom stemmed from a superstitious belief that such actions were necessary in order to ensure crop success and appease local fertility deities and nature gods.

That these ideas even express themselves in our literature and in our culture is significant, because they suggest the basic human need for Someone to rescue us, a radical wish for Someone to transform our state of being. They show the hunger, the thirst, of the world for a Redeemer, a Deliverer. But no earthly example of role reversal, historical or literary, ever can compete with the way Christ condescended to lower Himself in order to elevate us. By doing so He became the perfect High Priest, able to mediate between a fallen, wounded race and a holy, perfect God.

WITNESSING

We often want that which is newer, easier, faster, or more powerful. Ever advancing technologies place better products and services on the market each day. Many years ago it took days (sometimes weeks) to send messages to loved ones, friends, or business associates who were great distances away. Today, messages can be sent in just a few seconds via email.

The Bible tells us in Genesis, chapter 4, that Abel, the second son of Adam, brought an acceptable sacrifice unto the Lord. But the book of Hebrews tells us that Christ offered a better sacrifice than that of Abel (Heb. 12:24). How is this relevant to those of us who live in the twenty-first century? Abel, like many others after him, offered an animal sacrifice. The animal sacrifice was only a

figure, which represented a Savior to come. Christ, the Lamb of God, is that Savior, the True Sacrifice.

The blood of the animal sacrifice could not save a person from sin. But there is power in the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from our sins. Animal sacrifices had to be offered over and over again. And once the animal was slain, its death was permanent. Christ died once, for all, and now He lives again, to reign as our King forevermore.

As witnesses, let us share the good news that Jesus has made the way of salvation easier. And because of Him, there is a better life than the one here on this earth, hope beyond the grave, and something more than what our eyes can see. There is life everlasting in a newer, better world.

Thursday

July 24

OUR REACTION TO CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY: PART 2.

Yesterday's lesson looked at two examples of those who, having to choose between something good and something bad, chose the better of the two. Unfortunately, that's not always the case.

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven" (Heb. 12:25). Notice, again, the comparison between something better and something not so good. How much more impressive is it to be spoken to from heaven than from earth?

Read Hebrews 12:25. What's the point the author is making here? How does it fit in with the whole tenor of the letter to the Hebrews?

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:28, 29).

Read these two verses. What point is being made? What lessons are in them for us, particularly as Seventh-day Adventists, who have been given so "much more" than many others?

The human reaction to Jesus' superiority always will be two-fold. Some gladly will accept Him as their Lord. Some will refuse Him, and not always out of ignorance, either. Some know who the Lord is and what He has done in their lives but decide against Him anyway. The book of Hebrews is a call specifically to the latter: to those who know about Jesus to not reject what He has done. All through the book this same pleading occurs: Look at who Jesus is and look at what He has done for us. How, then, can you turn away?

If they needed to hear this back then, how much more so do we today?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: For a moment, be a Pharisee. What would you think of Jesus? A mere carpenter, who played God? A nobody with an air of superiority? An uneducated know-it-all? The book of Hebrews strives to present Jesus as a “superior” Being. He’s better than the average man, better than men such as Moses, better than the prophets, better than the angels. He’s more than you can imagine. But you have to *katanoein* to even begin to understand His superiority, says the author of Hebrews.

Thought Questions:

1. The Greek word *katanoein* means “to look,” except that it implies more than just opening your eyes and catching the color of someone’s eyes, height, approximate weight, and special features. When Paul uses the word *katanoein* in Hebrews 3:1, he urges us to “fix [your] thoughts on Jesus” (NIV). Don’t just look at Him; understand Him. Don’t just see Him; know Him. How can an intimate knowledge of Jesus help us? What keeps Jesus’ superiority from intimidating us?
2. Consider the president of a country who has a history of excellence, who is a high achiever, who is goal oriented, focused, and accountable. What kind of people would follow him? What would be the social, economic, and spiritual climate of that country? In what ways would the citizens show support to their president? How is this similar to our response to Jesus? How is it different?

Application Questions:

1. To help us understand God’s love for us, Jesus uses the same word Paul uses in Hebrews (*katanoein*) when He tells us to look at the ravens (Luke 12:24). He means study/understand/research creation to get a clearer understanding of our Father. How has nature helped you to obtain a deeper understanding of divinity in your pursuit of Christlikeness?
2. Because of Jesus’ superior nature, the disciples were committed and motivated to continue in their Master’s footsteps, even after He left them—even when it cost them their lives. How, then, should that same superior nature fuel our energies today? Why do you think the church makes seemingly little progress when it claims to believe in the power of Jesus’ superiority? What steps can the church take to be refueled by the passion and mission of Jesus?

FURTHER STUDY:

Christ was not insensible to ignominy and disgrace. He felt it all most bitterly. He felt it as much more deeply and acutely than we can feel suffering, as His nature was more exalted and pure and holy than that of the sinful race for whom He suffered. He was the Majesty of heaven, He was equal with the Father, He was the Commander of the hosts of angels, yet He died for man the death that was, above all others, clothed with ignominy and reproach. O that the haughty hearts of men might realize this! O that they might enter into the meaning of redemption and seek to learn the meekness and lowliness of Jesus!”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 339.

“The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. It speaketh better things than the blood of Abel, for Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us. We need to keep ever before us the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. That life-cleansing, life-sustaining blood, appropriated by living faith, is our hope. We need to grow in appreciation of its inestimable value, for it speaks for us only as we by faith claim its virtue, keeping the conscience clean and at peace with God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 947.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Tuesday’s study mentioned that the results from Christ’s superiority are future oriented. How do we react when people accuse us of thinking only in terms of the future and forgetting social and political involvement here and now?**
- 2. In the context of Jesus’ superiority being linked to His “inferiority”; that is, in His role of being “lower than the angels,” what can we learn about the servant-leader concept? What does Mark 10:44 add to this idea?**
- 3. In what subtle ways can even faithful Christians be caught up in the trap of self-superiority? What’s the only answer to protect ourselves against this deception?**

SUMMARY: Christ’s superior ministry breaks down in His better sacrifice on earth and His superior ministry in heaven as our High Priest. The results for us are a better covenant, a better hope, a better country, and a better resurrection. We commit ourselves to Him who has brought about so great a salvation.

Jesus, Our High Priest



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 5 and 7.

MEMORY TEXT: “For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15, 16, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Of all the books of the Bible, not one gives such a clear and definite explanation of the heavenly priesthood of Jesus as does the book of Hebrews.

AFTER WORLD WAR I, innkeeper Max Fladt went to the Rhine to swim. On the other side, French soldiers were practicing with pontoons. When one turned over, four soldiers fell in the torrent and fought for their lives. Only a couple days earlier the French had sentenced to death seven Germans. Should Fladt help? He cast himself in the waves and saved two Frenchmen. The next day, a French captain asked how he could reward him. Fladt responded: “Reward life with life. I am asking you to pardon the seven German men.” This is what mediation is all about.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What role of Christ in heaven does Hebrews emphasize? In what ways does Christ's heavenly ministry parallel the work of Aaron as high priest? Why is Jesus compared to the priest-king Melchizedek?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 2.

Sunday

July 27

JESUS' PRIESTHOOD, THE UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE OF HEBREWS.

“Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1, NRSV).

Three words are used in Hebrews to describe Christ's ministry in heaven: *Priest*, *High Priest*, and *priesthood*. None of these specific terms is used for Christ in the rest of the New Testament. Thus, Hebrews has an emphasis found nowhere else in Scripture.

The concept of priest, or priesthood, appears numerous times in Hebrews. Although it also describes the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Melchizedek, the context in Hebrews is, always, the priesthood of Jesus.

Look up these texts. What are they all saying in common? What's the basic point they are making, and why is it important for us? Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 5:6; 7:15; 7:17; 7:21; 8:1.

Hebrews talks about *both* the Messiahship and the priesthood of Jesus. In the New Testament, Psalm 110 is quoted frequently but always just the first verse. The exception is in Hebrews, which quotes Psalm 110:4 as well as verse 1. The Messiah—the One referred to in Psalm 110:1—is also appointed by God “a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” in Psalm 110:4. Thus, both the Messiahship and priesthood of Jesus appear in Psalm 110 and in Hebrews.

The heavenly priesthood of Jesus is a key element in Hebrews: “The main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1, NRSV). Jesus the Messiah is Jesus the High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

Though the *concept* of Christ as Priest appears in other parts of the Bible (1 John 2:1, 2; 1 Tim. 2:5), nowhere are we given such a clear and distinct expression of His priesthood as in Hebrews.

What is the common understanding of the word *priest* today? Protestants emphasize the priesthood of all believers as, for instance, found in 1 Peter 2:5, 9. What does that mean, and how can we be careful not to confuse our priesthood with that of Christ?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 8:1, 2.

Teachers Aims:

1. To study what the book of Hebrews reveals about the role of Christ in heaven.
2. To show how Christ's role as High Priest parallels the work of Aaron as high priest.
3. To compare Christ and the priest-king Melchizedek.

Lesson Outline:

I. Christ's Ministry in Heaven.

- A. Christ's service as Messiah equips Him for His intercessory role in heaven.
- B. Christ is ordained in the heavenly priesthood.
- C. Christ serves as our Priestly King.

II. The Definition of Jesus as High Priest.

- A. Jesus is sinless.
- B. Jesus is faithful above all others.
- C. He surpasses all in mercifulness.

III. Jesus' Ministry as High Priest.

- A. He is our Sacrifice before God.
- B. He is the Mediator for us in heaven.
- C. He serves, without ceasing, as our High Priest.

Summary: The book of Hebrews not only explains the ministry of Jesus as the High Priest of humankind but also defines its importance. Further, it shows that Christ's death was the fulfillment of all the sacrificial offerings of the Jewish sanctuary service. Likewise, the ministry of the Jewish priesthood served as a shadow of Christ's ministry as High Priest in heaven.

Commentary.

Jesus has already been presented to the readers as "a merciful and faithful high priest" (Heb. 2:17, NIV), and they are now shown He is the One from whom they can receive all the power needed to maintain their confession and resist the temptation to revert to their old ways.

Jesus, the Son of God, is not disqualified by His divine origin from sharing in His people's troubles and sympathizing with their weaknesses. Jesus Himself endured every trial we are likely to go through but remained steadfast throughout, and now He has passed through the

Monday

July 28

JESUS AND THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD (Heb. 5:1-10).

Although Jesus' priesthood is different from the Levitical priesthood, Aaron, the Levitical high priest, is compared with Jesus. Despite the clear differences between them, the similarities warrant study.

In Hebrews 5, Aaron is shown in parallel to Christ. Both are human, both are chosen by God, and both work in behalf of humankind. They offer sacrifices, and their ministry and service is "for the sins" of humanity.

What is different between the Aaronic priesthood and that of Jesus? Heb. 5:1-10; 9:6-12.

Jesus is human, but He is also the Son of God. Aaron was not, a crucial point stressed in Hebrews 5:5, 6, where a quote from Psalm 2 is followed by one from Psalm 110, which links the sonship with the priesthood. Because Jesus is the Son, God bestowed the Melchizedek priesthood on Him. Thus, another kind of priesthood (elaborated in Hebrews 7) is introduced here (see tomorrow's study).

There is also a difference with regard to sacrifices. Although both Jesus and Aaron offer sacrifices, the sacrifice of Jesus is a single sacrifice sufficient for all humankind and—because it is forever valid and effective—it cannot be replaced by any other.

Furthermore, Jesus is both Sacrifice and Priest and thus far surpasses Aaron, who was a priest alone. He could never be a sacrifice. Only Jesus could. Also, unlike Aaron and all other priests, Jesus was never tainted by sin.

The Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Jesus are both said to deal sympathetically with the sinner. However, this is true only for the ideal Levitical priest. Biblical examples show that Levitical priests could be quite rude, uncaring, and unfaithful. Hebrews, in contrast, stresses especially this aspect of Jesus' ministry: that although being sinless Himself, He sympathizes with sinners and is merciful and faithful in dealing with them.

Further distinctions are that Aaron served on earth, whereas Jesus serves in heaven. Although the sanctuaries, namely the earthly and the heavenly, are linked to each other, Jesus serves at the heavenly temple.

Look up these texts: Leviticus 10:1; Jeremiah 20:1-6; Matthew 26:3, 4. All deal with various priests in the Levitical system. What do these texts tell us, from a purely human standpoint, about the superiority of Christ's ministry?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

heavens to the throne of God. Aaron's and Melchizedek's priesthoods serve only as models of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

The author clearly describes Jesus' human nature: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15, NKJV). He has been tested every way in which a nature like ours can be tested. His testing is consonant with ours as His nature is consonant with ours. Thus, He can sympathize with us in all we endure.

Furthermore, the question is: How is it He had true humanity as we do?

Jesus' human nature was not phantasm, a deceptive illusion, as espoused by the Docetics, an early Christian sect, who believed Jesus did not appear in an actual physical body but in a spiritual one. Jesus possessed all the weaknesses of humanity: fatigue, hunger, thirst, discouragement, sadness, loneliness, and pain. What exactly that nature was has been the subject of much debate over the long centuries of the Christian church. What we can be sure of, however, is that Jesus can relate to us, and, thus, He can be an ever-present help in time of need, temptation, and trial, even though He was never induced to evil as we are. He committed no sin. He did not transgress His own law. He was sinless.

According to William G. Johnsson, "Jesus was tested 'in every way, just as we are.' The basic issue in temptation is the same today as it was two thousand years ago: Will we keep trusting God, seeking to follow His plan? Will we honor Him, putting Him and what He stands for first? . . . Jesus was truly human and shared our human experiences, so He was one with us in suffering and test."—*Hebrews* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 105.

Having introduced the subject of Christ, our High Priest, the author takes us to the throne of grace. This throne of grace is the throne of God, where Jesus, as His people's High Priest, sits exalted at the Father's right hand. Because we have such a High Priest, the doors of the heavenly sanctuary are open to welcome us. The Greek word *proserchomai* in Hebrews 4:16 means "to come to, to approach," which gives the idea of the High Priest's entry to the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary. He ascended to heaven that we may approach heaven with all confidence.

Christ became Priest, not on the basis of human ties but by a divine declaration. His priesthood is forever, because His life is indestructible. Jesus Christ is the only true priestly Mediator between God and the human race.

Hebrews clearly shows how Christ's work as our High Priest meshes with His role as our Sacrifice, the Lamb of God. Elsewhere in Scripture, echoes of this connection may be found that parallel the work of Jesus outlined in the book of Hebrews. Such examples are worth inspecting more closely in the illumination of the study of Jesus as our High Priest.

Tuesday

July 29

JESUS AND THE PRIESTHOOD OF MELCHIZEDEK (Heb. 7:11).

Humanly speaking, Jesus does not have the right to function as priest. He came from the tribe of Judah, not from Levi as did Aaron, and according to the Old Testament, all the priests were to come from the family of Aaron (Exod. 28:1, 40, 41).

However, because Jesus is the Son, the only One to share divinity and humanity at one time, and because He has lived among us and died in our place on the cross, He is the only perfect Mediator, the only One who—in the final sense—can be our true High Priest.

How can this truth be shown? The apostle has to prove from Scripture that Jesus has the right to be not only King but Priest. He points out in Psalm 110:4 that “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (NRSV); this has been fulfilled in Jesus, and in Him alone.

What do we know about Melchizedek? Some claim that he was Jesus Himself, appearing in the Old Testament. Only three passages in Scripture deal with Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20; Ps. 110:4; and Hebrews 5–7). What do they teach us about this mysterious figure from Old Testament history?

Hebrews 7 furnishes a brief description of Melchizedek (vss. 1-4). He is greater than Levi, because Abraham, the ancestor of Levi, paid tithe to him and blessed him (vss. 4-10). Then, after the mention of Melchizedek, the new and superior priesthood of Christ is presented. The argument is built on Psalm 110, not on Genesis 14, showing that the prediction of a Messianic priest is fulfilled in Jesus. Melchizedek’s ancestry, birth, and death are unknown, and the apostle is not interested in it. Melchizedek is a type of Christ, not vice versa. The emphasis is on Jesus, not on Melchizedek.

How are Christ’s priesthood and sonship related to each other in Hebrews? Heb. 3:1-6; 5:5-8; 7:28.

The topic of Sonship is crucial in Hebrews. Because Jesus is Son, He is superior to Moses (Hebrews 3) and Aaron (Hebrews 5). But He is also a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, whom He also surpasses, also by virtue of His sonship.

Melchizedek was both a king and a priest. Jesus is also a High Priest and King. What hope does His kingship offer to us, we who are totally dependent upon divine mercy for salvation?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Revelation, chapter 5, for example, links Jesus as Lamb to Jesus our King. John beholds, in vision, a Lamb (that looks as though it had been put to death) sitting on a throne in heaven. God's throne, as Hebrews tells us, is headquartered in the sanctuary, the seat of His government and of His intercessory work. The symbol of the once-slain Lamb on a throne, in this passage, recalls Christ's sacrifice and the blood He mediates in behalf of sinners, while the throne clearly suggests His kingship. Indeed, verses 6 and 7 of Revelation 5 refer to Jesus as the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, and the Lamb of God all at once: The Lion symbolizes His kingly authority, the Root refers not only to His royal descent from the line of David but to being rooted and grafted into the human race in order to save them, and the Lamb refers to His sacrifice and role as perfect Mediator.

Interestingly, in the Old Testament, Isaiah promises that in Paradise the lion and the lamb will coexist peacefully (Isa. 65:25). Yet, in the character of Christ, we have the fulfillment and the foretaste of such longed-for paradise when John names Him first the Lion of Judah and then the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:5, 6). Only in Jesus do both the meek lamb and the strong lion already coexist in harmony, for He is both at once.

Jesus not only mediates our sins but He mediates history, as Revelation 5 shows in reference to a sealed book that can be opened by no one but the Lamb. This book contains the future of God's people. God not only appoints Christ to be King and Mediator of our salvation but

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Leviticus 16:2, 3; Psalm 110:4; Matthew 23:2, 3; John 1:3; Hebrews 7:15, 16.

1. The author of Hebrews chooses to attribute priesthood to Christ. As is the case with kingship, this brings to mind both the similarities and differences between Christ's status and that of human kings/priests. How is Christ's priesthood dramatically different from human priesthood? How is it similar? What is the function of a priest?
2. Hebrews describes Christ as Messiah and Priest. How are these two concepts linked to each other? Were the human priests described in the Old Testament in any way Messianic? If so, in what way?
3. According to Hebrews, Christ is at once Priest, Sacrifice, and God. How is it possible for Him to combine these functions? What was the author trying to say to us?
4. What does Jesus' priesthood tell us about His status in relation to the Father? Does it imply Jesus is somehow subordinate to Him? If so, does this mean His status is somehow inferior? Why, or Why not?

Wednesday

July 30

JESUS AS HIGH PRIEST.

What are some of the characteristics of Jesus the Priest and High Priest?

Heb. 2:17 _____

Heb. 4:14, 15 _____

Heb. 5:5, 6 _____

Heb. 7:24-26 _____

Heb. 8:1-3 _____

In Hebrews 2:17 Jesus is called merciful and faithful. These two characteristics are developed more in the book, but in reverse order. First, Jesus is shown to be faithful, as Moses was, though He surpasses Moses. Then the theme of Jesus' mercy is developed. See Hebrews 4:14–5:10.

Besides faithfulness and mercifulness, Christ's sinlessness is described in Hebrews 4:14–5:10, as well. Although emphasizing Jesus' closeness to us, His humanity and brotherhood, the author is careful to leave no doubt that Jesus was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15), "harmless," "undefiled," and in this way, "separated from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). His sinlessness was crucial not only to His earthly ministry but also to His heavenly one. Had He sinned on earth, He would be of no use to us in heaven.

What does Hebrews reveal about the time and place of Jesus' high-priestly ministry? Heb. 5:5, 6; 9:11.

In Hebrews, Christ's priesthood is dependent on His incarnation and passion. "Strictly speaking, we may not speak of Him as priest until after the Resurrection. Not uncommonly we term the petition in the Garden (John 17) as the high-priestly prayer of Christ. But that goes against the theology of Hebrews."—William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), p. 93.

Why is the sinlessness of Christ so important for the theology of Hebrews, and what does it mean to us? What hope does it give us (1) that we can be justified by God despite our sinfulness? (2) that we can through Him live a life of obedience?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

the Mediator of history, as well. By giving the book to the Lamb, God is sending a message to the world that the Lamb alone is worthy to control the events of earth's history. It is not Jesus the Lion but Jesus the Lamb who opens the seals, emphasizing His actions toward us in the affairs of the earth as both benevolent and pure. Further, it shows us that the timing of events and their very existence are in Christ's hands and unfold from the throne of heaven. Nothing on earth happens without Christ's permission, for all things are put into subjection to Him (Heb. 1:2).

What a deep assurance that the One who mediates for us is also in control of the world. Amid the intractable and often senseless happenings of life, in this age of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, incest, abuse, and cold-blooded killing, we have the assurance that, even though we may see "through a glass darkly," often failing to understand or to justify the things that happen in this world, Jesus the Lamb, enthroned in heaven as our Mediator, forever rooted to humanity by His perfect sacrifice, holds in His hands the fate of the world.

WITNESSING

Sometime after the Israelites left Egypt, they camped near Mount Sinai. God told Moses He would come down to the mountain "in the sight of all the people" (Exod. 19:11). They were to set boundaries so no one could get close to the mountain or touch it. God warned Moses that anyone who touched the mountain would be put to death.

On the morning the Lord descended upon the mountain, "there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of [a] trumpet" (vs. 16). The mountain shook and was consumed in smoke, "because the Lord descended upon it in fire" (vs. 18). And God told Moses, again, to warn the people that anyone who tried to break through to look upon the Lord would perish.

Later, the Lord gave Moses instructions to build the tabernacle.

A veil guarded the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle. Only the high priest could pass through the veil into this sacred chamber, where the presence of God rested above the mercy seat. God told Moses to tell Aaron, his brother, not to enter the Most Holy chamber at just any time, or he would die. The high priest was to enter the Most Holy Place once a year to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the people.

When Jesus died, the veil was torn in two from top to bottom by an unseen hand. In our witnessing, we can tell those who are seeking salvation that Christ Himself is now that veil. We are on one side, and on the other side is God the Father. In His Holy presence we would surely die, if it were not for Jesus. But Christ stands as our High Priest, offering His own blood for the atonement of our sins, so that we will not perish.

Thursday

July 31

JESUS' WORK AND FUNCTION AS HIGH PRIEST.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Jesus' priesthood is unique. He is a Sacrifice and Mediator at the same time, attributes that do not apply to anyone else in history. Only Jesus died as our Substitute, and only Jesus is our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

Furthermore, Jesus is a unique Mediator, because no other being in the universe was both human and divine, attributes that enable Him to be the perfect bridge between heaven and earth.

The outcome of this ministry is also unique. No one can save forever besides Jesus. Only through Him is there eternal life.

Jesus' ministry as High Priest is also objective. This means that it is not dependent on how we feel or think. It exists whether we understand it, know about it, or even believe in it. Although there are subjective elements in the Christian life, the foundation of Christianity exists only in the work of Jesus.

How should we react, knowing that we have such a great High Priest ministering for us in heaven?

Heb. 4:14-16 _____

Heb. 10:22, 23 _____

Heb. 12:1, 2 _____

Summarize the above texts. What are they all saying to us?

Christians know that their High Priest is with them, even to the end of the age. Day by day, He serves them and is about to bring to a close human history in order to establish His kingdom of glory. This extremely positive outlook, this experience of the presence of the Lord, helps give meaning to our lives: We are children of God, brothers of Christ, and we live in order to serve others just as He did. Hebrews was written to encourage those who first read it. It should do the same for us, as well.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Not a hair falls from our heads through routine brushing, random baldness, or the ravages of chemotherapy that He does not know or number. While we may not understand the evil of this earth, we believe He is in control and soon we shall see Him “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: It was the 1930s. John Foster came home one day to find his daughter in tears. The radio was on, and the news reporter was describing the advance of Japanese troops into Canton, China. What difference did a war on the other side of the world have to do with the girl? Why was she crying? Because she was born in Canton. She had been there. She associated a home, a school, and friends with the place. And being part of it, she felt its pain. Having been there made all the difference.

Thought Questions:

1. Like Foster’s daughter, Jesus feels the pain of this sinful earth. Having been here, there is not one single temptation or struggle He does not understand. Consider some of your worst temptations. Do you truly believe Jesus was tempted in the same way? Explain. In what way would your relationship with Jesus be different if Jesus were 100 percent God and not human at all?
2. Being both human and God,

Jesus is the perfect High Priest—He can accurately represent humanity to God and God to us. *High Priest* is not part of our everyday vocabulary. What analogies could be used from today’s culture to convey the same meaning the term *High Priest* had for the people to whom Hebrews was written?

Application Questions:

1. Psalm 23 compares Jesus to a shepherd. What would be the implications of the psalm if it were rewritten with Jesus as the High Priest? Would the rewritten psalm be just as personal as the original psalm? Explain why, or why not. What does Christ’s role as Priest do to your approach to God?
2. The church today has no priest in its organizational structure. But we do have ministers. Compare the role of ministers today with that of priests in the Old Testament. What are the similarities and the differences? Is there a need for a priest? Explain.

Friday

August 1

FURTHER STUDY:

Let faith pierce through the hellish shadow of Satan and center in Jesus, our high priest, who hath entered for us within the veil. Whatever clouds overcast the sky, whatever storms surge around the soul, this anchor holds firm, and we may be sure of victory.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 127.

“Behold the apostle preaching in the synagogue at Corinth, reasoning from the writings of Moses and the prophets, and bringing his hearers down to the advent of the promised Messiah. Listen as he makes plain the work of the Redeemer as the great high priest of mankind—the One who through the sacrifice of His own life was to make atonement for sin once for all, and was then to take up His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Paul’s hearers were made to understand that the Messiah for whose advent they had been longing, had already come; that His death was the antitype of all the sacrificial offerings, and that His ministry in the sanctuary in heaven was the great object that cast its shadow backward and made clear the ministry of the Jewish priesthood.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 246.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Hebrews, for all its richness, is essentially a book about Christ’s high-priestly ministry. A whole book of the Bible dedicated to this topic should tell us that this ministry is of great importance. Discuss the implications of His ministry, especially as it relates to our doctrine of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.**
- 2. Paul, in an attempt to encourage the Hebrews, wrote this letter emphasizing Christ’s heavenly priesthood in behalf of fallen humanity. Why would knowing about this ministry encourage people to remain faithful amid times of discouragement?**
- 3. From what you’ve read and studied so far regarding the book of Hebrews, in what ways can you see the link between Christ’s death and Christ’s high-priestly ministry? Why are they essential to each other?**

SUMMARY: Hebrews informs us about Jesus’ priesthood and defines it. This superior ministry follows the order of Melchizedek and yet is not unrelated to the Levitical priesthood. Whatever the links to each priesthood, Christ’s ministry exceeds them both, infinitely so.

Sanctuary Language in Hebrews



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 9.

MEMORY TEXT: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building” (Hebrews 9:11).

KEY THOUGHT: Hebrews is full of sanctuary language that helps us understand what the Lord is doing for us in heaven now.

IN DECEMBER 1989, *Moody Monthly* reported: “Two Talmudic schools near the Western (Wailing) Wall are teaching students details of temple service. Other scholars are researching genealogies to identify members of the priestly line. Plans call for an organizing convention of priestly descendants next year. One group of Jewish activists, the Temple Mount Faithful, dedicated a three-ton ‘cornerstone’ two kilometers from the temple site. Police prevented them from staging the ceremony in the Western Wall Plaza.”—Page 74. Long after its destruction, there is still interest in the sanctuary. This week we’ll take a deeper look “within the veil”; that is, the veil of the sanctuary in heaven.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: In Hebrews, what role does the earthly sanctuary and ministry play? What can they teach us about what happens in the heavenly sanctuary? What’s the purpose of Christ’s ministry there?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 9.

Sunday

August 3

THE SANCTUARY ON EARTH (Hebrews 9).

The book of Hebrews is clear: Jesus is our High Priest in heaven. This concept of priesthood, of course, wasn't something that Paul's readers were unfamiliar with. Paul constructs his reasoning around the Old Testament sanctuary and the priesthood that officiated in this sanctuary. Apart from that background, much of what he says about Christ and His ministry in heaven doesn't make sense.

Read Hebrews 9:1-3. What is the author talking about? Why does he bring this topic into the discussion of Christ's high-priestly ministry? See also Exodus 25:8. Read Hebrews 9:4, 5. What else was Paul talking about? Now read verses 6, 7. What is the author describing here?

Paul gives a quick review of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary service, describing both apartments, as well as the daily and yearly rituals that took place in them. Then, in verses 8-14, he talks about Christ's entry into the heavenly sanctuary and His high-priestly ministry there.

Though Paul's point is the superiority of what Christ is doing in heaven as opposed to what happened on earth (see Heb. 9:11), it is clear that the ministry in the sanctuary below (the earthly) is linked with the ministry in the sanctuary above (the heavenly). That's why Paul talks about them together. The understanding of what happened on earth helps us understand what's happening in heaven.

***H**ebrews uses two words for the sanctuary, **hagion/hagia** and **skene**. The first word is originally an adjective and means "holy." In Hebrews it is used as a noun and is translated "sanctuary," "Holy Place," and "Most Holy Place," depending on the context. The second word is "tent" or "tabernacle" and reminds us of the Old Testament tabernacle in the wilderness.*

How well do you understand the earthly-sanctuary service? Though we don't need to know all the details, considering that the book of Hebrews places such an emphasis on it, is it not worthy of study? Read the sections in Exodus and Leviticus that detail the building, the structure, and the services performed there, remembering that this whole system symbolized Christ's death and heavenly ministry in our behalf.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 9:1-3.

Teachers Aims:

1. To illuminate Christ's ministry in heaven through study of the imagery and language of the earthly sanctuary.
2. To show that the book of Hebrews is an overview of the entire plan of salvation.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Importance of the Earthly Sanctuary to the Heavenly.

- A. Understanding what happened in the earthly sanctuary helps us relate to the service of the heavenly sanctuary.
- B. The sacrifices and offerings of the earthly sanctuary were fulfilled with Christ's sacrifice in our place.

II. The Sanctuary Service Represented at the Cross.

- A. The sacrifices of the earthly sanctuary were replaced by Christ on the cross.
- B. Christ accepted our sins so we might approach God as blameless.
- C. Christ took up the role of High Priest and Mediator.

III. The Tragedy of Sin and Its Solution.

- A. Sin caused a rupture between heaven and earth.
- B. Sin also separated the created from the Creator.
- C. Christ's sacrifice became the uniting bridge between God and humanity.

Summary: The services of the sanctuary were a bridge between God and His people. When Christ chose to accept His role as our Savior, He became the living Bridge to reunite God with humanity.

Commentary.

The particular sanctuary that Paul has in mind here in Hebrews, is clearly the wilderness tent described in detail in Exodus. The wilderness tent consisted of the court, the outer compartment, and the inner compartment.

In the tabernacle and in the temple (which later replaced the wilderness structure), the outer compartment, the Holy Place, was in continual use. Day by day, morning and evening, the appointed priests entered to trim the lamps on the lampstand (Exod. 27:20) and, at the same time, to burn incense on the incense altar (Exod. 30:7).

Monday

August 4

THE SANCTUARY IN HEAVEN.

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8:1, 2).

The apostle, as well as his audience, must have been well-versed in the Old Testament and its ritual services. The sanctuary that he refers to is the original earthly sanctuary as introduced by God and built under the supervision of Moses (Exodus 25–31 and 35–40), as opposed to the later temple erected by Solomon, which was more elaborate than the wilderness model and contained more items of the same kind, such as ten golden lamp stands and ten tables as opposed to one each in the wilderness tabernacle. (See 2 Chronicles 3–7.)

Besides the elements we studied yesterday, what other aspects of the earthly-sanctuary service are depicted in Hebrews 9?

Heb. 9:9 _____

Heb. 9:10 _____

Heb. 9:21 _____

Besides pointing to all the basic furnishings of the sanctuary, it also talks about some of the rituals that were performed there, including various sacrifices and offerings. Though he doesn’t go into detail about the contents of the heavenly sanctuary, one point does seem clear: The author is convinced that a real sanctuary exists in heaven, in which Jesus is ministering in our behalf.

Read Hebrews 8:1, 2. What does the author say that indicates the reality of the heavenly sanctuary?

Paul’s discussion about the earthly sanctuary and its “gifts and sacrifices” (Heb. 9:9) and “meat and drinks, and diverse washings” (vs. 10) was never an end in itself but always a prelude to a discussion about the heavenly. That’s the whole point of Hebrews: to show the readers that there’s something even better than the earthly system that God Himself ordained, and that’s the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus ministers as High Priest.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

In addition, week by week the appointed priests entered the Holy Place to put fresh loaves on the table of shewbread (Lev. 24:5, 6). These were the principal services discharged in the first tabernacle; any number of the priesthood could discharge them.

But none except the high priest was permitted to enter the second tabernacle, the Holy of Holies. The priest was permitted to enter it only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and the conditions of his entering were strictly prescribed. These conditions are set out most fully in Leviticus 16, where the Holy of Holies is called “the holy place within the veil.” Aaron (and each successive high priest of Israel) might enter the Holy of Holies only on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri) in each year.

The New Year, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles originally belonged to one festal complex at which the kingship of the God of Israel was annually celebrated.

But in the New Testament antitype of this festal complex, the divine Priest-King fills the central and decisive role by virtue of His perfect self-sacrifice. He has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God and reigns forevermore from the heavenly Zion—High Priest of the new and eternal order.

In verses 2-10 of Leviticus 16 we have the description of the Levitical order. In contrast, we have now the description of Christ’s priesthood in verses 11-28. In keeping with the central theme of Hebrews, Christ, our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, is infinitely superior to Aaron and the Levitical order. The apostle Paul is using the Greek word *koine* Greek to say the heavenly tabernacle is better than the one on earth. The apostle Paul follows the Exodus prototype: redemption, covenant, and sanctuary. The sanctuary of the new covenant is superior, because it is heavenly (Heb. 8:1; 9:24). It is clear that here Hebrews relies on Exodus 25:9, 40, finding there a reference to God’s genuine heavenly sanctuary, which antedates the earthly sanctuary.

Inasmuch as the sanctuary is a copy of the original, it is inferior, described as a “shadow” of the heavenly sanctuary. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the heavenly sanctuary is real; Jesus Christ entered there after His ascension (Heb. 4:14-16; 6:19, 20; 9:24; 10:12) and is performing a priestly work in heaven (Heb. 8:1, 2). For Paul, the reality of all these experiences is indisputable. It is clear the book of Hebrews follows the teaching of the Old Testament and assumes a real sanctuary in heaven.

Meanwhile, Aaron and his successors went into the earthly Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement by virtue of animal sacrifices. Jesus Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary “through” (Greek preposition *dia* meaning “through,” “by,” “by means of,” or, more generally, “on account of”) His own blood. Aaron surely carried the sacrificial blood into the Holy of Holies. Jesus Christ accomplished in reality what Aaron and his successors performed in type by the twofold act of slaying the victim and presenting its blood in the Holy of Holies.

Tuesday

August 5

SACRIFICES.

Though Hebrews is clear about the reality of Jesus as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, the topic isn't limited to just that. He talks also about sacrifices. And no wonder. If sacrifice was central to the earthly system, how much more so to the heavenly?

Which animals are mentioned in Hebrews that were used as sacrifices? Heb. 9:12, 13, 19; 10:4.

Which types of sacrifices do they point to? Lev. 1:5; 4:3; 16:3; Num. 7:17.

Four different kinds of animals are enumerated in the four verses of Hebrews. With the exception of the heifer, they come in pairs: "goats and calves" and "goats and bulls." Goats are found most often. Interestingly enough, the lamb, which is so prominent in Revelation (see also John 1:29, 36; 1 Pet. 1:19), is not found in Hebrews.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, mentions goats in Numbers 7:17 in the context of "peace offerings." A synonym for the word *bull* used by Hebrews is found in Leviticus 1:6 as a "burnt offering" and in Leviticus 4:3 as a "sin offering." The heifer, mentioned in Hebrews 9:13, occurs in Numbers 19, in connection with the peace offering. There the ashes of the red heifer are used for purification. Bulls and goats were also used on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

Thus, the different animals used as sacrifices remind us of the basic types of Old Testament sacrifices, including (but certainly not limited to) the Day of Atonement.

Yet, all these animal sacrifices were only preliminary, unsatisfactory, unable to save from sin (Heb. 10:4). The shedding of blood was, nevertheless, important, because it pointed to Jesus, who alone brings about forgiveness and reconciliation.

Rivers of animal blood were spilled over the centuries in the Old Testament—sacrificial system. However gruesome, it was to teach an object lesson about the cost of sin. And yet, those were only animals, which, in the end, could never bring salvation. In contrast, what does the death of Christ, the only means of solving the sin problem, tell us about the true cost of sin?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

The Aaronic high priests had to present themselves before God repeatedly, because the “redemption” their ministry procured was of a temporary character. But Christ entered in once for all, to be enthroned there in perpetuity, because the redemption procured by Him is perfect in nature and eternal in effect.

This perfect redemption can be understood even more fully by the imagery and language used to describe the sanctuary and Christ’s work there. Ellen White says every element in the sanctuary has a lesson for us (see *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, p. 406). Without pushing this too far it may prove valuable to examine a few random elements of the earthly sanctuary and see what they reveal to us about Christ’s work for us in the heavenly sanctuary today.

For instance, we are told that a perpetual incense burned in the earthly temple. “Its ‘continual’ burning teaches us that day by day we are to come before the Lord in prayer.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 658, “Perpetual incense.”

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Leviticus 1:4; Psalm 103:20, 21; Hosea 6:6; Romans 6:12-14; Hebrews 9:1-5.

1. The author of Hebrews discusses the fact that the earthly sanctuary described in the Old Testament was meant to reflect the reality of the heavenly sanctuary. In what sense is the heavenly sanctuary real? Do you think the author meant to say that it has a physical location?
2. Hebrews states the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament—unlike Christ’s sacrifice—never had the power to atone for sin. Why, then, do the books of Moses seem to give the impression they do? Do you think people of the Old Testament period were aware these sacrifices were not ultimately effective? Does it matter?
3. In Hebrews 9:5, the author briefly mentions the cherubim represented in the earthly sanctuary service but chooses not to discuss them in detail. Then, as now, many people had a misunderstanding of, or an unhealthy fascination with, angels. What are some of the ways in which people have a distorted view of the role of angels? What does the Bible teach in regard to these beings?
4. Hebrews emphasizes the work Christ does in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of the whole world. But what does the sanctuary service suggest to us about the way Christ works in each individual life?
5. Why do you think many people of the Old Testament period lost their sense of the significance of the sanctuary service?

Wednesday

August 6

THE SANCTUARY SERVICE (Heb. 8:1-3; 9:5-7).

In the above texts, notice those involved in the sanctuary service. The apostle mentions cherubim, priests, high priests, the minister in the sanctuary, and the mediator. The titles “priest” and “high priest” refer to descendants of Aaron, as well as to Jesus, who is the ultimate Priest and High Priest and whose ministry alone can solve the sin problem. This, again, leads to a key theme of Hebrews: the superiority of Christ and His ministry over all that came before.

The word *minister* (*leitourgos*) is used for the angels in Hebrews 1:7 and for Jesus, the Minister in the heavenly sanctuary. Jesus’ ministry (*leitourgia*; Heb. 8:6) is the real “liturgy.” *Mediator* is found three times in Hebrews (8:6; 9:15; 12:24) and is applied to Jesus only.

The cherubim mentioned in Hebrews 9:5 are the two golden figures placed on the mercy seat in the earthly sanctuary. What do they symbolize? See also Ezek. 1:5-14, 22-26; 10:1, 4, 18-22; Rev. 4:6-8.

Cherubim are not just mythological figures but real beings (Gen. 3:24) living in the presence of God. They form the entourage of the majesty of the universe in His sanctuary.

“There can be no doubt that the Biblical cherubim designate a class of angels. Nowhere are they represented as objects of worship, and therefore cannot have been divine beings.”—*SDA Bible Dictionary* (revised edition), pp. 189, 190.

Hebrews is strongly opposed to angel worship (see Heb. 1:5-14). This may be a reason for not mentioning the heavenly counterpart of the cherubim in the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary.

There’s no question, though, that angelic beings are mentioned in the context of the sanctuary. What exactly they do, we don’t know. However, when we understand the role of the sanctuary service and what God is accomplishing there, then perhaps we can better understand the function of angels, which comes from a word that also means “messenger.” Perhaps, because they are so closely involved, they themselves can witness the work of Christ in the sanctuary, which is a work He does in behalf of saving humanity, a work that has implications for the entire universe.

Think of the heavenly sanctuary and Christ’s work there for us, all in the context of the great controversy, in which great issues regarding the character of God are at stake before all creation. In this context, what role can you see for the angels in the heavenly sanctuary?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Numbers 19:6 lists other elements of the earthly sanctuary structure that contain insights into the character of God, as well. Hyssop, cedar, and scarlet were used in its construction, the “very items . . . used in the cleansing of the leper” from sin.—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 887, “Cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet.” Hyssop represented purification. Scarlet was a symbol of sin, and cedarwood was a symbol of the sweet, holy fragrance and incorruption of Christ’s perfect sacrifice to save humanity from the leprosy of sin.

Scripture also tells us priests wore pomegranates and golden bells on the hems of their priestly garments. Pomegranates, a fruit native to the Mediterranean, where Jesus was born, has long been respected as a blood purifier, with medicinal properties. Each tiny tear-shaped seed, the color of blood, then, is a fitting reminder and symbol of the pure blood of Christ shed to cleanse our sins. Additionally, the sound of the bells on the priests’ garments reminded people the priests were interceding for them. “The bells and pomegranates remind us that by faith we may now enter boldly ‘into the holiest by the blood of

WITNESSING

In the book of Hebrews, there are words such as *sacrifice*, *without spot*, *High Priest*, *holy place*, and *mercy seat*. There are many who read these words but do not fully understand what they mean or how they relate to us today. A very effective witnessing tool is to use something people can relate to as a way to explain what they have difficulty understanding.

For example, each year millions donate blood and other body organs and tissues. An individual may indicate on his driver’s license he would like to be an organ donor in the event of an accidental death. If he chooses to do so, a symbol is printed on the front of his driver’s license, showing he is a donor.

Some organs such as the kidney may be donated from living donors. A person can donate one kidney and still survive on the other healthy kidney.

Although donating blood and other organs may be safe, it still can pose some risk (however small) for the donor. The donor gives up something of great value to save another life, taking the chance there will be no health risk to himself.

When Jesus shed His blood, He gave up something of great value. He gave His life to save not just one but every human being who ever lived or ever will. He gave not just a part but all of Himself for us. And He gave up all of heaven to do so!

In sanctuary language, Jesus is our Sacrifice, the Lamb without spot or blemish. He is the High Priest who sits in the Most Holy Place at the right hand of the heavenly Father. And because of His sacrifice and ministry for us, we may “come boldly into the throne of grace . . . [to] obtain mercy” (Heb. 4:16).

Thursday

August 7

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION.

Read these verses from Hebrews. All have a similar theme. What is it? Heb. 1:3; 2:17; 8:12; 9:26; 9:28; 10:12; 10:17; 13:11, 12.

The fall of Adam and Eve changed the relationship of humans to God. And though it dramatically altered life on earth, bringing disease, death, and suffering, the real tragedy of sin exists in the rupture between heaven and earth, in the chasm between the creature and Creator. All that sin causes us to do to ourselves and to each other is because of what sin has done to us and to our relationship with God. Sin ruptured that relationship, caused an estrangement, and created a division between the Creator and the created so that the created became separated from the only Source of his or her existence, life, and purpose. This separation comes with consequences more dire than if the umbilical cord were severed in the womb, because what the created lost because of sin wasn't just physical, but spiritual, even eternal.

First and foremost, then, it was to heal this infinite and eternal rift that Jesus Christ came, died, and now ministers in heaven in our behalf.

And this is what Hebrews is about: God healing the rift between heaven and earth. It's an overview of the whole plan of salvation, beginning with Christ's death on the cross (symbolized by the sacrifice) and continuing with Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary.

Indeed, in Scripture the emphasis is not so much on this problem but on the solution: forgiveness of sin, liberation from sin, and the power to overcome sin. A key theme in Hebrews is purification. God wants not only to forgive us but to purify us, cleanse us, and make us holy. All this is now possible but only because of the superior sacrifice of Jesus, His superior blood, and His superior ministry in our behalf.

What we have in Hebrews, then, is God showing us what the problem is and how He is solving it. Read again the texts for today. Though all talk about sin, they talk about the remedy too. Focus on what those texts say Jesus has done for us in regard to the question of sin. Write a paragraph expressing the wonderful hope found in them for us, focusing particularly on the results of what Christ has done.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Jesus'. . . . By faith we too may hear the sound from the sanctuary that directs our hearts and minds upward to where Christ sits at the right hand of God to make intercession for us."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 650: "A golden bell."

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: "Visualize a person on the *Titanic* facing the imminent expectation of drowning and death, but then being placed in a lifeboat. That is *rescue*. Then picture the person now in the lifeboat removed from danger and death. That is *safety*. Now picture an ocean liner coming alongside the lifeboat and hoisting it and its passengers aboard ship. Now they enjoy *security* and *soundness* of mind. All three ideas are included in the biblical concept of salvation."—Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publications, 2000), p. 4.

Thought Questions:

1. "In his life, Christ is an example, showing us how to live. In his death, he is a sacrifice, satisfying for our sins. In his resurrection, he is a conqueror. In his ascension, he is a king. In his intercession, he is a high priest."—*Martin Luther*. Through His journey on earth, Jesus took on multiple roles, one of which was to be our High Priest. This was a heavenly appointment. God chose His very Son to take on this role, so the gulf between humans and God would be bridged. Could Jesus have taken

on the role of High Priest while refusing the role of Savior? Explain. In what ways did Jesus' priesthood shine through His journey on earth?

2. While on earth, Jesus' life emphasized service. Even in heaven, as our High Priest, He serves. How are both services similar? How are they different? What kind of services does God expect from us, both as individuals and as a church?

Application Questions:

1. Imagine that all of a sudden the atmosphere is sprinkled with a magical "redemption dust" that saves and redeems relationships. How differently would you function in such an atmosphere? What would be the most awesome thing that could happen in your workplace? In what ways could your "redemptive" nature draw others to the Cross, the true place of redemption?

2. In light of Jesus as your Savior and High Priest, write a personal prayer that combines boldness and humility in approaching God. How different would this prayer be without Jesus as your Mediator?

Friday

August 8

FURTHER STUDY:

Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. To many it has been a mystery why so many sacrificial offerings were required in the old dispensation, why so many bleeding victims were led to the altar. But the great truth that was to be kept before men, and imprinted upon mind and heart, was this, ‘Without shedding of blood is no remission.’ In every bleeding sacrifice was typified ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ Christ Himself was the originator of the Jewish system of worship, in which, by types and symbols, were shadowed forth spiritual and heavenly things. Many forgot the true significance of these offerings; and the great truth that through Christ alone there is forgiveness of sin, was lost to them. The multiplying of sacrificial offerings, the blood of bulls and goats, could not take away sin (*Signs of the Times*, Jan. 2, 1893).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 932, 933.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Revelation 7:15 and 16:17 are quite clear: The throne of God is in the heavenly temple. In Hebrews, the throne is found four times (1:8; 4:16; 8:1; 12:2). When we read the context of Hebrews 4:16 and Hebrews 8:2, we get the same impression: The throne is found in the sanctuary. This is supported by Old Testament evidence such as Psalm 11:4 and Isaiah 6:1, which state, “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.” The sanctuary is the center of God’s government. Salvation, assistance, and judgment proceed from God’s dwelling place, His palace, which is the sanctuary. In fact, the Old Testament term for temple (*hkl*) is also translated “palace.” In what ways is this idea, that of the sanctuary being where God’s throne resides, important to our understanding of Christ’s ministry in heaven?**
- 2. From what you’ve studied so far, if someone were to ask you, Why is Christ’s ministry in heaven important? what would you respond?**

SUMMARY: Hebrews is very rich when it comes to words related to the sanctuary. Indeed, the sanctuary concept forms the foundation for understanding the entire book. And what this concept teaches us is that God wants to be close to us and dwell among us. Through Jesus we now have access to the Majesty of heaven and can rejoice in the assurance of salvation.

Lesson 7

*August 9-15

Jesus and the Covenant



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 8 and 9.

MEMORY TEXT: “ ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,’ he also adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more’ ” (Hebrews 10:16, 17, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: One of the important topics in Hebrews is that of the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ.

IN MODERN TIMES WE DEFINE A HOST of relations by contracts. These are usually for goods or services in which equal sides gain from each other. Hans signs a contract with the plumber to fix the faucet; the plumber receives his money, and Hans gets a fixed faucet. The new covenant, however, doesn't work quite like that. In this covenant, God doesn't need us; we need Him. He extends to us grace, mercy, forgiveness of sins; we offer nothing back because we have nothing to give that merits the gifts we get from Him. All we can do is accept it by faith, a faith that's motivated by a love that leads to heartfelt obedience. This week we'll look at how the new covenant relates to Christ and His ministry in heaven.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What is the biblical covenant? Why the need of a new one? How does it relate to Christ's heavenly ministry? What are we offered in this new covenant?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 16.

Sunday

August 10

COVENANTS.

In the ancient Near East, covenants describe the relationship between a superior power and a subordinate people (though a covenant also can be made among equals, as well).

Among the pagan nations, these covenants often contained the following elements: (1) preamble introducing the sovereign; (2) the historical prologue describing previous relations between the contracting parties; (3) the stipulations that outline the nature of the community formed by the covenant; (4) the document clause providing the preservation and regular rereading of the treaty; (5) the lists of gods who witnessed the treaty; and (6) the curses and blessings that attended it.

The covenants found in the Bible share some similarities to this typical covenant form.

Look up the following texts, which deal with various Old Testament covenants. Gen. 6:18; 9:11-13; 15:18; Exod. 19:5; 24:7, 8; Ps. 89:3, 4; Jer. 31:31-34. What elements do they have in common? After reading these texts, write out the essence of what you believe these covenants meant. What do they teach us about the kind of relationship God wants with His people?

The covenant promises are crucial. In Abraham's case, they included the promise of God's constant presence; the Messianic promise that he would be a blessing for all peoples; and the promise of land and of a great nation.

The Mosaic covenant (Sinaitic covenant) was an enlargement of the earlier covenants; it was addressed to the entire people of Israel. Only after having saved the Israelites from Egypt did God graciously offer them His covenant and promise to make Israel His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

Why is the concept of a covenant so important in biblical theology? Think of it this way: None of us are forced to serve the Lord. The concept of a covenant comes in usually (but not always) when we choose to serve the Lord, to enter into a relationship with Him. In such a case, why is a covenant so important?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 13:20, 21.

Teachers Aims:

1. To define what the biblical covenant is and why there is a need for a new covenant.
2. To compare and contrast the old covenant with the new.
3. To outline what the new covenant offers us.
4. To understand how the new covenant relates to Christ's heavenly ministry.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Covenant Relationship.

- A. God's covenant with Abraham included the following promises:
 1. His constant presence
 2. A Messiah
 3. Land
 4. The creation of a great nation
- B. The Messianic promise foretold that a great Blessing would come to the whole world through Abraham's line.
- C. The Mosaic covenant enlarged on the earlier covenants with the promise to make Israel a holy nation.

II. The Old Covenant Versus the New Covenant.

- A. The new covenant provides total forgiveness and assurance.
- B. Far from abolishing the law in the new covenant, Christ's life exalted the moral code.
- C. The law is internalized in the soul and, through faith in Christ, the believer lives in obedience.
- D. The new covenant has been sealed with Christ's blood.

III. The New Covenant and the Ministry of Jesus.

- A. Christ accepted the role of our Sacrifice.
- B. He became High Priest, or Mediator, in our behalf.
- C. We have the assurance that God will uphold His end of the covenant promises—even when we fail to uphold ours.

Summary: The new covenant represents a special relationship between God and His people, one that offers a solution to the great rift caused by sin. Christ chose to become the Solution. He is the Guarantee that God will honor His part of the covenant with humanity. The good news gets even better. Gracious provisions have been made by God through Jesus to pardon and restore those who fail to uphold their end of the covenant.

Monday

August 11

THE OLD COVENANT AND THE NEW COVENANT.

What reason does the author give in Hebrews 8:6-13 for the need of the new covenant?

The introduction of the covenant in Hebrews didn't come in a vacuum. The first seven chapters dealt with the priesthood of Jesus. Chapters 8–10 tell us about the accomplishments of Jesus. However, the author had to show that Jesus is the legitimate Priest, even though He was not a Levite. Therefore, in Hebrews 7, the author pointed to the priesthood of Melchizedek, which foreshadowed Christ's priesthood, and to Psalm 110, which predicted Christ's priesthood. He did this in order to show that although Jesus was not a Levite, still a new priest, from the order of Melchizedek, was to come. In chapter 8, he then related the promise of a covenant that required *a new and better priesthood* and a new and better sanctuary. This, of course, refers to Jesus and His ministry in heaven.

Read Hebrews 13:20 and 8:6. What adjectives are used to describe the new covenant? Why were these terms used?

Though a sharp contrast is portrayed between the old and new covenant, some elements of continuity exist between both. The partners in both covenants are the same: God and His respective people. In both cases, God takes the initiative; He alone saves. In both there are promises, and there are duties. And, certainly, in both, the presence of God amid His people is paramount.

The main, and crucial difference, between the old and new covenant is that there is now total forgiveness and assurance. What the old covenant pointed to in type and shadows and symbols has been fulfilled, in reality, in Jesus. In the new covenant, the law is now internalized, and through faith in Christ, the believer lives in obedience to the law, now written in the heart. The new covenant is permanent; it has been ratified, not with the blood of an animal but with the blood of Jesus. And, finally, if in the old covenant people found hope in the blood of a goat or a lamb or a bull, how much more hope do we have in the blood of Jesus Christ? See Heb. 9:13, 14.

Read carefully and prayerfully the quote from Jeremiah in Hebrews 8:8-12. Dwell on what God promises to do for us in the new covenant. Then ask yourself, Have I experienced these promises in my own life? If not, why not, and what can be done to change this?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Commentary.

The “covenant” is an important concept that runs throughout the Bible; thus, we find it here, too, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The new covenant, according to Jeremiah’s prophecy, involved the implanting of God’s laws into the hearts of the people, not to mention giving them the will and power to obey those laws. It also gives the assurance that their past sins and iniquities would be eternally blotted out from God’s record.

Thus, God’s covenant is given first to His people, and then, in turn, His people share His covenant with the world, according to Jeremiah 31:31-34. God through Christ brings the unsaved into a saving relationship with Him, and God promises to write His moral laws upon their hearts in the new covenant of regeneration.

Christ is called the “surety of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22, NKJV), because He offered His life as a guarantee of the new covenant. He died for the elect, whom God had given to Him (John 6:37). The word *covenant* in the book of Hebrews (Greek *diatheke* and Hebrew *berith*) is so important that we need to explore its meaning.

The meaning of the word *diatheke* is “to set out in order, to dispose in a certain order, a testament, a covenant.” God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, not in the sense that God came to an agreement or compromise with fallen humanity. Rather, it involves the declaration of God’s unconditional promise to make Abraham and his seed the recipients of certain blessings (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:18; 17:7, 8, 19-21; 21:12, 14; 22:2, 12).

God is bringing about His prearranged plan in regard to Israel in spite of the fact Israel has not yet believed in the Messiah. The Sinaitic *diatheke* to Moses, however, was a conditional dispensation or series of promises (Exod. 19:5-8, 20-23; Heb. 12:18-21), which God made for the Jews, but only if they obeyed.

In the New Testament the idea is that God provided His Son in the execution of His plan. The giving of eternal life to individuals was based on their acceptance of the sacrifice of the Son of God. Christ was given for the sins of the world; those who would enter into a covenant relationship with the Lord needed to accept that sacrifice made in their own behalf.

The idea of setting up a relationship, which may be done by the free act, or choice, of one person, is always present. It is in this latter sense we understand the divine *berith*, or covenant. This is a divine order or agreement, which is established without any human cooperation and springs from the choice of God Himself, whose will and determination account for both its origin and its character.

It’s not easy to find a word that conveys the meaning of the divine *berith*. Why did the Septuagint choose and adhere to the Greek word *diatheke* as the rendering of *berith*? It is because the Greek word *diatheke* had the meaning of will or testament. No better word was

Tuesday

August 12

THE COVENANT AND RELATED CONCEPTS.

How does the covenant relate to the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the sanctuary? Heb. 9:11-15.

In the context of the Abrahamic covenant, a sacrifice is mentioned (Genesis 15). After God had saved Israel from Egypt, he offered them His covenant, and they responded: “ ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do’ ” (Exod. 19:8; 24:7, RSV). He explained the promises and gave His law, which they were obliged to keep. Sacrifices were then offered, and the covenant was ratified by blood (Exod. 24:8). The covenant laws also included the establishment of the sanctuary, the installation of the priesthood, and the formal institution of the sacrificial system (Exodus 25–31). Thus, covenant, sacrifice, priesthood, and sanctuary belong together; hence, a new, better covenant requires a new and better sacrifice, a new and better priesthood, and a new and better sanctuary.

How does the law relate to the new covenant? Heb. 8:10.

On the one hand, Hebrews stresses the necessity of a change of the law (Heb. 7:12)—the Mosaic law being the issue here, because the context is clearly that of the earthly-sanctuary service and its priesthood, all shadows of what Christ was to do: “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect” (Heb. 10:1). That specific system of law was abolished after the death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the Ten Commandments are as valid in the new covenant as in the old. Under the new covenant, the law is now written on the hearts (Heb. 8:10), a far cry from being abolished (1 John 5:3). If anything, the life and example of Jesus, and His perfect keeping of the law, have exalted the law in the new covenant, elevating it to a higher, spiritual plane than a mere cold, dead code, which it had become for those who kept it for the wrong reasons. In the book of Hebrews, God does not speak of a new law but of a new covenant, with the law and gospel at the center.

Why is the law important in the new covenant, which emphasizes the substitutionary death of Christ in our behalf? If obedience to the law can never save us, and if Christ fulfilled the demands of the law for us, what role does keeping the law have in the life of a Christian?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

available to express the Old Testament idea of a solemn and irrevocable disposition made by God of His own gracious choice and meant to secure a religious inheritance for His chosen people.

In this covenant relationship, the one who makes the will does not ask the recipient of the will whether it is acceptable or not. It is a unilateral demonstration of the will of the testator. God is the One who begins the covenant and also who finishes it.

The question now arises, Why is the Testator, Jesus Christ, called the Mediator of the new (*kaines*) will or *diatheke*? How can the Testator be also the Mediator? Does a will require a mediator? Jesus is called the Mediator of the new (*kaines*) and better covenant. God expressed His will toward humankind by making known His plan of redemption for humans. He offered Jesus Christ as that guarantee.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts For Discovery: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 4:23-25; 6:1, 2; Colossians 2:14, 16; James 2:15, 16.

1. Like so many concepts in the Bible, the idea of a new covenant is derived from social and personal relationships between or among people. Yet, it also highlights the differences between human-to-human and God-to-human relationships. Does the covenant between God and ourselves tell us anything about how we should relate to one another?
2. The idea of a new covenant is not unique to the book of Hebrews, or even to the New Testament (a term that is synonymous with the new covenant). It first appears in the book of Jeremiah. Why do you think a new covenant was necessary? What was wrong with the old covenant?
3. The religion of the Old Testament was based, to some degree, on sacrifice. In a slightly different way, so was the religion of the New Testament. Why do you think a sacrifice was necessary? Was it to fulfill a legal requirement, or was it to emphasize the cost of disobedience? Both? Neither?
4. What is the place of the law under the new covenant? It is clear most Christians regard at least some of the Old Testament regulations as outmoded. How are we to decide which we must still literally fulfill?
5. Hebrews warns us against willfully continuing to sin. Yet, most of us continue to sin in one way or another. How can we be sure we are not intentionally cultivating sin while assuming we can have it forgiven later? Isn't any sin an act of will?

Wednesday

August 13

BENEFITS OF THE COVENANT.

A number of positive results of the new covenant are stressed in Hebrews. What are they?

Heb. 8:12; 9:26, 28; 10:17, 18 _____

Heb. 8:10; 10:16 _____

Heb. 9:9, 14; 10:2 _____

Heb. 9:12, 15, 28 _____

Heb. 10:10, 14 _____

Heb. 10:19 _____

The new covenant has “better promises” (Heb. 8:6). In the New Testament, the word *promise* is found more frequently in Hebrews than in any other book. What are we promised so profusely in Hebrews?

The promises of the new covenant include, among other things, access to God, a clear conscience, redemption, and forgiveness of sins. Here, indeed, are some of the “better promises” the author talked about, no doubt one of the best being the final promise of Jeremiah 31:34—“I will remember their sin no more.”

How do you understand that phrase, “I will remember their sin no more”? What promise do you see the Lord giving to His people there?

“The blessings of the new covenant are grounded purely on mercy in forgiving unrighteousness and sins. . . . All who humble their hearts, confessing their sins, will find mercy and grace and assurance. Has God, in showing mercy to the sinner, ceased to be just? Has He dishonored His holy law, and will He henceforth pass over the violation of it? God is true. He changes not. . . . In the better covenant we are cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ (Letter 276, 1904).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 931.

Read over what you wrote on the lines above about the benefits of the new covenant that were stressed in Hebrews. Which ones mean the most to you, and why? Be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Right from the beginning, in the first gospel declaration (Gen. 3:15), God pledged Jesus Christ as the Guarantee for the effectiveness of what He promised.

When someone makes a will to distribute worldly possessions, the will can't be enforced until after the person's death. Today's news headlines often feature gruesome stories of greedy spouses taking life-insurance policies out on their husbands or wives and then arranging their deaths in order to claim policies worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

This is, in effect, what Jesus subjected Himself to for the human race. Jesus drew up a divine will to save us from sin and then willingly died so we could get the inheritance (Heb. 9:17). Jesus, though, does the impossible: He makes the will, dies to enforce it, and comes back to mediate the distribution of what that will offers us upon His death. This is forgiveness to the uttermost from the sewage of sin and contains gracious provisions of mercy and love and the power to overcome.

WITNESSING

For Christmas one year, Ashlee gave her 11-year-old brother a box of building gadgets for making a model car or airplane or whatever he so desired. Many hobbyists spend hours structuring detailed, small-scaled models of planes, boats, cars, and other things. Architects use models as they make plans for erecting new buildings. But the miniature-sized structure only represents the real thing.

In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with His people. The covenant was simply a contract between God and the people. Under this contract, the Lord promised to be their God and to forgive them and cleanse them from all their sins. And the people would worship the Lord and obey His law. The terms of this contract were put into effect by a model. That model was the earthly sanctuary, with all its symbols and ritu-

als. But the model was only there to represent or point to the real thing. It pointed to a Savior and to the heavenly sanctuary.

When explaining the earthly-sanctuary ministry to those who do not clearly understand its purpose, we can show how the sanctuary services on earth were a part of the old covenant between God and His people. The terms of that covenant, or contract, have been fulfilled in Christ. We are now under a new covenant. Under the old covenant, God's law was written on two tables of stone, and there was hope of a soon-to-come Savior. Under the new covenant, God's law is written in our hearts; the Savior has come, and our salvation is sure. There is no longer a need for the model, because Christ, our eternal Sacrifice, now ministers for us in the heavenly sanctuary above.

Thursday

August 14

JESUS AND THE COVENANT (Heb. 7:22; 9:15).

Jesus is the “surety” of the new covenant. Hebrews 7:22 and its context associate priesthood and covenant. Three times in Hebrews Jesus is called “mediator,” the Mediator of a better or new covenant (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). While Hebrews 7 presents Jesus as Priest, Hebrews 8–10 prefer to depict Jesus as Sacrifice. Hence, we can see the link between Sacrifice, covenant, and Mediator.

“By so much was Jesus made a surety [or guarantee] of a better testament” (Heb. 7:22). What does “surety” in this context mean?

“Surety” or “guarantee” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. “It is common in the papyri in legal documents in the sense of a pledge or as a reference to bail. . . . Since the covenant in the biblical sense is an agreement initiated by God, the surety (i.e. Jesus) guarantees that that covenant will be honoured. . . . The mediator is a go-between whose task is to keep the parties in fellowship with one another. In a case where God is one of the parties and man is the other, the covenant idea is inevitably one-sided. Defection is always on man’s side and hence the mediator’s task is mainly to act on man’s behalf before God, although he has also to act for God before men.”—Guthrie, pp. 165, 166, 174.

The crucial point, then, is that we can be certain that God will uphold His end of the covenant promises. We fall, we renege, we waver, we become Laodicean. In contrast, Jesus is the Surety, the Guarantee, that He will keep His part of the bargain. What we should do is another matter entirely.

Hebrews also wants to help readers who are troubled by a bad conscience and are not sure of forgiveness and salvation. These people don’t primarily need a list of what is required of them, but they must, instead, for now, understand the gracious provisions God has made and executed in Jesus Christ.

The second part of Hebrews 10 warns against sinning willfully or persisting in sin. To do this is a form of disobedience and a breaking of the covenant *from our end*. The aim of the letter is to turn people away from such a reckless course.

How many do you know who have, in a sense, personally “broken” the covenant, those who once knew and loved the Lord but now have fallen away? Track their course. What mistakes did they make that you can learn from, so you don’t make them yourself?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: In the book *The Constant Fire*, A. K. Chalmers tells of two men in China. One was a writer; the other a working man. Because of their devotion to the cause of the revolution, the men were rounded up by the government and put under torture. Eventually, they were released, but they were soon under suspicion again and sought by the authorities. They escaped and eventually reached the seacoast, where a boat was waiting to carry them to safety. There at the water's edge, the worker stopped, held out his hand to the writer, and said "Goodbye." "Why goodbye?" asked the writer. "Because," said the other, "I've decided not to go with you. You must go to America and Europe to interpret to the world by your understanding mind and brilliant pen the meaning of our struggle. But I must go back to face whatever I must with the rest, so you, dipping your pen into my blood, can make the world understand that we mean what we say." (Adapted.)

Thought Questions:

1. The story above illustrates how a partnership, contract, or agreement does not necessarily bring equal benefits and profits to both sides; nor does it always translate into equal investment, effort, or sacrifice!
2. Compare God's new covenant with marriage, a business partnership, and a franchise. What are the similarities and differences? Why is it sometimes so hard for humanity to expect God's gift of grace? What are the advantages of going into a partnership with God? Are there any disadvantages? Explain.

Application Questions:

1. Compare the story of the two Chinese men with your role as a partaker of God's new covenant. How does Jesus' work in the heavenly sanctuary transform you? Think of three ways your life today is better because of Jesus' work?
2. In what ways does the new covenant give you direct access to God? Name some barriers that tend to get between you and God. How might an understanding of Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary help remove these barriers?

Friday

August 15

FURTHER STUDY: Study the concept of the covenant in these texts: Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 1:72; 22:20; Acts 3:25; 7:8. John does not talk about the covenant, and John the revelator mentions the ark of the covenant only (Rev. 11:19).

God’s people are justified through the administration of the ‘better covenant,’ through Christ’s righteousness. A covenant is an agreement by which parties bind themselves and each other to the fulfillment of certain conditions. Thus, the human agent enters into agreement with God to comply with the conditions specified in His Word. His conduct shows whether or not he respects these conditions. Man gains everything by obeying the covenant-keeping God. God’s attributes are imparted to man, enabling him to exercise mercy and compassion. God’s covenant assures us of His unchangeable character.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 932.

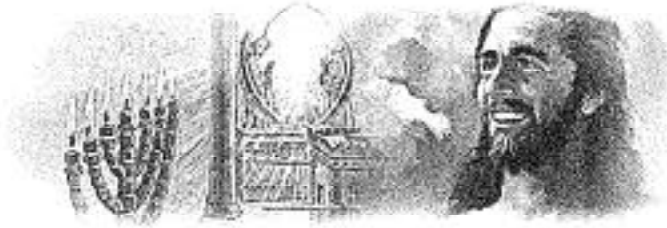
“The great law of love revealed in Eden, proclaimed upon Sinai, and in the new covenant written in the heart, is that which binds the human worker to the will of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 329.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. What kind of worldly covenants do we engage in all the time? What can we learn from them that could help us understand the divine covenant?**
- 2. There’s a great deal of emphasis on forgiveness in the book of Hebrews. Why is that so? How do you understand the sanctuary, the blood of Christ, and mediation in heaven—all in relationship to the forgiveness of sin? What good would any of these do for us without forgiveness?**
- 3. What is a mediator? How are priesthood and the functions of a mediator related to each other? In what situations have you enjoyed the benefit of a mediator?**

SUMMARY: After having pointed out Christ’s superiority to angels, Moses, and Aaron in Hebrews 1–7, the apostle summarizes his discussion with Hebrews 8:1, 2 before specifically turning to the covenant, the sanctuary, and the sacrifice. From Hebrews 8 onward, he focuses on the accomplishments of Jesus. The covenant allows for a special relationship to God and offers a solution to our deepest needs and problems. Here, the great theme of “something better” appears. A new and better covenant requires a new and better priesthood, sanctuary, and mediator. We have been given them all.

Jesus and the Sanctuary



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Heb. 8:2; 9:1-3, 8, 12, 24, 25; 10:19; 13:11.

MEMORY TEXT: “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12).

KEY THOUGHT: In the book of Hebrews, the author puts Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.

THE SUBJECT OF THE SANCTUARY was the key that unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of his people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 423. The sanctuary in heaven plays a vital role in Adventist self-understanding. Various questions have arisen regarding our interpretation of Hebrews. This week we'll take a look at the heavenly sanctuary, focusing also on some issues that have confronted the church.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What is typology? How do the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries correspond? Does the book of Hebrews teach that Christ entered “the Most Holy Place” after His ascension? Is the emphasis in Hebrews on which apartment Jesus entered or upon the fact that He is in the heavenly sanctuary ministering in our behalf?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 23.

Sunday

August 17

SANCTUARY ON EARTH, SANCTUARY IN HEAVEN.

As do other books of the Bible, Hebrews uses typology. In typology a so-called “type” is a real person, event, or institution, designed and preordained by God, to prefigure and predict a greater reality, the “antitype.” In other words, types are like symbols of things greater than the symbol itself (as a national flag is only a symbol for something greater than itself). The Hebrew Bible is filled with types, many finding their fulfillment in Jesus Himself, who is greater than all that prefigured Him.

Which words are used in Hebrews 8:5 (last clause) and 9:24 to describe the correspondence between the earthy and heavenly sanctuaries? How are the sanctuaries related to each other?

The translated words in these two verses *pattern* and *copy* come from the Greek words *typos* and *antitypos*. The earthly sanctuary is compared to the heavenly one. It is a copy of the heavenly. Unlike other biblical books, in Hebrews the original is called *typos* (the type, in this case, is the heavenly sanctuary) and the counterpart, *antitypos* (antitype, in this case, is the earthly). This reversal does not change the meaning of typology; one is a symbol of something greater—in this case, the earthly sanctuary is a shadow, a mere copy, of the real one in heaven.

Hebrews 8:5 quotes Exodus 25:40. What pattern was Moses to follow in building the earthly sanctuary?

In Hebrews 8:5, the earthly sanctuary is deemed a “shadow” (*skia* in the Greek) of the heavenly sanctuary. In Hebrews 9:9, the earthly sanctuary and its services were called a “figure” or a “symbol” (from the Greek word that also means “parable”) of the heavenly. In Hebrews 9:23, the earthly services were called a *hupodeigma* (pattern, copy) of the heavenly sanctuary. In each case, the point is the same: The earthly sanctuary is merely a symbol of something greater; that is, the heavenly sanctuary.

Why do you think the author of Hebrews stressed the reality of the heavenly sanctuary? Why is the issue of the reality of the heavenly sanctuary important to us as Seventh-day Adventists?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 9:24.

Teachers Aims:

1. To compare how the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries correspond.
2. To define where the book of Hebrews places Christ after His ascension to heaven.
3. To explore Christ's role in the heavenly sanctuary today and what it means for us.

Lesson Outline:

I. Typology, or Symbolism, of the Earthly Sanctuary.

- A. The earthly sanctuary is a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary.
- B. The earthly sanctuary embodies an enacted "parable" of the heavenly sanctuary.

II. Entrance to the Most Holy.

- A. In the earthly sanctuary, the high priest entered the innermost apartment only on special days.
- B. Christ, as our High Priest, entered the heavenly sanctuary after His ascension and has not left it.
- C. Christ will not leave the heavenly sanctuary until His intercessory work is completed and He is ready to return to earth.

III. The Character of the Sanctuary.

- A. The heavenly sanctuary is not built by humanity but by God.
- B. It is the *greater* sanctuary.
- C. Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary not by the blood sacrifice of an animal but by the offering of His own blood.

Summary: In Hebrews, Paul contrasts the earthly sanctuary with the heavenly sanctuary and compares the role of the earthly high priest to the heavenly High Priest, so we might fully comprehend what was done to ensure our salvation.

Commentary.

Since its beginning, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has taught the doctrine of the sanctuary. The church pioneers believed that October 22, 1844, marks the movement of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, from His work in the Holy Place in heaven's sanctuary to the Most Holy Place. Further, the purification of the sanctuary on earth was a

Monday

August 18

“THE HOLIES” IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH: PART 1.

Even the most cursory reading of Hebrews shows two points: the reality of the heavenly sanctuary and the importance of the heavenly sanctuary and the ministry there. Paul summed up the first seven chapters with these words: “Now of the things which we have spoken *this is the sum*: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8:1, 2, emphasis supplied).

This is the sum: Jesus is our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

The most common phrase used in Hebrews for the sanctuary both in heaven and on earth comes from the Greek term, *ta hagia*, meaning “the holies,” “the holy places,” “the holy things.” Another form of the phrase is *hagia hagion* (“the holy of holies”), used exclusively for “the Most Holy Place” alone (Heb. 9:3).

***Ta hagia* (a plural sometimes appearing in the singular) appears in Hebrews 8:2; 9:1, 2, 3, 8, 12, 24, 25; 10:19; and 13:11; where it’s translated as “sanctuary,” “holy place,” “most holy place,” “holy places,” and “holiest.” Because some different translations translate the same word in the same text differently (and sometimes in contradiction to each other), ask yourself this question as you read each verse: Judging from the context, is the verse talking about “the Holy Place,” “the Most Holy Place,” or the entire sanctuary?**

In some places, the meaning is very obvious. In Hebrews 8:2 and 9:1, for instance, the word *sanctuary* in both texts refers to the entire sanctuary.

In Hebrews 9:2, the author describes the contents of the first apartment, which he calls “the sanctuary.” The context shows that he is talking about the first apartment of the earthly sanctuary, what is known as “the Holy Place.”

In Hebrews 9:3, the phrase translated “Holiest of all” in the KJV (*hagia hagion*) means the second apartment, “the Most Holy Place” alone. Interestingly enough, this phrase, which clearly means “the Most Holy Place,” is never used again in Hebrews in any reference to Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, one logical question arises: If Hebrews meant to teach that Christ at His ascension entered into “the Most Holy Place,” why does the book never again employ the phrase that without ambiguity refers exclusively to “the Most Holy Place”?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

shadow of the cleansing of heaven's sanctuary by Jesus Christ.

The pioneers visualized the sanctuary doctrine as a pillar connected with others to form a temple of truth. They connected it with such doctrines as the Sabbath, the state of the dead, and the second coming of Christ. Adventist beliefs early established certain positions. In order to understand the issue on the sanctuary, let us review a little bit of our church's history.

The followers of William Miller (many of them later were part of the small group of Adventists) had identified the sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 with the earth and had expected a "cleansing" of it by fire at the second coming of Christ, in 1844. But when Jesus Christ did not return, they began immediately to study several alternatives.

The Millerite group experienced two disappointments: first, in the spring of 1844, and the second, on October 22, 1844. The latter was the Great Disappointment. The failure of Jesus to come as expected produced such disillusion that many left the movement right away.

The main problem was the way William Miller interpreted Daniel 8:14 and other passages of the Scriptures. As we know today, according to the Scriptures, Jesus was not coming to the earth but was entering a new phase of His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Our spiritual forebears (the pioneers) agreed on certain points regarding the sanctuary, including a belief that Christ's activity as High Priest in heaven began in the Holy Place at His ascension and then to the Most Holy Place in 1844. Though the teaching has undergone some tweaking and refining over the years, it still remains intact as one of our key beliefs, and rightly so.

In an article, James White explains to his readers that in the typical sanctuary God manifested His glory in the Holy, as well as in the Most Holy. Consequently, in the heavenly sanctuary, Jesus can appear in the presence of God for us in the Holy Place, as well as in the Most Holy. Like James White, several of the pioneers taught and believed in the intercessory work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.

Two Holy Places in the Sanctuary in Heaven.

In 1853, J. N. Andrews presented several evidences from the Scriptures that the sanctuary in heaven has two holy places. We will consider two of these evidences: (1) the tabernacle erected by Moses, after a forty days' inspection of the one shown to him in the mount, consisted of two holy places (Exod. 26:30-33) and is declared to be a correct pattern, or model, of that building. But if the earthly sanctuary consisted of two holy places and if the great original from which it was copied consisted of only one, instead of likeness, there would be perfect dissimilarity. (2) The apostle actually used the word *holies* (plural) in speaking of the heavenly sanctuary. The expression "Holiest of All," in Hebrews 9:8; 10:19, NKJV, has been supposed by some to prove that Christ began to minister in the Most Holy Place at His ascension. But the expression is not *hagia hagion* (holy of holies), as

Tuesday

August 19

“THE HOLIES” IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH: PART 2.

Yesterday we looked at a few verses (Heb. 8:2; 9:1, 2, 3) in Hebrews, regarding the sanctuary. Today we’ll look at a few more, remembering this question: Does the context teach that the verse is talking about “the Holy Place,” “the Most Holy Place,” or, simply, the sanctuary as a whole?

In Hebrews 9:1-7, the author describes the earthly sanctuary and its services, both the daily and the yearly, which were only a type, a shadow, of the heavenly sanctuary and its services. Then, in verse 8, he says that the way into “the holiest” didn’t happen while the earthly sanctuary was still standing. The RSV translates the verse to mean that the way into “the sanctuary” didn’t happen while the earthly was still standing. When you look at what the author is contrasting—that is, the earthly service to the heavenly—he is showing us that although the earthly sanctuary had a function in a certain time frame, a way was made into the “holies”; that is, into the heavenly sanctuary, through the work of Jesus Christ. He’s not contrasting compartments of the sanctuary; he’s contrasting sanctuaries, the earthly to the heavenly.

Read Hebrews 9:9, 10. What things does he list as part of the earthly sanctuary service?

After talking about the earthly-sanctuary ritual, the author in verses 11 and 12 again shifts his gaze heavenward to a “greater and more perfect tabernacle” (*skene*, “tent” in the Greek), which is the entire heavenly sanctuary. Then, in verse 12, he says that “neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” It’s clear that tabernacle (*skene*) in verse 11 and “holies” or “holy place” in verse 12 are talking about the same thing; that is, the entire sanctuary (in Heb. 8:1, 2 these Greek words are used in the same parallel fashion). Again, the context shows that the issue here isn’t which room Jesus entered into but that He is our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

Read Hebrews 9:24 and 10:19 in their respective contexts. What is the author telling us there? What hope does he give us regarding Jesus in heaven?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

in chapter 9:3 but is simply *hagion* (holies). It is the same word rendered “sanctuary” in Hebrews 8:2.

The early Adventists elaborated further on Christ’s position in heaven, observing that He obviously moved around a great deal. Jesus has free access to the heavenly sanctuary (Holy and Most Holy) as the priest did in the earthly sanctuary.

Does Christ Minister Only in the Holiest?

One of the main dilemmas for early Adventism was to explain the role of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Was Jesus stationed in a specific place in the heavenly sanctuary? J. N. Andrews believed that Jesus Christ began His work at His ascension in the Holy Place of

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Daniel 8:13, 14; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:16; 9:23-25.

1. Early Adventists regarded the vision of the heavenly sanctuary as a charter for the continued existence of Adventism. Has it become less important to us today? Would you personally remain a Seventh-day Adventist if you were conclusively convinced traditional Adventist beliefs about the heavenly sanctuary were incorrect? Why, or Why not?
2. The distinction between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place is very important to Seventh-day Adventists. Do you think the author of Hebrews was aware of the importance these terms would
3. Most commentators agree at some level the major point of Hebrews 9; 10 is the fact that Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary ministering on our behalf. Why, then, if one accepts this basic premise, might it be important to an individual’s relationship to God what he or she believes about this ministry?
4. Once again, the similarities between the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries serve also to highlight the very important differences. Discuss the contrast between the ways in which old-covenant believers and new-covenant believers were and are to approach God.

one day assume? If not, is this an example of how Inspiration works?

Wednesday

August 20

“THE HOLIES” IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH: CONCLUSION.

Read Hebrews 9:24-28. Keeping in mind the context of Hebrews, what is the author saying here? What is the main point? Is it the sanctuary itself, or the nature of His sacrificial death?

There’s no question that verse 25 deals with the Day of Atonement, and there’s no question that the High Priest went into the “Most Holy Place” on that day (see Lev. 16:15). Some try to insist, however, that the use of *ta hagia* here (translated “holy place” in the KJV) proves that it means “the Most Holy Place.”

However, “sanctuary” is a better translation here, because, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest ministered in *both* apartments. His work was not restricted to the second apartment. “Because the whole sanctuary is involved in these services, ‘sanctuary’ is to be preferred as the translation.”—Alwyn P. Salom, *Issues in the Book of Hebrews* (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), p. 227.

Read Exodus 30:10, where “once in a year” (a clear reference to the Day of Atonement; see also Lev. 16:30) Aaron, the high priest, sprinkled blood on the horns of the altar in the Most Holy Place. Some scholars see Leviticus 16:16-19 as a reference to the priest’s work in the first apartment, as depicted in Exodus 30:10. (See the Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary, *Exodus* [Philadelphia, 1991], p. 195; see also *Leviticus*, p. 105. See also Word Biblical Commentary, *Exodus* [Waco, Tex., 1987], p. 399.) Study the texts until you can see, clearly, that even on the Day of Atonement, the high priest ministered blood in the entire sanctuary.

The texts we looked at are important, because some people have challenged our interpretation of Christ’s two-apartment, two-phased ministry in heaven. By dogmatically asserting that some of the verses we looked at put Christ, after His ascension to heaven, in “the Most Holy Place” of the heavenly sanctuary, critics claim that these verses (among others) nullify our sanctuary doctrine, particularly 1844, the time when we believe Christ entered “the Most Holy Place” of the heavenly sanctuary. Hebrews, though, is simply not addressing the question of which apartment. Instead, the point is that He is there in heaven in our behalf.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

the heavenly sanctuary. He quoted Revelation as evidence that this was so, saying that when John gazed into the temple of God in heaven, he saw the Father sitting upon the throne, and before the throne burned seven lamps (see Revelation 4). In this place he also saw the Son of God. Before the throne stood the golden altar of incense (see Rev. 8:3). These things vividly identify the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary and reveal that this is the place where Jesus Christ our Lord began His ministration as our High Priest.

Finally, the majority of the early Adventists believed the Bible indicates that at a certain time Jesus Christ changed His ministry in heaven to the Most Holy Place. We can see from these brief excerpts of Adventist history that the early Adventists believed (1) the sanctuary is in heaven, (2) heaven's sanctuary has two apartments, not one, and (3) at His ascension, Christ began His ministry in the Holy Place, not the Most Holy.

WITNESSING

Being separated from loved ones can fill our hearts with sadness. Over a period of time, the sadness fades as we grow accustomed to the separation. Still, those from whom we are separated are greatly missed, and we look forward to one day seeing them again. When that day of reunion finally comes, we are filled with joy and cherish every moment we can spend with those we love.

After Adam and Eve sinned, they "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God" (Gen. 3:8). Sin separated Adam and Eve from their Creator. Since that time, the Lord's desire has been to reunite Himself with those whom He created and loves so dearly. The earthly sanctuary was established so God could dwell among His people. But sinful humanity could not survive in the presence of God.

Sin had to be removed. Sacrifices were made, and the blood of innocent animals was shed, pointing to Jesus, whose blood cleanses us from sin. And through the Savior we are reunited with the Father in heaven.

In our witnessing, we can show others how Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary reunites us with the Father. But while we are still here on this earth, the Lord wants to dwell with us by living in our hearts. The Bible says, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you . . . therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20, NKJV). Let us open our hearts to the Holy Spirit and encourage others to do the same so God may dwell with us.

Thursday

August 21

THE CHARACTER OF THE EARTHLY AND THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARIES.

As we've seen, the great issue in the book of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ's heavenly ministry as compared to the earthly-sanctuary service. With this context in mind, how is the character of the earthly sanctuary, even sometimes indirectly, described in the following texts?

Heb. 8:2; 9:24 _____

Heb. 9:1 _____

Heb. 9:11, 12 _____

The heavenly sanctuary is the true sanctuary. That does not mean the earthly was a false one; on the contrary, it had been instituted by God. Nevertheless, three times it is stressed that the earthly sanctuary was made with hands. Although its establishment was ordered by God, it was made by humans, sinners. The heavenly surpasses the earthly by far, because it was built by the Lord.

The function of the earthly was limited in efficiency, as well as in time. Its service was not able to solve the sin problem. The shedding of blood was without lasting effect. The human conscience was not really cleansed. Although real, it was just a copy of the genuine sanctuary and its service. Only the blood of Jesus and His ministry as High Priest make a real and lasting difference.

However, the apostle does not ridicule the old sanctuary, although he points out its serious limitations, even if it served its purpose at the time it was used.

What is the basic intention of the earthly sanctuary in the Old Testament? Exod. 25:22; 29:43-46.

The wilderness tabernacle was built so that God might dwell among His people. Yet, even then, sin blocked access to God. The good news of Hebrews is that Jesus has opened the way back to our Father. Through Him we have access to the very presence of God, because we are covered in His perfect righteousness. Boldly and yet reverently, we approach Him because Jesus, through His death and ministry, has paved the way.

If the Old Testament service really couldn't solve the sin problem, why was it instituted to begin with?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Online chatting is becoming more and more popular. It's not like getting a letter with old news or talking over static telephone lines. Besides being an inexpensive way to keep in touch, online chatting takes place in real time and is almost like talking to someone face to face. In fact, if your computer has video-conferencing capabilities, it is just like talking face to face. Something about talking online makes you feel so much closer to the person—it provides a special place and time to be alone with someone. The sanctuary was something like that. There were many ways for people to keep in touch with God, but the sanctuary was a “special” place where God met with His people.

Thought Questions:

1. Exodus 25:8 tells us the sanctuary enables God to be with His people. On the other hand, Acts 7:48 says God doesn't live in temples (KJV). What does it take to bring these two biblical passages together without one contradicting the other? What is the overriding principle of communication between God and humanity? Does it matter whether there is a special place? Why is it that many poor congregations save up for several years just to build a house of worship?
2. At the height of his fame, Michelangelo stated, “A true work of art is but a shadow of divine perfection.” The earthly sanctuary, crafted by human hands, is a mere shadow of the awesome work of the sanctuary taking place in heaven. Likewise, what elements of our lives can shadow what we can expect to experience in heaven?

Application Questions:

1. Does everyone need to have a special place to meet with God? Explain. What kind of benefit do you think there could be in having a “special” meeting place—just for you and your Lord? What is it about such a place that will enhance your spiritual life? How can you keep your special meeting place from turning into a ritual?
2. Compare and contrast your place of worship with the Old Testament sanctuary. What are the differences and similarities? Share unique elements of your personal worship time that can be incorporated into the worship style of your church. What are the advantages and disadvantages of adding variety to traditional church services?

FURTHER STUDY:

Though a lot of debate exists regarding *ta hagia*, it seems clear that in Hebrews it means “the sanctuary” as a whole. 1. Look at Hebrews 8:2, the first time that *ta hagia* appears in Hebrews. Notice how it is used. “A minister of the sanctuary [*ta hagia*], and of the true tabernacle [*skene*], which the Lord pitched, and not man.” The text clearly and unambiguously parallels *ta hagia* with *skene*, and *skene* means the “tabernacle,” the entire sanctuary. Thus, right from the start, we are given a definition of *ta hagia*.

2. Again, Hebrews is contrasting the earthly to the heavenly sanctuary, not which apartment Christ entered in heaven. Therefore, *ta hagia*, understood as “sanctuary,” makes the most sense.

3. Recent studies on *ta hagia* in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible have shown that when *ta hagia* is used in the context of the sanctuary it consistently designates the entire sanctuary.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. William Johnsson, a Hebrews scholar, has this to say about some of the modern translations of Hebrews: “This calls for a word about the New International Version. I think it is, in general, an excellent translation, but I disagree with its approach in Hebrews. The translators . . . render *ta hagia* as ‘Most Holy Place. . . .’ In my judgment they would have been fairer with the reader by translating the uncertain references by the more neutral ‘sanctuary.’ The upshot is that all students of Hebrews, and especially Adventists, need to be discriminating and ready to challenge the New International Version wherever they find ‘Most Holy Place.’”—William Johnsson, *Hebrews* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 149, 150. Discuss the implications of what Dr. Johnsson has written.

2. The sanctuary is mentioned also in Hebrews 10:19 and 13:10, 11. What is the message for us in these verses, including their respective contexts?

SUMMARY: The book of Hebrews, in numerous places, contrasts the earthly-sanctuary service with its better counterpart, that of Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. The issue in Hebrews is not which apartment Jesus entered; the issue, instead, is that He is our great High Priest, through whom we have direct access to the Lord of the universe.

Jesus' Ministry and the Sanctuary



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 9 and 10.

MEMORY TEXT: “Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself” (Hebrews 7:27, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Hebrews uses images from both the daily and yearly services to show we have complete access to the Father.

WE HAVE ALREADY STUDIED THE SANCTUARY LANGUAGE of the Epistle to the Hebrews. We have also noticed that the author knows the old system very well. For him the earthly sanctuary is a shadow of the real heavenly sanctuary. In addition to the real tabernacle, there is a real sacrifice, which surpasses all animal sacrifices atoning for the sins of humanity. There is also a real priesthood.

Hebrews has some strong allusions to the Day of Atonement. What conclusions can we draw from those allusions? What conclusions are not warranted? This week we'll take a look at some texts and issues that are of special significance to Seventh-day Adventists.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why does Hebrews talk about both the daily and yearly services? What is the meaning of “within the veil”? We say that Jesus is our High Priest in heaven, but what does that mean? What does He do for us as High Priest, as Intercessor and Mediator?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 30.

Sunday

August 24

THE DAILY SERVICE IN HEBREWS.

“Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people” (Heb. 9:6, 7).

No question, the author of Hebrews used the Old Testament wilderness sanctuary and its sacrificial services as the model, the type, to help provide insights into Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Separated from that context, the verses about blood of goats and bulls, the tent, the veil, the high priest, and so forth make little sense. Paul used the earthly realities to explain heavenly ones; we should, as well.

Thus, it’s not surprising that, in agreement with the Old Testament type, he distinguished between a ministry in the first compartment of the tabernacle, the Holy Place, and a ministry in the second apartment, the Most Holy Place. In the former, the priests and the high priest, serving on a daily basis, offered sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. In the Most Holy Place, the high priest made final atonement for—and cleansed the sanctuary from—sin (Leviticus 16). The daily seemed to deal with sin on an individual basis; in the yearly, the whole service took on a corporate component, dealing with the nation as a whole.

In Hebrews 9:7, the word translated “errors” comes from a Greek word that means sins committed through ignorance or thoughtlessness. What does the fact that even these kinds of sins needed to be atoned for tell us about just how serious they are?

In addition to Hebrews 9:6, the daily ministry in the earthly sanctuary is specifically mentioned in Hebrews 7:26, 27 and 10:11, 12. What’s the one point that both are making as they compare the daily sacrifices to Christ’s sacrifice? (See also Heb. 9:28.)

Of all the good news found in Hebrews, these texts contain some of the best, which is that Jesus’ sacrifice was all-sufficient and complete. No more blood needs to be shed, no more animals need to be sacrificed, and no more deaths need to atone for sin. Christ’s death was enough.

Read Hebrews 2:9. How does that text help us understand why Christ’s once-and-for-all sacrifice was sufficient?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 10:19-22.

Teachers Aims:

1. To study the daily and yearly services described in Hebrews.
2. To understand the meaning of “through the veil” (Heb. 10:20).
3. To explore the role of Christ as our High Priest in heaven and to contemplate what it means for Him to serve as our Mediator before God.

Lesson Outline:

I. Daily and Yearly Services of the Earthly Sanctuary.

- A. The priests, on a daily basis, offered sacrifices to atone for the sins of individuals.
- B. Once a year the priest entered the Most Holy Place and offered atonement for the nation as a whole.
- C. Once a year the sanctuary was completely cleansed of sin.

II. Our Heavenly Intercessor.

- A. Christ tore down barriers between God and humanity.
- B. Humanity can approach God through Christ.
- C. Christ stands before God as our Representative.

III. The Divine-Human Mediator.

- A. In the earthly sanctuary, the priest was a flawed representative—a sinner himself.
- B. In the heavenly sanctuary, our High Priest is perfect in every way.
- C. Christ mediates for us, not with our sin-tainted righteousness but with His perfect, flawless righteousness.

Summary: Hebrews gives us a good description of how the earthly sanctuary represented the heavenly sanctuary. While both have similar roles, the delineating factor is Christ’s intercession on our behalf.

Commentary.

Aaron and his successors needed to present a sin offering for the people and one offering for themselves. This was preeminently true on the annual ritual of the Day of Atonement. But Jesus has no need to present a daily sacrifice or, for that matter, a yearly sacrifice for His people’s sins.

Instead, He presented a permanent sin offering on their behalf when He offered up His own life, an offering so perfect and effica-

Monday

August 25

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT IN HEBREWS.

Besides using images from the daily (or first-apartment) ministry, Hebrews uses images from the yearly ministry, the Day of Atonement, the climactic sanctuary ritual of the year. This shouldn't be surprising, because a book finding its basic types from the earthly-sanctuary service hardly would be expected to ignore one of the most solemn sanctuary rituals.

Besides Hebrews 9:7, references to the Day of Atonement may be found very clearly in Hebrews 9:25, 26 and 10:1-4. As with the references to the daily (see yesterday's study), what's the main point the texts are making, and how does that point fit in with the entire theme of Hebrews that we have looked at so far?

Another fascinating text with Day of Atonement overtones is Hebrews 9:23. "Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (NASB). After reading the text in context, ask yourself this question: Given the overall contrasts being made in the book of Hebrews, particularly in chapter 9, what are the "heavenly things" that need cleansing?

Following a passage on the dedication of the sanctuary, this text argues that just as the earthly things (i.e., the earthly sanctuary and all that was in it) require purification, the "heavenly things" (the sanctuary in heaven) do, as well. Except that, in this case, the heavenly cleansing demanded "better sacrifices." It's no coincidence that the word translated "cleansed" is used in Leviticus 16 to describe the purification of the sanctuary at the Day of Atonement. The author sees this earthly ritual as a symbol of something better in heaven.

Though Hebrews does not elaborate more on this theme and does not say *when* these "heavenly things" are or would be cleansed (for example, either at the Cross or beginning in 1844), what it does do is affirm the Adventist teaching that not only is there a sanctuary in heaven but that it needs to be "purified" or "cleansed." How do you understand this verse in the context of our 1844 sanctuary message?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

scious it needs no repetition. Jesus' ministry in heaven is not, as some would have us believe, shadowy, unreal, or just a mental notion. It is not the temple in heaven that is a copy of the earthly. It is the tabernacle that Moses built that is a copy (shadow) of the model from heaven.

I. The "Shadow" of the Heavenly Sanctuary.

The word *shadow* is used not so much in the Platonic sense of a copy of a heavenly and eternal ideal as in the sense of foreshadowing. Jesus' ministry in the sanctuary is as real as the heavenly sanctuary is real.

What is the distinction Paul makes in the book of Hebrews between the words *shadow* and *image*?

The *shadow* is but an *image* of the reality itself. The *image* is thus something superior to the "copies" or patterns. The implication of Paul's argument is that Jesus enters into the heavenly sanctuary, not a copy or image but the real thing.

Not only was the earthly sanctuary a shadow of the heavenly but its services also were a shadow. This is true even to the cleansing of the sanctuary, which was a shadow of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary.

II. Jesus and His Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary.

Ellen G. White clearly points out "the subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time or to occupy the position which God designs them to fill.

"The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ's work in behalf of men."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 488.

Jesus Christ by His sacrifice has accomplished once for all what generations of Levitical sacrifices had never done, and this is to pay the penalty for sin. After hundreds of years, those sacrifices were no nearer the attainment of their aim than they had been at the beginning. It is very important to understand this aspect of Jesus' ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

It is, then, in no earthly copy of the heavenly dwelling place of God that Jesus ministers as His people's High Priest but in the heavenly dwelling place itself; His ministry is far superior to any earthly ministry. And it is because of the superiority of the covenant in the power of which it is exercised, the covenant of which Jesus is Himself the Mediator. Jesus Christ, the Mediator who offered the supreme sacrifice for the sins of His people.

Ellen G. White writes, "Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary, and he is there to make an atonement for the people. He is there to present his wounded side and pierced hands to his Father. He is there to plead

Tuesday

August 26

WITHIN THE VEIL.

Read Hebrews 6:13-20. What hope is the author giving to his readers? What seems to be the point of this discourse?

There's been much discussion over the years regarding the phrase "within the veil." Because this phrase is used almost exclusively (though not always; see Num. 18:7) as a reference for the Most Holy Place in the Hebrew Bible, some have tried to argue on the merit of this verse that Hebrews has put Jesus in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, thus voiding the 1844 message.

In Hebrews 9:3, the phrase "second veil" refers to the veil between the Holy Place and Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary. The question arises, Why didn't he use that same phrase in Hebrews 6:19 if he meant, specifically, the second apartment?

It is rather suspect that the author of Hebrews didn't use the phrase "second veil" here; the obvious phrase he meant the text to mean was the second veil; that is, the inner veil that stood before the Most Holy Place. In fact, there is nothing in the immediate context of Hebrews 6:19, 20 that alludes to the Day of Atonement. More than likely, considering the whole context of the book, the phrase alludes to our complete access to God in the heavenly sanctuary.

Again, the author is using Old Testament imagery to teach New Testament truths regarding the greater efficacy of Christ's death and high-priestly ministry, one that gives us "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast," in contrast to the old, inefficient Levitical system.

There's no question that all the sacrifices, including those of the Day of Atonement, had their fulfillment in Jesus at the Cross. Yet, to focus exclusively on this phrase is to miss the whole point of Hebrews, which is that through Jesus all barriers between God and humanity have been broken and that through Christ's death and mediation we now have full access to the Father. That verse, along with other Day of Atonement images (interestingly enough, no mention is made in Hebrews of the scapegoat, a key element in the yearly service), doesn't prove that the Day of Atonement ritual itself was fulfilled at the Cross. Hebrews doesn't address that issue.

Dwell on Hebrews 6:18, 19, focusing on such words as "immutable," "refuge," "anchor," "steadfast," and "sure." Rephrase the two texts in your own words in a way that helps you understand the hope the author is trying to give us.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

for his Church that is upon the earth. He is cleansing the sanctuary from sins of the people.”—*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Jan. 28, 1890.

This affirms it was necessary that the heavenly things be purified with better sacrifices than the blood of calves and goats. The only blood that can do this is the blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord. For this reason, Jesus, by virtue of His own blood, entered the heavenly places, there to appear before the face of God in our behalf (Heb. 9:24).

Paul invites us to have a personal sanctuary experience, to enter into the Most Holy Place and to come boldly to the royal throne of grace. The Old Testament gives us a portrait of one who boldly approached a royal throne—albeit an earthly one—in need of grace and mercy: Queen Esther. She wished to intercede to save her people from the death penalty. To save them, she risked her life to appear, without invitation, before her husband the king. If her husband re-

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Leviticus 23:27, 28; Matthew 25:34-40; Romans 8:26; 1 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 8:1, 2; 9:1-14.

1. The book of Hebrews puts special emphasis on the Day of Atonement as observed in the Old Testament era. What relevance do you think the Day of Atonement has for Adventist Christians in the present day?
2. Arguments over the meaning of the various terms used to describe Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary can become quite involved and technical. How would you respond to someone who claims such issues are merely a distraction?
3. Christ is our Representative before God. Does this have anything to do with the fact we represent Christ to our fellow humans?
4. Even though we no longer have imperfect humans (priests) making atonement for us, we still face the sometimes confusing and disillusioning fact of our own and others' imperfections in the church. How do you feel it is possible for God to work with such flawed material?
5. In recent years, many have for one reason or another found traditional Adventist teachings on the sanctuary to be problematic. They claim it robs them of any kind of assurance of salvation. Is the problem, however, with the doctrine itself or how some have gone about teaching it? How can we understand Christ's high-priestly ministry in a way that helps give us greater assurance of salvation?

Wednesday

August 27

OUR HEAVENLY INTERCESSOR.

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

Perhaps, in many ways, the key theme of Hebrews can be found in the simple phrase within this text: that He can save to the uttermost those who “come unto God by him.” The Greek word translated “by” here means “through” or “by the means of.”

We must, again, remember the purpose of the epistle: Paul is telling these people, Don’t go back to your old ways. The new way offers something much better, something that can accomplish what the old never could. The new way offers you the opportunity to come to God as you never could before. And that’s because you now can come to God through, or by the means of, Jesus.

What does it mean to come to God “by him,” that is, through Jesus? Write down your understanding of what Jesus has done so that we can, through Him, come to God. What texts can you find to back up your answer? Also, what does it mean to come to God?

No question, its through Christ as your great High Priest that we can have access to God. But how? How can we, as sinners, have access to a holy God?

Of course, we don’t (at least not now) stand in the physical presence of God. But we don’t have to. Someone else does it for us, and that’s Jesus, who by virtue of His perfect life stands before the Father—*for us*. He stands *in our place*, representing us, not because of our own worth but because of His. He alone has the perfect righteousness to stand in the presence of the Father.

Just as in the daily and the yearly service in the old covenant the priests entered into the presence of God in the sanctuary, Jesus does so for us in the heavenly sanctuary. He is our Representative there, doing for us what we can never do for ourselves.

Read Romans 8:34; Hebrews 6:20; 9:24; 10:20. What is the one similar point they are all making? What hope, what promises, are found there for us?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

fused to hold out his scepter to her, she would die. Esther wore her loveliest garments and, perfumed and beautified, appeared before the king, who was so overcome with her beauty he extended his scepter of mercy to her and heard her petition.

Like Esther, we have need of recommending ourselves to the King. But we have no beauty of our own. The garments of our character are filthy rags. But Christ makes provision for our nakedness and our spiritual ugliness. He clothes us in the robe of His beautiful character, and we enter the sanctuary through the veil “that is, his flesh” (Heb. 10:29). The word *flesh* has several meanings: (1) meat, (2) the physical body, (3) the carnal fleshly passions, and (4) the character and personality. The only interpretation of *flesh* that makes sense here is the last one. To enter within the veil, then, is to be clothed by faith in Christ’s righteousness over our rags, His character covering our nakedness.

WITNESSING

Enlisted in the various branches of the military are thousands of men and women who count it an honor to serve their country. When necessary, these servicemen and servicewomen proudly fight for those who cannot fight for themselves.

This week’s lesson speaks of how the priest would go where others could not go, to represent them. He did for the people what they could not do for themselves. The people could not go into the Holy and Most Holy Places of the sanctuary. But the high priest could go into these chambers as mediator, to minister on behalf of the people. Jesus does the same in the heavenly sanctuary. He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

We cannot save ourselves from sin and death. Jesus redeems us by His blood. Sin separates us from

God. Jesus removes all barriers so we may “come boldly” to the Father. By ourselves, we are powerless to overcome sin and temptation. But by the power of Christ, we can “resist the devil, and he will flee” (James 4:7).

In the earthly-sanctuary services, the sins of the people were symbolically transferred to the animal sacrifice. Unless our sins are transferred to Christ, we must pay the penalty of sin, which is death. But when we confess our sins, He will forgive us and “cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Let us be faithful witnesses so not only our words but our actions tell others what Christ’s ministry in the sanctuary is all about. He has fought for us on earth’s battlefield and gained the victory over sin and death. Now He intercedes for us in the heavenly sanctuary above.

Thursday

August 28

OUR HEAVENLY MEDIATOR.

Look up the texts below. What are they all saying to us? What do they mean for us? What is your understanding of a mediator? Why do we need one?

1 Tim. 2:5 _____

Heb. 8:6 _____

Heb. 9:15 _____

Heb. 12:24 _____

Jesus as Mediator cannot be separated from Jesus as Sacrifice and Jesus as our High Priest. All are part of the same plan of salvation. By virtue of His perfect life and complete sacrifice, Jesus now stands as our High Priest in heaven, where He stands in the presence of God for us as our Mediator.

In the old covenant–sanctuary service, the priest would take the blood of animals and bring it into the earthly sanctuary. He would, as a representative of others, go where others could not go. The priests would have to do this day after day in the daily service, year after year in the heavenly service.

Under the new covenant, instead of earthly and sinful priests, we have Jesus, the Mediator of “a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” Sinners today don’t have to find an animal, don’t have to bring it to an earthly sanctuary, and don’t need another sinner to mediate that blood for them. Mediation is being done for us through Jesus, through whom we can have access to God at any time, at any place.

When we sin, we confess our sins, and Jesus, because of His merits, His perfect righteousness, stands “in the presence of God for us,” representing us, not with our righteousness but with His own, the merits that He Himself wrought out for us while here in the flesh, the merits that become ours by faith. In short, He’s applying in our behalf the benefits of His perfect life and death, the only means by which we, as sinners, can be accepted by God.

Read 1 John 2:1 in light of today’s study. How does this text fit in with the whole theme of Hebrews? You need to be able to see the great hope and promises we have, knowing that “Jesus Christ the Righteous” intercedes for us, that He stands in God’s presence for us, and that He is our Mediator. Dwell on these themes until you grasp their importance for you personally.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: It has been theorized that Leonardo da Vinci painted his own profile in shadowy detail along the edge of the veil draped around Mona Lisa's face. (See "theory" at <www.monalisaprofile.com>. Cited May 2002.) Proponents of this theory illuminate the hidden outline of the artist's profile within the veil.

Similarly, the book of Hebrews speaks of a veil that hid God from humanity. Just as da Vinci's face lay hidden from view in the painting for centuries, the presence of God lay hidden behind a veil that separated the seen from the unseen, the earthly from the heavenly, until Christ came and tore down that veil. While a literal veil partitioned the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the earthly sanctuary, a symbolic veil also existed that hid the Divine presence. To be within the veil meant to be in the very presence of God. How, then, is Christ the Way through the veil into God's presence?

Thought Questions:

1. As observers of the human race and as ones who have "been in our shoes," what words of wisdom and advice do you think Enoch, Moses, and Elijah might have for us? In what ways do you think they might appreciate Jesus' ministry in the sanctuary more than we do? Think of three questions you want to

ask Jesus about His role in the sanctuary.

2. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is uniquely blessed with its insights on the sanctuary message. What are the advantages of having this message? Many consider the Seventh-day Adventist Church a "cult" because of our "strange" beliefs and theology. How important are our beliefs in the bigger scheme of things? Are there other things that take precedence over our belief system? Are there times to be ecumenical? Explain your answers.

Application Question:

Animal sacrifice leaves the sinner uncured; it leaves the barrier between the sinner and God. One Christian author compares it to ineffective medicine through the following illustration: A man is ill. A bottle of medicine is prescribed for him. If that medicine effects a cure, every time he looks at the bottle thereafter, he will say: "That is what gave me back my health." On the other hand, if the medicine is ineffective, every time he looks at the bottle he will be reminded that he is ill and that the recommended cure was useless. Why do you think people are generally skeptical of cure-alls? How can you share Jesus, the only Cure-All, to those who think they are terminally ill (spiritually)?

Friday

August 29

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, pp. 188–212.

“All is terror and confusion. The priest is about to slay the victim; but the knife drops from his nerveless hand, and the lamb escapes. Type has met antitype in the death of God’s Son. The great sacrifice has been made. The way into the holiest is laid open. A new and living way is prepared for all. No longer need sinful, sorrowing humanity await the coming of the high priest. Henceforth the Saviour was to officiate as priest and advocate in the heaven of heavens.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 757.

“By the rending of the veil of the temple, God said, I can no longer reveal My presence in the most holy place. A new and living Way, before which there hangs no veil, is offered to all. No longer need sinful, sorrowing humanity await the coming of the high priest.”
—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1109.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Look at these Ellen White quotes in light of this week’s lesson. How do they harmonize with our understanding of Christ’s two-phased ministry in heaven?**
- 2. After much study by some of our best scholars, a report was given on Hebrews. Two questions were asked. Does Hebrews teach Christ’s two-phased priestly ministry? Does Hebrews deny Christ’s two-phased priestly ministry? The committee answered No to both questions. Discuss the implications of their answer.**
- 3. Hebrews is very clear that the earthly and heavenly sanctuary are closely tied together. Though we don’t want to make an exact comparison, demanding that every stick of furniture in the earthly must have a corresponding counterpart in heaven, why does the reality of a two-phased earthly ministry—which was so crucial to the function of that sanctuary—provide powerful biblical evidence for a two-phased heavenly ministry, as well?**

SUMMARY: The book of Hebrews, using the old covenant–sanctuary service as its model, employs images from the daily and yearly services. All these point to the greater, better hope we have in Jesus, our Intercessor, Mediator, and High Priest in heaven.

Jesus, Our Sacrifice and Salvation



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 9 and 10.

MEMORY TEXT: “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Voluntarily, Jesus laid down His life and became the Supreme Sacrifice in order to save us. His sacrifice made superfluous all other sacrifices.

HE [JESUS] **BEGAN HIS MINISTRY** by being hungry, yet He is the Bread of Life. Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the Living Water. Jesus was weary, yet He is our rest. Jesus paid tribute, yet He is the King. Jesus was accused of having a demon, yet He cast out demons. Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears. Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the world. Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd. Jesus died, yet by His death He destroyed the power of death.” —Gregory of Nazianzus, A.D. 381 (article, “Jesus” [cited 28 January 2000], from www.sermonillustrations.com). Let us look closely at some concepts found in Hebrews regarding His sacrifice.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What role does blood play in Hebrews? What did Christ accomplish with His death? Why does Hebrews stress the once-and-for-all nature of Christ's death? How are we cleansed and purified of sin?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 6.

Sunday

August 31

THE CENTRALITY OF BLOOD.

“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4).

Why do you think that the blood of animals, even those used in the earthly sacrificial system (instituted by God Himself), was unable to “take away” sins?

The Greek term for “blood” appears twenty-one times in Hebrews, the highest concentration occurring in Hebrews 9. The theme of blood, introduced in Hebrews 9:7, becomes central in these verses and recurs constantly from verse 18 to the end of the chapter. In addition, a unique phrase is used in Hebrews 9:22, the “shedding of blood.”

Read the following texts: Hebrews 9:7, 18-22; 10:29; 12:24; 13:20. What’s the point they are making in regard to the blood? Why is blood deemed so important?

The old covenant and the new covenant were ratified by blood. Whereas “the blood of the covenant” in Hebrews 9 refers to the old covenant, in Hebrews 10–13 the focus is on the blood of Jesus and the new covenant.

Hebrews 9:7, 18, and 22 contain the word *without*. The high priest of the old system entered the Most Holy Place not *without* blood. The old covenant was not inaugurated *without* blood. There is no forgiveness *without* the shedding of blood. Blood is essential.

Hebrews 9:7-14, 25 contrasts the application of animal blood with the application of the blood of Jesus, thus showing the limits of the old system. Hebrews 9:18-21 emphasizes the importance of blood with regard to the covenant and the inauguration of the Old Testament sanctuary. Finally, Hebrews 9:22 contains the basic principle and forms a climax: Forgiveness of sin is possible only by shedding of blood; that is, the blood of Jesus, which alone has the ultimate power to purify and cleanse from sin.

Read Hebrews 9:22. Why can there be no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood? Whose blood? Hint: See Leviticus 17:11.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 10:22.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore the role of sacrificial blood in Hebrews and what Christ accomplished with His death.
2. To illustrate why Hebrews stresses the singularity of Christ's death.
3. To define how His death cleanses and purifies us of sin.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Role of Blood in the Covenants.

- A. Under the old covenant, animal blood was symbolic of Christ's sacrifice.
- B. Only Christ's blood can save humanity.

II. The Effects of Christ's Blood.

- A. Christ's blood allowed Him entrance to the heavenly sanctuary.
- B. Christ offers us the only way to be purged of our sins.
- C. We are sanctified by His blood.

III. The Perfection of Christ's Sacrifice.

- A. Christ lived as one of humanity yet was sinless.
- B. He bore the punishment and death we deserve.
- C. He is the epitome of what humanity was intended to be, and His sacrifice was more than sufficient to cover humanity's sin.

Summary: Our imperfection and dark, sinful natures are such that only through divine intervention could we hope to regain favor in God's sight. Knowing this, God asked His only Son to substitute His perfect nature for our imperfection.

Commentary.

In the previous lesson, we saw how Jesus, our High Priest, had access to the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary and became our Intercessor to the Father.

The teaching already emphasized in the earlier part of chapter 10 is now repeated; namely, that under the old system there is a ceaseless sequence of sacrifices, involving the repetition of the same sacrifices.

Monday

September 1

THE EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S SHED BLOOD.

We often tend to think of blood in very negative terms: It reminds us of violence, death, and war. In the book of Hebrews, however, blood means something quite positive.

What did Jesus accomplish by His blood being shed?

Heb. 9:12 _____

Heb. 9:14 _____

Heb. 9:22 _____

Heb. 10:19 _____

Heb. 13:12 _____

Take what you've written on these verses and summarize the gist of what they say Christ's blood has accomplished. What do these accomplishments mean for us personally?

“The blood of Christ is life-giving and hope-giving, accomplishing fully the eternal purpose of God to rescue man from the predicament of sin. . . . No book of the New Testament so exalts the place of Calvary as does Hebrews. It sets out its message of the finality and all-sufficiency of the blood of Christ in such striking and contrasting terms with the Old Testament that every believer may indeed find absolute confidence.”—Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, pp. 112, 114.

Read Hebrews 10:29. How would you explain this text in the context of all the hopes presented in Hebrews?

The blood of Jesus purifies. It cleanses the sinner and the sanctuary (Heb. 9:14, 23); it also brings salvation. But if it can do all those things for those who accept it, then those who reject it must face the consequence, and that is—condemnation. Jesus does not want us to fall away from Him, the Source of eternal life. Hebrews is nothing, if not an exhortation to stay faithful.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Moreover, the logic of the situation and the sacrifices is that it can never take away sin.

Only Jesus, who alone is equal to the Father, can provide what is needed to deal with the sin problem. Thus, Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient for our salvation. Whatever the priest did in the earthly sanctuary did not accomplish what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross of Calvary. As mentioned before, Christ, by His self-sacrifice, has accomplished once for all what generations of sacrifices had never done.

The sacrifice of Christ has purified His people from the moral defilement of sin and assured them permanent maintenance in a right relation with God.

As the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ bore the sins of the world (John 3:16). All the accumulated sins of humanity were placed upon Him. He is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe in Him. Jesus' sacrifice could not be, and was not, limited only to those who should finally accept Him. It included all humanity in its provision. The key, of course, is that only those who accept what Christ has provided for them, only those who claim it by faith, are justified and receive the ultimate benefits of that provision; that is, eternal life. There is no universal justification; the provision was universal in that it was sufficient to cover the sins of all humanity; but justification itself comes only to those who claim it by faith.

The great news is that Jesus bore the sins of humankind, of Caiaphas, of Judas, of those who nailed Him to the cross. But He bore them efficaciously only for those who would finally accept Him. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12, NJKV).

But even those who reject the offer of salvation have been the beneficiaries of Jesus' atonement. No sinners have any inherent right to life, and their continued existence and opportunity of accepting salvation is provided for them only by the sacrifice on the cross.

Probationary time is granted them in which to make their decision. When at last they finally and irrevocably decide they will not accept life on the conditions on which it is offered, the die is cast, and they must bear the consequences.

God can do no more for them. Salvation has been offered them again and again, and they have rejected it. But for sinners who repent and cast themselves upon the mercy of God, Jesus Christ takes their sins, bears them, for He has suffered and died for them, and sinners are set free.

Jesus Christ pays the penalty due to sins, and redemption is accomplished. Sinners are restored completely to the love and favor of God and stand before God as though they have never sinned.

"Christ's work encompasses more than His ministry on behalf of humanity. Through His death He reconciled to God 'all things, whether on earth or in heaven' (Col. 1:20). This cosmic reconciliation will reach its consummation at the end of the great controversy, before the destruction of the evil powers, when every creature in heaven and on

Tuesday

September 2

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST (Heb. 10:12).

While the concept of blood dominates Hebrews 9, the terms *sacrifice*, *offering*, and *to offer* find their highest concentration in Hebrews 10. The first part of Hebrews 10 discusses the inadequacy of the sacrifices of the old covenant. Starting with verse 10, the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus is contrasted with the services in the old tabernacle (see Heb. 10:10-18).

As mentioned earlier, but worth repeating (since the apostle does the same): Christ’s sacrifice was once and for all. That sacrifice did not need to be repeated, over and over, as in the Old Testament system.

Why do you think Hebrews emphasizes the fact that Christ had to die only once? Why is it not repeatable? What is it about its once-and-for-all nature that makes it better than the Old Testament system? What point is the author trying to make by stressing the uniqueness of this sacrifice? Keep in mind the general theme of Hebrews as you dwell on your answer. See also Hebrews 10:18.

Jesus offered up Himself, once and for all, as a sacrifice; this means that He took upon Himself the punishment that we deserved for our sins. He was sacrificed in our behalf. Sin brings death; but, out of His love for us, He faced that death in our stead. He bore the punishment that we deserve. This is the essence of His sacrifice.

Although it is said that He had been offered (Heb. 9:28), other texts perceive the initiative originating with Him. Hebrews 9:14: Jesus “through the eternal Spirit offered himself” (see 10:12). These texts seem to express that Jesus voluntarily accepted suffering and death, including humiliation.

The point is that His sacrifice is all sufficient. It is one sacrifice offered once for all. Its results are that people *are* sanctified and perfected and experience forgiveness (Heb. 10:10, 14, 18).

Is it fair that Jesus, being innocent, should suffer and die for the guilty? But do we want fairness? If we got fairness—in other words, if we got what we deserved—what would we get?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

earth will ‘confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’ (Phil. 2:10, 11). Meanwhile, through Christ God preserves the universe and keeps it together (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).

“God revealed Himself in a unique way in Christ (John 1:14). Through the Son God speaks (Heb. 1:2) and reveals His will to the Christian community (Heb. 12:25). His speaking also takes the form of a blessing. Through Christ God has blessed believers ‘with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 1:3; cf. Gal. 3:14).

“Through Christ’s sacrificial death human beings are brought to God and continue to have access to Him (Eph. 2:18; 1 Peter 3:18). Christ appeared before God in the heavenly sanctuary as our forerunner; thus we are free to approach God in full confidence through Him (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:20).

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Romans 4:3, 6:23, Ephesians 2:1-5, Hebrews 9:14, 9:28, 11:26, 2 Peter 3:9.

1. Hebrews emphasizes again and again that sin cannot be forgiven without the shedding of blood. What does this tell us about the nature of sin? Why do you think sin is regarded as so serious that only the death of something or Someone can erase it?
2. We often talk about God’s grace being “free,” if not cheap. How might all this talk about the shedding of blood modify our thinking on this point? What does it say to us about the reality of this sacrifice and its consequences?
3. The blood spoken of by the author of Hebrews is not just any blood but (of course) Christ’s blood. Why is that so? Why could only Christ atone for the sins of the world? Who was Jesus that He would be able to do that for us? Discuss.
4. According to Hebrews, Jesus sacrificed Himself “once for all” (10:10). If His sacrifice atoned (in theory) for all people, why will not everyone be saved? If God wants us to be saved, why can’t He just will that to be so? Does this mean God is limiting His own power in some way?
5. Is there any way we can be worthy of the sacrifice Christ has made for us? What (if any) is our part in the whole plan of salvation?

Wednesday

September 3

THE CONCEPT OF PURIFICATION (Heb. 10:22).

There are different ways to describe God’s saving activity. The Bible uses a variety of images and terms such as “justification,” “redemption,” “atonement,” “ransom,” and being “in Christ” to describe the same outcome. Another one of these words is “purification,” a concept heavily emphasized in Hebrews.

Look up Hebrews 1:3; 9:13, 14, 22, 23; 10:2, 22. In what ways do they show not only the idea of defilement but also of purification? What things are defiled? What things need to be purified, or cleansed? How do you understand what this cleansing means?

Justification pictures a legal process in which someone is declared just. Redemption is a picture explaining how something is being “bought back.” Forgiveness implies the cancellation of a debt. But purification alludes to the removal of uncleanness and defilement. And Hebrews teaches that humanity needs purification.

The first use of the concept of “cleanse, purify” occurs in the prologue of Hebrews. After Jesus has been introduced as the Creator, His achievements are mentioned, the first being that He “purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3). Thus, the tone is set for the rest of the epistle. Jesus has made purification of sins.

“By His atonement Christ accomplished both the cleansing of sin in general—which work was made possible by the sacrifice on the cross and will at last issue in the purification of the universe from sin—and the cleansing of the individual from sin. This latter work, also made possible by the cross, is still in progress and will not be finished till the last soul is saved.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 397.

“One is not *redeemed* from defilement, just as one is not *forgiven* it, *reconciled* to it, or *justified* in spite of it. If one is defiled, he must be made clean—the stain, the corruption must be taken away. And, argues the author of Hebrews, the means of that purifying and purification is blood, the blood of Christ Himself, the purifying agent par excellence.”—William Johnsson, *Issues in the Book of Hebrews* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1989), p. 89.

Hebrews 9:13, 14 tells us that through Christ’s blood even our conscience can be purified. What do you think that means? How can our knowledge that Christ paid, in full, the penalty for all our sins and that we can stand faultless before God help “purge” or “cleanse” us from “dead works”?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

“Forgiveness is mediated from God to humanity through Christ (Eph. 4:32). Through Christ repentance reaches the human heart (Acts 5:31). Even after conversion, sin besets Christians, making it possible for them to fall. In such cases there is an Advocate who can represent the sinner before God and through whom one can be forgiven (1 John 2:1, 2).

“Uncleanness is the natural condition of the human heart. In order to restore unity between God and humanity, cleansing is necessary. This cleansing, necessary whenever believers sin (Heb. 9:14), is available through Christ (1 John 1:9). Believers were once sanctified through the blood of Christ (Heb. 10:29), but Christ continues to establish their hearts in holiness (1 Thess. 3:13). They are called, like ancient Israel, to be holy because God is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16). But that holiness reaches Christians through the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.”—Angel Rodriguez, “The Sanctuary,” in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, p. 393.

WITNESSING

Thirty-eight U.S. states currently allow capital punishment, the legal infliction of death for certain criminal acts. There is much controversy and debate among nations worldwide over the death penalty. Those opposed to capital punishment believe it is brutal and degrading. Supporters believe it to be necessary and very effective.

Throughout earth’s history, death has been the penalty for many crimes and antisocial behaviors. In Exodus 21:12 we read, “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.” Both in the Old and New Testaments we find that those found committing adultery were to be stoned to death. Death causes our

hearts to grieve. But we rejoice over the death of Jesus on the cross. Because of His sacrifice, our sins have been blotted out. But we must not forget the seriousness of this event.

As witnesses, it is our job to inform every lost soul we all must appear before the judgment seat of God. We have been charged with a serious crime, the criminal act of transgressing the law of God. And we know we are guilty. But Jesus, our Lawyer, has pleaded our case, and we have been acquitted. Now we can stand with boldness before the heavenly court, and when asked “How do you plead?” our divine Attorney will cry out in our behalf “*Not Guilty!*”

Thursday

September 4

JESUS, OUR AUTHOR AND FINISHER.

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Read for today Hebrews 12:1-4. Notice that it comes right after the famous Hebrews 11, which gives a litany of loyal followers of the Lord who lived by faith. Chapter 12 begins by referring back to those people as examples for the Hebrews to follow.

In Hebrews 12:1, he talks about the Christian life as a “race.” How do you understand the meaning of that term in the context of living by faith?

Though pointing them first to various biblical figures, the author of Hebrews then points them to Jesus, whom he calls the “author and finisher of our faith.” The word for “author” there also can mean “originator,” “founder,” “pioneer,” “finisher,” and “perfecter.” What this tells us is that everything we need for salvation, for faith, for assurance, and for personal holiness comes from Jesus. He began the process of our salvation, and He will end it. It all rests in Him; and the work that He has accomplished for us, He will finish *in* us. Jesus is our salvation. In Him our redemption was completed. Our part is to cling to Him in faith, to live by faith, and to endure in His strength.

Yet, at the same time, it’s clear by the whole context of the passage, and in the message of the whole book of Hebrews, that He can work in us only as long as we allow Him to. It takes our cooperation, our surrender, our willingness to live by faith, to remain steadfast and unwavering, even amid great trial and tribulation.

Read carefully Hebrews 12:2-4. What is the author saying to the readers here? Not only is he pointing us to Jesus; he’s telling us to focus on a specific aspect of Christ’s life and ministry. What aspect is that, and what’s the specific point he’s trying to make in these passages?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Longfellow could take a worthless piece of paper, write a poem on it, and instantly make it worth thousands of dollars—and it's called genius. Rockefeller could sign his name to a piece of paper and make it worth millions of dollars—and it's called riches. A mechanic can take material worth five dollars and turn it into something worth five hundred—and it's called skill. An artist can take an inexpensive piece of canvas, paint a picture on it, and make it worth thousands of dollars—and it's called art. Jesus Christ can take a worthless, sinful life, wash it in His blood, put His Spirit in it, and make it valuable to God—and that's called sanctification. The Lord is in the business of taking rough, raw material and using it—transforming men by His power.—Adapted from *Parson's Bible Illustrator CD-Rom*.

Thought Questions:

1. What are some of the rough edges of sinful humans God is willing to transform? As created beings, we, too, have the ability to create and re-create. Armed with the power of the Holy Spirit, what can God expect from His “transformed” children?
2. The Old Testament Hebrew word that is translated as “atonement” literally means “to cover.” The animal sacrifices “covered” your confessed sins. In the New Testament, however, the word *expiate*, denoting “atoning sacrifice,” literally means “to put away.” Jesus’ blood does not merely cover up your confessed sin; it puts that sin away as though it had never been committed.

Application Questions:

1. While the Holy Spirit touches lives and the process of sanctification takes place, is there a part for Christians to play? What do you think is your responsibility in the process of discipleship? Consider a new member in your church. List three specific things your Sabbath School class can do to nurture and disciple this new member.
2. In the New Testament, the sacrifice of Jesus was voluntary. In the Old Testament, however, the animal’s life was taken from it. Jesus gave His life willingly. Obedience can be voluntary, out of love—or forced, out of fear. In parallel, why should our obedience as Christians be voluntary, not forced?

Friday

September 5

FURTHER STUDY: Take a concordance and look up the terms *to save*, *salvation*, and *savior* or investigate the topic on salvation in the book of Romans: chapters 5:9, 10; 8:24; 9:27; 10:9, 13; 11:14, 26.

Note: “Our Saviour is in the sanctuary. . . . He is our interceding High Priest, making an atoning sacrifice for us, pleading in our behalf the efficacy of His blood. Parents should seek to represent this Saviour to their children to establish in their minds the plan of salvation. . . . The fact that the only-begotten Son of God gave His life because of man’s transgression, to satisfy justice and to vindicate the honor of God’s law, should be constantly kept before the minds of children and youth. . . . Christ suffered in order that through faith in Him our sins might be pardoned. He became man’s substitute and surety, Himself taking the punishment, though all undeserving, that we who deserved it might be free, and return to our allegiance to God. . . . He is our only hope of salvation. . . . Man repents, becomes contrite in heart, believes in Christ as His atoning sacrifice, and realizes that God is reconciled to him.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 369.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Read Hebrews 2:10; 5:7, 9; and 9:28. How do they show the work of both the Father and Son in the plan of salvation?**
- 2. Hebrews talks about us being purified or cleansed from sin. How do we experience this purification and cleansing in our lives? God doesn’t do this without our cooperation. What must we do, as Christians, to allow this process to take place?**
- 3. Read Hebrews 12:4. What is the apostle saying here to us about the battle against sin? What do his words imply about the struggle involved in that battle?**

SUMMARY: Someone has written: “If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.”—Author unknown ([cited 28 January 2000] from www.sermonillustrations.com). And the book of Hebrews, by stressing the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ, gives us a wonderful view of just what our Savior has done for us.

Jesus, Our Assurance



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Heb. 6:11, 18-20; 10:19-23, 35; 11:1-6.

MEMORY TEXT: "Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:22, 23, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The recipients of the epistle needed assurance, and Hebrews shows them where this assurance can be found.

MOST HUMANS HAVE A DESIRE for some level of certainty and assurance in their lives. Who would get on an airplane without some certainty, some assurance, that it was well-maintained and mechanically sound or that the pilots knew how to fly? Who would go to the doctor without some certainty regarding the physician's competency in medicine? Who would seek employment without some assurance that the company would be around for a while? All of us, in one way or another, look for and need a certain level of assurance in the most everyday things of life.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: In what ways does Hebrews present the topic of assurance? How is faith linked to assurance? What conditions are placed on assurance? How do we strike a balance between assurance and presumption?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 13.

Sunday

September 7

OUR STATUS AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.

The book of Hebrews, along with other New Testament writings, offers us certainty in regard to our relationship with God. Assurance is an important theme in this epistle, and in others. How could it not be? After all, we are sinners who daily confront our own weaknesses, faults, and shortcomings. If we didn't have some sort of assurance of salvation and acceptance, who wouldn't eventually give up the faith completely?

How do each of the following texts give us assurance of salvation in Christ?

Heb. 2:17 _____

Heb. 3:14 _____

Heb. 6:18 _____

Heb. 9:15 _____

Heb. 9:28 _____

Heb. 10:14 _____

Dwell specifically on the notion that we are made “partakers of Christ” (Heb. 3:14). What does that mean? How should this experience change our lives? What condition does the author place on this good news?

Because Jesus has “made purification for sins” (Heb. 1:3, NRSV) and because He has “obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12) for us, we can be accepted by God, even as sinners. Thus, we have assurance of salvation, not from anything in ourselves but because of what God did in Christ, the Son of God, our King, our Brother, our Sacrifice, and our High Priest. Our assurance rests in Him, not in ourselves.

“Christians are holy, sanctified, perfected, cleansed, purified—all terms associated with the sanctuary and its services. They *are* God’s people, even now. Now they are ‘clean,’ now have access to God, now have consciences purged, now have Jesus as Heavenly High Priest.”
—William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, p. 155.

Why is assurance of salvation so important in the Christian life? At the same time, how do we protect ourselves against turning assurance into presumption?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 8:10-12.

Teachers Aims:

1. To illustrate how Hebrews presents the topic of assurance.
2. To define how faith is linked to assurance and the conditions placed on it.
3. To explore how to strike a balance between assurance and presumption.

Lesson Outline:

I. Our Assurance of Salvation.

- A. Christ became human so He, as a full Representative of humanity, could present our case before God.
- B. We partake of Christ's sacrifice by our faith in Him.
- C. He is our ultimate Mediator, because, through His death, we inherit eternal life.

II. Christ, Our Assurance.

- A. Jesus' intercession still continues in our behalf.
- B. He paid the price for our sins.
- C. He offers us the power to overcome sin.

III. Additional Promises.

- A. We must seek mercy, and God promises it is there for the asking.
- B. He asks us to spread His message of salvation to all and to uphold our faith in Him as an example to others.
- C. Have faith in Him, and He will take care of us in all things.

Summary: Through our faith we accept Christ's sacrifice for us and the promises of salvation that come with it. In addition, we receive the assurance of eternal life that transcends the mundane goals of our present life.

Commentary.

Jesus, our Assurance, is one of the main concepts that runs through the Epistle to the Hebrews. The "boldness" believers in Christ have to enter the heavenly sanctuary through Him is set in contrast to the restrictions placed on those who lived during the time of the earthly service.

Monday

September 8

OUR ASSURANCE FOR TODAY.

Yesterday, we studied some promises made to those who belong to Christ. Most of these promises used verb forms that relate to the past. What about verses that spell out Christ's ministry in our behalf and how it impacts us now?

What is Jesus doing for His children today?

Heb. 2:18 _____

Heb. 4:15 _____

Heb. 7:19 _____

Heb. 7:25 _____

The passages that describe what has been done *in the past* deal with different aspects of our salvation. The passages for today, in contrast, contain some practical aspects of present-day life that, nevertheless, depend on Jesus' high-priestly ministry.

Jesus makes intercession in our behalf. He sympathizes and deals gently with us. He has suffered in the flesh, as we have suffered in the flesh; thus, He can relate to us as a human to a human in our fleshly sufferings. Yet He never succumbed to sin; and thus He offers us power to overcome sin, as well. As Christians, we never have a good excuse to sin.

We know that God loves us, and we know that Christ is working in our behalf, even now. Yet, we have to be careful how we understand what that means. What it *doesn't* mean is that life will always be sweet and nice, because we have Jesus as our High Priest ministering in our behalf in heaven.

We can have assurance, we can have hope, we can have peace from the knowledge that not only has Jesus died for our sins, having paid the penalty for them, but that He now ministers in heaven in our behalf, representing us before the Father, not with our own merits but with His own perfect record. Talk about assurance.

But that doesn't mean that we will never have suffering in this life. On the contrary.

Read carefully Hebrews 12:6-11. What is the author telling his readers? What reason does he give for what they might be going through? How are they to respond? How have you, in your own life, experienced what the author is talking about?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

In the earthly service, not all the people could exercise this privilege, that of entering the sanctuary; only the priests could, and only then at certain times and under certain conditions.

But those who have been cleansed within, consecrated and made perfect by the sacrifice of Christ, have received a free right of access into the holy presence, and Paul urges his readers to benefit themselves fully of this free right.

The invitation to “let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith” has already been issued in this Epistle (Heb. 10:22, NKJV); on that occasion the invitation was based on the assurance that Jesus the High Priest who passed through the heavens is One whose experiences of temptation enable Him to sympathize with His people in their trials. Now a further assurance is given: the way by which this High Priest has entered into the presence of God is a way that remains open for His people to follow Him there.

This free right of access is described as the assurance given by Jesus Himself into the holiest by His blood. Jesus’ blood gives us full assurance. The boldness of our entry, far from resting on any supposed merit of our own, is justified and indeed demanded by the blood of Jesus; that is to say, on the basis of the incarnate Son’s atoning self-offering and thus by virtue alone of His merits.

Jesus Christ’s work includes more than His ministry on behalf of humanity. The assurance of the cosmic reconciliation will reach its consummation at the end of the great controversy, before the destruction of the evil powers, when every creation from God in heaven and on earth will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. In describing Jesus’ assurance, Ellen G. White says “Christ assured the angels that by His death He would ransom many, and would destroy him who had the power of death. He would recover the kingdom which man had lost by transgression, and the redeemed were to inherit it with Him, and dwell therein forever.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 65.

Similar to the assurance given to the angels, Jesus assured us of His love and salvation. Are we willing by faith to take Jesus’ word and rest on it? Jesus’ word never fails nor will it ever fail. This is the kind of assurance we have as Christians.

Paul, in speaking of this assurance, points out that “Now faith is the assurance (*hypostasis*) of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, NASB). Faith and assurance are related; they are like brother and sister. The Christian faith consisted simply in taking God at His word and directing the life accordingly.

This Greek word *hypostasis* has appeared twice already in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 1:3, the Son was stated to be the very image of God’s *hypostasis*; in chapter 3:14 believers are said to be Christ’s associates if they hold fast the beginning of their *hypostasis*, firm to the end. That is to say, things, which in themselves have no existence as yet, become real and substantial by the exercise of faith. In other words, the apostle Paul exhorts Christians to be faithful and confident to the end.

Tuesday

September 9

OTHER PROMISES.

Hebrews contains texts filled with hope and promise. After each text, write down what that promise means to you and how the hope it expresses has impacted your faith. (For example, for the first one: How have you experienced that promised rest?)

Heb. 4:3 _____

Heb. 4:16 _____

Heb. 8:10-12 _____

Heb. 10:22 _____

Heb. 12:28 _____

Heb. 13:5, 6 _____

Look carefully at Hebrews 10:22. It talks about the “full assurance of faith.” The Greek word translated “full assurance” means also “to be absolutely certain,” “to be completely sure.” The apostle says that we should draw near to God in full assurance of faith that the promises He has made to us will be fulfilled (vs. 23 says that He “is faithful that promised”). Why do we have this “full assurance”? The three verses before help answer that: Jesus, by His death, is now our High Priest, who has consecrated a new and living way for us to have access to God.

Notice, however, how the author, though stressing the “full assurance” we can have, also balances it with something that can save us from presumption. What is it? See verse 23. How does this help put all the promises in the right perspective?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

It was for faith and assurance of this kind that men and women of old received the divine commendation, and this has been placed on permanent record as an example to their descendants. It is very important to emphasize that in order to have assurance we have to have faith. William G. Johnsson clearly observes, “That’s the apostle’s point. Faith, he says, is your title deed and mine to the glorious future God has in store for you. Faith turns hope into reality and the invisible into the concrete.

“Thus, faith isn’t a one-time matter, a decision to turn from the world and to follow Jesus. Faith is a way of life, an attitude.” —*Hebrews* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 205.

The Christians who have faith have assurance, because Jesus is our Assurance. Jesus is also the world’s Assurance, the world’s Redeemer and Creator. In Jesus, humanity receives the full assurance of salvation; let us hold to this precious gift.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Romans 3:20; 6:4; 12:3; James 1:5, 6; 2:19; Jude 24.

1. Other religions and traditions offer assurance of salvation (or whatever the ultimate goal is) based upon an individual’s own capabilities and strengths. Why might such a view be attractive? What are the problems with it?
2. Christianity bases the assurance of salvation on the deeds of Jesus Christ, the God-man. To some extent, this takes away our illusion of control. Do you find this comforting, or disturbing? Why?
3. Christ’s sacrifice “cleanses” us so we can approach God, at least through Christ. Are we really clean, or is this just a legal fiction? Or can we look at this cleansing as a process? Does the fact that God views us as being clean make it easier for us to become, in fact, clean?
4. Assurance is a result of—maybe even a synonym for—faith. Where does this faith come from? What part do we play in producing this faith? How can our actions and attitudes negatively or positively affect it?
5. In our culture, faith is usually taken to be a synonym for acceptance of a set of beliefs. How would this definition be confusing to someone looking for a true understanding of what it means to have faith? In what way would true faith differ from mere acceptance of a creed?

Wednesday

September 10

TERMS DESCRIBING ASSURANCE AND SURETY.

The topic of surety and assurance is expressed by a number of Greek words used in Hebrews with different shades of meaning: *plrophoria*—full assurance, conviction, certainty; *parrsia*—boldness, confidence, assurance; *hypostasis*—confidence, assurance, conviction; *tharre* —to be full of courage, to act boldly, to be confident; and *asphals*—safe, sure.

What is the message of those texts that contain the noun “assurance” or “confidence” (some different translations might use different words with the same meaning)?

Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:35 _____

Heb. 4:16; 10:19 _____

Heb. 6:11 _____

Heb. 10:22; 11:1 _____

These texts can be grouped into four categories. The first group stresses the fact that we with confidence may draw close to God. We have access to the throne of grace in the heavenly sanctuary. We are cleansed and washed. The barriers are removed. Instead of fear, confidence fills our life. The second pair connects assurance and hope and seems to be a call to stay faithful and endure unto the promised end. The third connects assurance and faith. It is by faith that we have the assurances of what Christ has done for us and what He will do, even in those things that are yet unseen. Faith is an indispensable element of our hope, confidence, and assurance. The last category consists of calls to hold fast confidence, not to throw away assurance.

According to Hebrews, we should have hope, confidence, and assurance. What are things that we confront as believers that daily work against these things? How do we confront those challenges?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

WITNESSING

Key Texts: Mark 2:1-5, Luke 19:1-5, John 12:2-8, Hebrews 4:15, 7:25, 10:19-23.

What risks would you take to get to Jesus?

Zacchaeus, stumpy tax collector, shinnies up a tree just for a glimpse of Him. Four friends rip open a roof and lower the twisted body of a paralytic to Him for healing. Mary Magdalene disturbs a feast in His honor by anointing His feet with spikenard and wiping them with her hair.

Need emboldens these men and women to take risks to be near Jesus. Even if it means climbing a tree and exposing oneself to the ridicule of a throng. Even if it means vandalizing a roof. Even if it means becoming a spectacle in front of disapproving dinner guests. Spiritual risk takers boldly surmount obstacles. Their need to be in Christ's presence is so strong they allow nothing to hinder them.

The book of Hebrews encourages us to let nothing hinder our approach to Jesus but rather to "come *boldly* to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16, NKJV, emphasis supplied). Such boldness involves a risk of trust in Someone other than yourself to save you. True, risk involves the potential for failure.

But Christ eliminates failure, because we stand to lose nothing of value but gain eternity by trusting Him.

Why, then, with such assurance, do we often draw back from coming boldly to Him, afraid we must be perfect before we approach? Much of the answer lies in 1 Peter 5:8. Satan, the diabolical saboteur of holy boldness, excels in the dark art of poisoning minds with fear. He blackens our eyes with every past failing, assaults our hearts with every imperfection. Who are *you*, mortal gnat, he accuses, to approach the Most Holy God? Heartsick, many focus on their sin-crimes and fail to look to Christ.

The book of Hebrews contains an arsenal of Bible promises engineered to arm us against the deadly war on our faith. Read Hebrews 4:15, 7:25, and 10:19-23. Have you betrayed someone's trust? Look boldly to Christ. Have you lusted after someone's spouse? Look boldly to Christ. If you've lost your temper, boldly ask Him to take your anger in exchange for His peace. Salvation is not about what we offer Christ, it is the assurance of what He offers us. That is enough to inspire the most downcast sinner to risk casting aside fear to come boldly to Jesus.

Thursday

September 11

FAITH AND ASSURANCE.

The word *faith* (in various forms) appears dozens of times in Hebrews. It comes in clusters. The first use is found in Hebrews 2:17, where Jesus is called a “faithful” High Priest. The next two chapters focus on faith. Another cluster appears in Hebrews 6 and the most extensive one appears at the end of Hebrews 10, running through chapter 11, which discusses the famous heroes of faith.

Perhaps the most explicit and systematic explication of faith appears in Hebrews 11.

Read the first ten verses of Hebrews 11. Compare them with Hebrews 10:19-23, 35, 38, 39. What’s the main point these texts make? How does it fit in with the overall theme of Hebrews?

In Hebrews, the concept of faith and assurance are linked. We’re saved by faith, not works; thus, as long as we cling to the Lord in faith, we have the assurance of the salvation that comes to us by faith.

It’s interesting that Hebrews 4 contains a call to make a decision and believe. However, the book is addressed not to non-Christians but to Christians. Thus, in Hebrews, faith does not simply refer to a decision to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Faith is practical. On one hand, it leads to assurance and provides hope; on the other hand, it has to do with the conduct of life.

Meanwhile, in Hebrews 10:35, the author calls his readers not to throw away their confidence, their assurance. How do they not cast it away? The answer is that they persevere *in faith*. Those who persevere will receive the promise (vs. 36)—the second coming of Jesus (vs. 37) and final salvation (vss. 38, 39).

Read Hebrews 3:15-19. It seems as if disobedience and unbelief are almost used interchangeably. Why is that so? In what ways are disobedience and unbelief so linked? Notice, too, whom he charged with “unbelief.” What message does that hold for us, as professed followers of Christ?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: There's a story about a man who had to cross a wide river that was frozen from the winter weather. Afraid the ice might be too thin, he began to crawl on his hands and knees. He was so afraid of falling through at any moment. Just as he neared the shore, exhausted, another man glided past him nonchalantly on a sled loaded with goods. How like some Christians! Headed for heaven, we tremble at every step, afraid the divine promises might break under our feet.

Thought Questions:

1. With the above story in mind, interpret this statement: "You can never break God's promises by leaning on them." List at least two characteristics of each faith hero in Hebrews 11 that testify to the assurance that comes with trusting in God's promises.
2. The validity of Christ's promises results from the act on the cross. About two hundred years after the church began, Origen suggested that the death of Christ was a ransom paid to Satan (see Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation* [Nashville, Tenn.:

Word Publications, 2000], p. 54). This theory continued to be believed for more than a thousand years. How different is this theory from the one that by "taking our place" on the cross Jesus took upon Himself our sins? Does the meaning of assurance change in both theories?

Application Questions:

1. When you rest completely on God and take His promises at face value, you can drive out the paralyzing fear that hinders you from effective service. What practical things can you do every day to keep God's promises fresh in your mind? How do promises cultivate faith?
2. What do you think is the relationship between faith and confidence? When you have total faith in God's involvement in your life, how will it affect your confidence in your accomplishments? In your personal family life? In your workplace? If faith and confidence go hand in hand, what would the seeming presence of one and not the other be an indication of?

FURTHER STUDY: Read Ellen G. White’s statements on faith and assurance in *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 531, and *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 287. Study Hebrews 11.

Note: “The Sacrifice of Christ assures Christians of two great facts: First, the Act *has been done* that solves the sin problem. They don’t have to strive and stretch, to hunger and thirst, to press and prevail, in the frantic, frenzied—and futile—effort to find cleansing from their sins. By one sacrifice for all time God has utterly dealt with sin. Nothing we might do can add to that or diminish from it. Calvary gives us absolute confidence of the putting away of sins.

“Second, Calvary assures us of our full access to the presence of God. No matter who we might be, we *belong* in Jesus Christ. The gates of the temple stand flung open. All who believe may enter—not cringing, but boldly.”—Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, p. 118.

“We have the assurance of a Saviour who has come—a Saviour who has been crucified, has risen, and has proclaimed over the rent sepulcher of Joseph, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ In our knowledge of Jesus and his love, the kingdom of God has been placed in the midst of us. . . . We have had presented to us by the messengers of God the richest feast,—the righteousness of Christ, justification by faith, the exceeding great and precious promises of God in his word, free access to the Father by Jesus Christ, the comforts of the Holy Spirit, and the well-grounded assurance of eternal life in the kingdom of God. We ask, What could God do for us that he has not done in preparing the great supper, the heavenly banquet?”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, January 17, 1899.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Why do some people have problems with assurance of salvation? Why is trust in what Christ has accomplished for us the only place where we can rest our hope of salvation?**
- 2. Though filled with promises of assurance, of hope, Hebrews always balances it with the call to remain steadfast in the faith. Skim over the book and mark out the places (for example, 2:14; 3:6-12) where the apostle exhorts them to persevere. Write down the specific things he says that we need to do in order to maintain this assurance. Do any patterns emerge? If so, what are they?**

SUMMARY: Assurance and faith are related to each other. By faith we take hold of Christ’s achievements for us and the promises found in them. This assurance allows us to have a better quality of life, to live in hope, and to have a goal that transcends our present life.

Jesus and the Christian Walk



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Heb. 12:1–13:19.

MEMORY TEXT: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: While the book of Hebrews deals with heavenly issues, it touches on some very earthly matters, as well.

WHEN QUEEN VICTORIA WAS A CHILD, she didn't know that she was in line for England's throne. Her teachers tried to prepare her for that role but failed to inspire her to take her studies seriously. Finally, they told her that one day she would become queen. Victoria quietly said, “Then I will be good.” The realization that she had inherited this high calling gave her a sense of responsibility that profoundly affected her conduct.

Jesus has paid the supreme sacrifice for us; He serves as our High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary; and the promise of heaven is ours. If this fails to motivate us to live worthy of our high calling, what will?

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: In what ways are we “strangers and pilgrims” on the earth? What does Hebrews say about the danger of backsliding? How are Christians to relate to society? How can we be protected against some of the more common sins and temptations?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 20.

Sunday

September 14

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13).

Read carefully the above verse, in the context (of course) in which it was written. Focus especially on the two nouns that describe these faithful people, *strangers* and *pilgrims* (or *exiles*). What do these two words automatically bring to mind? In what ways are Christians to be “strangers and pilgrims” on the earth? See also Job 8:9; Eccles. 1:14; James 4:14. At the same time, how far do you want to take these images? In other words, in what ways should we *not* be strangers and pilgrims?

Pilgrims are people who have left their homes, sometimes even their countries, to go on a journey. At least temporarily, and maybe even permanently, they have broken away from their normal activities, from families and friends. They have a clear purpose, oftentimes purification from sins, and are willing to endure hardship to attain their goal.

Unfortunately, the concept of a pilgrimage often involves the most choking aspects of salvation by works. This is hardly the message of Hebrews, which is talking about a different kind of pilgrim and a different kind of pilgrimage. These pilgrims aren't seeking salvation; salvation has found them, in the person of Jesus, who “was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28), who “obtained eternal redemption” for them (Heb. 9:12), and who now appears “in the presence of God” (Heb. 9:24) for them. Thus, their journey isn't to find salvation; they already have it. Instead, because they have that great salvation, they follow the One who saved them wherever He bids them go.

Look at Hebrews 9:12, 24-26, and 28 in this specific order. What sequence do you see that gives us the essence of what Christ has done and is doing for us now? Why does salvation by works have no role here?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 12:1-3.

Teachers Aims:

1. To define how we are “strangers” and “pilgrims” on the earth (Heb. 11:13).
2. To state the danger of backsliding and explore how we as Christians should relate to society.
3. To learn how we can be protected against both sin and the temptations that beset us daily.

Lesson Outline:

I. Salvation Seeking the Lost.

- A. Christ offered to bear the sins of everyone, regardless of whether he or she sought God or not.
- B. Christ obtained eternal redemption for all, and all are free to accept it.
- C. Christians are not on a pilgrimage to seek salvation; salvation has found them, in the Person of Jesus.

II. Jesus and the Challenges of the Church.

- A. Paul challenges church members to follow Christ and warns them about the danger of apostasy.
- B. Repentance is successful only when we turn from the path of rejecting Jesus.
- C. A full pardon is ours for the asking but is based on the condition we turn away from our rejection of God.

III. Support of a Christian Community.

- A. The church should offer support for believers as they struggle through times both good and bad.
- B. Encouragement helps uplift us when we stumble through the tough times.
- C. Discipline enhances our growth and maturity.

Summary: Even though we are saved and have a commission to spread the gospel, God expects us to take responsibility for the well-being of our Christian community.

Commentary.

It is interesting to see that the apostle Paul calls those from the past “witnesses.” They have borne witness to the faithfulness of God; they were, in a manner of speaking, witnesses to Christ before His incarna-

Monday

September 15

CHRISTIANS AND THEIR LORD (Heb. 12:25).

Why does Hebrews deal so strongly with apostasy? Heb. 6:4-9; 10:26-29; 12:25. What's the common thread among them?

In three major blocks (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:15-17, 25-29), the apostle deals more or less with the same subject. He is concerned that church members may fall away and not be renewed to repentance. In strong words he directly or indirectly challenges them to follow Christ and warns them most distinctly about the danger of apostasy.

William Johnsson points out that all three blocks contain five common elements: (1) privileges, (2) offense, (3) result, (4) prospect of judgment, and (5) reasons for the divine rejection. The author of Hebrews “seems to speak of a deliberate rejection of the gospel, not just a gradual falling away or neglect. And in all three he issues severe warnings—the sternest in the entire New Testament. . . . The apostle describes acts of wanton rejection, of overt defiance of Jesus as Lord. No suggestion of a sin of omission or weakness here. . . . Because Hebrews exalts the cross in such glowing terms, because it shows so emphatically its superlative worth, it must point out the horror of a deliberate rejection.”—Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, pp. 143, 145–148.

Hebrews 6:4-6 presents some great challenges, because on face value it seems to teach that someone who had once known the power and majesty of God's salvation and then turned away could never again be saved. How, though, is this to be interpreted in contrast, for instance, with Luke 15:11-32, the story of the prodigal, or with all the other places in the Bible where the Lord calls backsliders to repentance?

Perhaps it needs to be understood in the sense that it is impossible to turn them back to repentance *as long as they continue in their blatant and open rejection of Christ*. This idea is congruent with the rest of Scripture, which time and again deals with the Lord pleading with those who have fallen into apostasy to return to Him, for He will pardon and cleanse *but only if they turn away from their rejection of Him*. As long as someone remains in rebellion, refusing to change, even God can't bring him or her back. (See Matt. 24:37-39.) The sanctity of free will carries some powerful and fearful consequences.

What hope can you give to someone who is struggling because a loved one has walked away from the Lord? What other texts can you find that help put those here in Hebrews in their proper perspective with the overall tenor of Scripture?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

tion, for they lived in the goodness of that promise that has been realized in Him.

As a witness, the Christian ought to live the life of a hero. The one who becomes a witness (*martureo*) contends in a contest of faith. The prize with which the martyrs are crowned is eternal life.

So, in the Christian contest, the prize is for all who compete lawfully and run with patient endurance. "So run," said the apostle Paul to the Corinthians, "that you may obtain it" (1 Cor. 9:24, NKJV).

There are two important elements that need to be considered: (1) the Christian's character and (2) the way the Christian ought to live.

I. The Christian Character: Perseverance.

The Christian is the one who is fit and ready to run the race that is set before each of us and to do so with perseverance. One of the main problems with the Hebrew Christians to whom this letter is addressed is that they have set out on the race but, after a good start (Heb. 10:32-34), are now slackening in the will to persevere; their effort is decreasing (Heb. 2:1), sin is holding them back. They need to recover their intensity of purpose (Heb. 4:11), to shake off the sluggish mood into which they have fallen, and to regain their confidence and their competitive spirit. They should remember they are engaging in a contest of the utmost seriousness, and their goal belongs not to the realm of time but of eternity.

More specifically, the Christian contestants need to separate themselves from the sin that clings so closely to them. It is precisely sin, of whatever kind, that impedes or slows down the Christian in the spiritual race. Conversely, anything, however innocent in itself, which impedes or slows down the Christian in the spiritual race is for that reason sinful and must, with God's help, be discarded.

Indeed, perseverance is itself an integral part of the daily spiritual contest. As the apostle Paul says, the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh (Gal. 5:17). In the end, only one wins.

II. The Christian Life: The Race.

The analogy of the athlete used by Paul is very important. The athletes must discipline themselves. There are many things that may be perfectly all right in their own right but that hinder a competitor in the race of faith. They are weights that must be laid aside. It may well be that what is a hindrance to one entrant in this spiritual contest is not a hindrance to another; individuals must learn for themselves what in their case is a weight or an impediment. But there are other things that are not perfectly all right in their own way but are essentially wrong and thus must, without equivocation, be discarded.

The apostle Paul is not referring so much to some specific besetting sin, in the common use of the phrase, but to sin itself, as

Tuesday

September 16

CHRISTIANS AND SOCIETY.

However much Hebrews focuses on Christ and His work in the heavenly sanctuary, this focus has a human element, as well. It has to. After all, if Christ's death and high-priestly ministry were for us, then how can they not impact us, even now?

Thus, the assurance, the hope, the promises that we have been given through Christ's death and high-priestly ministry *of necessity* impact how we live, how we treat others, how we deal with those with whom we daily come in contact. Though deeply theological and dealing with, literally, heavenly things, Hebrews also touches on the personal, the individual, the character, and the lives of those who are living the life of faith as expressed in Hebrews 11. Indeed, the litany of people in Hebrews 11 shows how greatly faith impacts personal behavior.

Look up Hebrews 12:14; 13:1-5, 16, 17. What is the apostle telling them to do? What kind of personal relationships is he talking about here?

Notice the parallel between Hebrews 12:14 and some of Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount. According to Matthew 5:9, Christians not only avoid frictions, rivalry, and war; they actively get involved trying to make peace. Thus, they serve their society and work toward its improvement. In other words, we need to be involved. Though strangers, though pilgrims, we still are strangers and pilgrims *here*, and while here, while passing through, we need to leave our mark, to let our light shine.

In addition, the apostle mentions hospitality, which is not restricted to church members only. Christians take care of those at the margins of society—the outcasts, the prisoners, and those ill-treated. To care for those groups means to identify to a certain degree with them, exactly as Jesus did when He was in the flesh.

Read carefully Hebrews 13:16. The word translated “communicate” comes from a Greek word that has the meaning of “fellowship,” “close, personal relationship,” and “sharing.” Notice, too, how the author calls these things that he asks us to do “sacrifices.” What image does that bring up? How does that fit in with the theme of Hebrews? At the same time, why do these things require a “sacrifice” on our part?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

something that inevitably gets in the way of the runners' feet and trips them up before they have taken more than a step or two. Anything that distracts athletes from the contest in which they are competing will quickly put them out of the running.

Everything that would impede them or divert their attention must, therefore, be put away, and the athletes must keep their eyes fixed on the goal toward which they are pressing. Those who run become witnesses in the Christian sense. They must keep their eyes fixed on God and endure torments even unto death. He exhorts his readers to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom faith depends, from start to finish.

In our Christian race, God chastises us for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness and yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:8, 10-12). Divine rebuke is a compassionate sign that God deals with us as sons and daughters, adopted from the orphanage

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Genesis 47:9; Matthew 7:22, 23; John 7:40-43; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 3:15-17.

1. Followers of Jesus Christ are described as "pilgrims" in the book of Hebrews. Given that the author is not literally urging us to make pilgrimages, what do you think is meant? Why might a pilgrimage be a good metaphor for the Christian life?
2. Hebrews suggests Christians should feel motivated to good works and character improvement by awareness of the high price paid for our salvation. Why aren't believing Christians, in fact, more excited by this? What do you think would make people more aware?
3. Even while discussing the power and finality of Christ's sacrifice, Hebrews 6:4-6 acknowledges the possibility that even a previously believing Christian can lose salvation by taking it for granted. Is it possible to reject God without being aware one has done so?
4. Hebrews and many other biblical texts urge us to do good works for those outside the church, as well as for those within. Is this separate from our duty to spread the good news of Christ? How is it related?
5. Much of the New Testament, including the book of Hebrews, stresses the necessity for Christians to participate in the church community in a constructive way. In what way does community life prepare the Christian for life in the world to come?

Wednesday

September 17

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

Hebrews 10:19-25 presents a great example of how what happens in heaven should have an impact on earth. Follow the line of thought in the verses. First, in verses 19-21, the emphasis is on Jesus in heaven and what He has done that allows us “access” to the Father. Second (vss. 22, 23), as a result of what Christ has done, our inner selves, our hearts, can be changed because we have assurance and hope through Jesus if we hold fast. Finally, because of Jesus (vss. 24, 25), we live a different life, one in which we are ministering to others, sharing from what we ourselves have been given in Christ. Thus, he goes from Christ in heaven to the Christian community on earth.

How does the element of Christian community fit in with the verses below? How can the community help in each instance?

Heb. 12:15 _____

Heb. 13:1-3 _____

Heb. 13:7, 17 _____

Heb. 13:9 _____

Heb. 13:18 _____

The Christian church is like a family. Already in New Testament times Christians would call one another brothers and sisters. They formed the “household of God” (Eph. 2:19), God’s family. In a family it is quite natural to take care of one another, to encourage one another, and sometimes even to confront one another in order to enhance growth and maturity.

Nobody can be a Christian in isolation unless forced by difficult situations, such as persecution and dispersion. We need one another. Jesus has instituted His church, in which we need to get involved, find friendships, develop our gifts, and corporately meet our Lord.

Why do we need one another in the church? Why does the Bible stress the idea of a Christian community? How has fellowship as a whole helped you? Or has it?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

of sin. If we endure His correction, we are His children. But if we reject His rebukes, then, spiritually speaking, we are illegitimate children, born outside of wedlock, who don't know their Father or carry His name and have no right to His inheritance.

In medieval times, illegitimate birth was considered shameful in the extreme, believed to be the product of lust and the devil. An illegitimate child bore the stigma of such a sinful birth all the days of his or her life. The child could not call himself by his father's name, even if the father was known. Nor could such a child claim any part of his or her father's inheritance. So strong is the stigma against illegitimate birth that even to this day in many cultures the common word is considered profane or foul.

In medieval times a king had the power to reverse illegitimacy. The medieval mind-set endowed their kings not only as sovereigns but as the fathers of the realm. Thus, a king could legitimize anyone he chose and give him or her a surname. This is what the King of heaven does for us. Through Christ, God grafts us into the heavenly family tree and adopts us into the heavenly family. We become the sons and daughters of God, our lives legitimized through the new-birth experience, and joint heirs with Christ.

WITNESSING

Many new believers come into the church and, after a short period of time, they leave or stop coming. There are some very specific things that can be done to prevent this from happening. But it may require a little effort and attention from those who seem to be rooted and grounded in the faith. Witnessing is more than just speaking the words of truth. Reaching out to others in fellowship and to encourage them in their Christian walk can also be a form of witnessing. Fellowship should go beyond a warm greeting and friendly handshake.

Many people in the church feel alone and do not have the support of friends and family. They look to the church for support in their spiritual growth and hope to find friends among church members. As fellow believers, we should fel-

lowship with one another outside of regular church services. We should pray and study together more, form witnessing teams, talk to one another during the week, and fellowship together socially. Many of us already do these things. But let us not leave out the new believers or those who attend only sometimes. The Lord has promised that "where two or three are gathered together in [His] name," He will be "in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

Even those who believe they are rooted and grounded in the faith could be in danger of falling away from the truth. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Witnessing and reaching out to others can also serve to strengthen our own faith.

Thursday

September 18

SEX AND MONEY.

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:4, 5).

In the two verses listed above, what two points are touched on?

In verse 4 the apostle stresses the importance and sanctity of marriage and warns against a misuse of the sexual powers. “When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man’s social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 25. “Whoremongers and adulterers” may describe two different groups. Adulterers are married persons who maintain a sexual relationship with someone who is not their spouse. Whoremongers, or, may in this context, refer to unmarried individuals that have sexual contact with another person.

Another area of temptation has to do with money. What is the apostle saying in verse 5 that’s so important in regard to how we deal with the question of money and possessions, in general? How does the Bible text he quotes help defend against this dangerous allurements?

Money, or at least the love of money, can do strange things to people. Unless we’re on guard, even Christians can get swept away by what Jesus called “the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19).

Jesus was once asked to intervene when two brothers fought for their inheritance. “‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions’ ” (Luke 12:15, NRSV). We would do well to heed those words, especially when we tend to measure the worth or quality of our lives by what possessions we do or do not have.

Look at the Bible promise quoted at the end of Hebrews 13:5. How do we understand what the promise means in daily life? It’s one thing to quote it and say that you believe it. But how does this belief impact how we live, especially in times of adversity and temptation?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: The Bible summarizes the life of Enoch very simply—“Enoch walked with God” (Gen. 5:24). Folklore, however, tells us that Enoch had a more calculated life. “Legend tells that with Enoch the Angel of Death made a compact of friendship. Enoch made three requests of him. First, to die and come back again so that he might know what death was like. Second, to see the abode of the wicked so that he might know what the punishment of the evil was like. Both these requests were granted. His third request was to be permitted to see into Paradise so that he might see what the blessed enjoyed. This also was granted, but Enoch, having been granted a glimpse of Paradise, never came back to earth again.”
—William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia, Penn.: The Westminster Press, 1976, revised edition), p. 134.

Thought Question:

Epicurus said, “God does nothing.” Like Epicurus, there are many who, while believing in the existence of God, think of Him as Someone who sits up there in heaven and does nothing, as Someone who doesn’t care. What are the advantages of a religion

that believes in a God who cares? Find verses in the Bible that speak of God’s love. How does belief in a caring God motivate spiritual growth?

Application Questions:

1. In a true love relationship, love takes precedence over calculations of self-gain. When you measure a relationship by what you gain from it, you have lost the essence of love. What disadvantages does someone with a history of abuse have when seeking a secure relationship with God? How can you disciple someone with such a history? What, if any, is the harm when people seek God primarily for what they can get for themselves—affirmation, love, security, assurance?
2. Not all of us are gifted to disciple and nurture. What else can we do to enrich the Christian walk of one another? Suppose a stranger visiting your church sits next to you. The service is about five minutes from starting. You want to make the most of the opportunity but do not know what to talk about. What can you do? Think of some icebreakers to ease the silence.

Friday

September 19

FURTHER STUDY: Study the life of Paul as presented in the letter to the Philippians and how his way of life and teaching reported there correspond with the topic for this week.

Note: A man in the army of Alexander the Great was named Alexander; he was also accused of cowardly actions. He was brought before Alexander, who asked his name. The man replied softly, “Alexander.” “I can’t hear you,” the ruler stated. The man again said, a little louder, “Alexander.” The process was repeated one more time, after which Alexander the Great commented, “Either change your name or change your conduct.”

“All who are made partakers of His salvation here, and who hope to share the glories of the kingdom hereafter, must gather with Christ. Each must feel that he is responsible for his own case, and for the influence he exerts over others. If these maintain their Christian walk, Jesus will be in them the hope of glory, and they will love to speak forth His praise. . . . The cause of their Master will be near and dear to them. It will be their study to advance His cause and to honor it by holy living. Said the angel: ‘Every talent God will require with usury.’ Every Christian must go on from strength to strength, and employ all his powers in the cause of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 179.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Though the book of Hebrews deals with heavy theological issues, everything from the incarnation of Christ to His heavenly ministry in our behalf, the book does clearly have a practical side. In other words, theology does not exist in a vacuum. It should impact how we live. Discuss why this is so.**
- 2. Study Hebrews 12:14. What does that mean? How do we understand this text in the context of righteousness by faith?**
- 3. Though in the end we are saved only as individuals, what role and responsibility does the community have toward the spiritual well-being of its members?**

SUMMARY: Though this earth isn’t our final home, it’s where we are now, it’s where we live now, and God expects us to live according to the high calling that we have in Jesus Christ.

Lesson 13

*September 20-26

Jesus and Our Future



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 11–13.

MEMORY TEXT: “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: However much Christians are enjoying the privileges of being God's people here and now, their ultimate hope exists in the final fulfillment of all promises: Christ's second coming.

HOWEVER MUCH HEBREWS HAS FOCUSED ON THE PAST, such as the earthly-sanctuary service and the death of Christ—the picture would be incomplete if it stopped there. For this reason, Hebrews looks toward the future, as well, particularly to Jesus' return, which culminates the plan of salvation. Without this dimension, the Christian hope would be in vain. Maybe that's why the word *hope* is found five times in the book, and for Christians, that hope is eternity with God in a new world, the one that His people have been eagerly anticipating since the fall in Eden and the first promise of salvation, a promise made complete in Jesus.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why does the author of Hebrews imply that he's living in the last days? Why does the Bible talk about salvation as a present reality and at the same time a future hope? How is the sanctuary tied in with the second coming of Jesus?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.

Sunday

September 21

THE TIME OF THE END.

Read Hebrews 1:2 and Hebrews 9:26. What do they mean by talking about the “last days” and “the end of the world” even before the first century A.D. had ended?

How do we understand these words? Perhaps, like this: The first coming of Christ was a climactic event that brought about a change of eras. A whole new spiritual order had been inaugurated by the ministry of Jesus, who had to suffer and die before sin and suffering ever could be over. The supreme sacrifice had been offered; the penalty for sin had been paid. All that was needed to secure salvation had been taken care of with Jesus’ once-and-for-all sacrifice. These things had to happen before the reality of a new heavens and a new earth could ever be realized. In this sense, and from this perspective, the apostle could talk about his time as the “end of the world,” no matter how many more centuries would elapse before Christ returned.

Read 1 Peter 1:18-20. Notice how he ties in the death of Jesus with the “last times.” Why did Jesus have to die before these “last times” could arrive?

The author of Hebrews wanted to let readers know that the old ways are gone and that something new and better, something that will bring to fruition all their hopes, has taken place through Jesus. The author, it seems, wasn’t so much trying to place them in a time line as much as let them know that they were in a new spiritual age.

“With the first advent of Christ, the new age had broken into or overlapped the old. The two ages would continue to exist side by side until the Second Advent, when the old age would finally be destroyed. Christians, therefore, live in two worlds at once. . . .

Jesus even could combine the two concepts together in one sentence: ‘I tell you the truth, a time *is coming* and *has now come* when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God’ (John 5:25, NIV).” —Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 77, 78, emphasis author’s.

We like to say that we are living in “the last days.” How do some of the verses we looked at today help us keep that concept in proper perspective?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Texts: Hebrews 13:8, 2 Peter 3:10-13.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore what caused the author of Hebrews to imply that he was living in the last days.
2. To compare salvation as a present reality versus salvation as a future hope.
3. To define how the sanctuary is tied in with the second coming of Christ.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Time of the End.

- A. The ministry of Jesus created a new era.
- B. The old was washed away, and new opportunities were raised.
- C. We are saved, but this is not the final realization of our salvation.

II. Keeping Perspective.

- A. The Bible is written by human authors but is the Word of God.
- B. There is one Godhead but Three within the trinity, and All are called God.
- C. We are saved by faith but judged by our works.

III. What the Future Holds.

- A. We await the second advent of Christ.
- B. We hold precious the promise of the resurrection of the dead.
- C. Christ shall execute and bestow the final judgment and reward.

Summary: God has invested much in us, and He asks that we take an active part in our future by investing our faith in Him. He wants us to continue to grow and advance by helping those around us. For only by living a life that reflects Him can we draw others to accept the salvation He offers to all.

Commentary.

As we reach the end of these lessons, it is appropriate to talk about Jesus' second coming, expressed here in the faith of those who waited for hope given in the promise of His coming: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

These lives were regulated by the firm conviction God would fulfill

Monday

September 22

THE ALREADY AND THE NOT-YET.

In the New Testament, and especially in Paul's writings, we find the concept of the "already/not-yet." What this means is that we are already saved and yet we are not finally saved. For example, John 5:24 reads, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is *passed* from death unto life" (emphasis supplied). Thus, we are already saved; we have eternal life, even now. In contrast, Matthew 19:29 reads, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and *shall inherit* everlasting life" (emphasis supplied). In other words, final salvation is yet to come (for another example of this contrast, see Ephesians 2:6 and Romans 8:22-24).

In what ways does this already/not-yet tension appear in Hebrews? See Hebrews 12:28, 11:13-16. How can we resolve this tension? Or should we?

There are all sorts of tensions in the Bible that, if properly understood, actually harmonize with each other in helping fill in the big picture. The problem comes when we emphasize one aspect at the expense of another; instead, we should attempt to balance them out.

The Bible is full of statements that seem to be opposed to each other and yet both are true: While living on earth, Jesus was fully divine and fully human. The Bible is written by human authors; even so, it is the Word of God. God is independent of time, though He relates to us in time. There is one Godhead, but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are called God. We are saved by faith and judged by works.

When it comes to God and His plan of salvation, we have to acknowledge that our mind can grasp only part of the reality, a few slices at best. In such a context, we must realize, too, that opposites are not necessarily contradictory but can simply be different parts of a much bigger picture. Trouble comes when we focus too much on a single part at the expense of the whole.

Look up these verses: John 3:15, 36; 1 Timothy 6:12; 1 John 5:12, 13. These, among many others, stress that we have eternal life now. Though the full realization of it wouldn't come until Christ returns, how do these promises give us comfort and assurance for the present? How differently should we live, knowing that we *have* eternal life, even now?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

the promises He had given them, and as they faced death, they continued to look forward (to the future) to the fulfillment of these promises, as is evident from the words in which Isaac and Jacob bestowed their final blessings on their sons or grandsons.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived preeminently as strangers and pilgrims on the earth in a sense that is inapplicable to those Israelites of later generations after the settlement in Canaan. To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Canaan remained in the future, a Promised Land to the end of their lives; meanwhile, their descendants saw the fulfillment of what was promised to the patriarchs. But to the patriarchs, that promise was sure, because it was God's promise, and they staked everything on its certainty.

The future promise given to those men of the Old Testament is the promise given to those also in the new era, the Christian era. Hebrews 11:16 presents, as in Hebrews 13:14, the notion of a city, the city promised to those who believe in it. Paul clearly explains in those verses their true home was not on earth at all but the better city on which they had set their hearts; that is, the heavenly city. The earthly Canaan and the earthly Jerusalem were temporary object lessons pointing to the saints' everlasting rest, the well-founded city of God.

The example of the patriarchs is intended to guide the readers of the book of Hebrews to a true sense of values. First Peter 2:11 mentioned they are to live in this world as "aliens and exiles" (RSV), and like the Philippians to whom the apostle Paul wrote, their "citizenship" is in heaven (Phil. 3:20, NKJV). This notion has proved too high for many Christians throughout the different centuries of our era.

Yet, those who have shared most truly the promise of a future heavenly city of the patriarchs have not been unpractical, too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. The three patriarchs mentioned above were not faultless, but God is not ashamed to be called their God, because they took Him at His word.

As expatriates, they sought a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, there was ample opportunity for them to return. But to go back would have been the reversal of the principle of faith and the turning of their backs on the hope that had been set before them.

By their steadfast endurance and perseverance in the midst of every kind of adversity, they make it plain they desire a better city, altogether beyond any country past or present of this fallen world; in other words, a heavenly one, unmarred by any imperfection, glorious forevermore.

The apostle Paul's use of the present tense in verse 16 should be noted; it expresses the desire even now for a better city, and God is not ashamed even now to be called their God.

For these men, then, and for all who tread the same path of faith, God has prepared His city, His commonwealth. There is, obviously, no difference between the heavenly country and the city of God. The

Tuesday

September 23

FUTURE EVENTS.

“But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:16).

The discussion on the last days and on the already and the not-yet shows that Jesus is at the center of the end. “When the New Testament is rightly understood, Jesus Christ is what the end is all about.”—Paulien, p. 81.

Which events—still future and depending on Jesus’ intervention—are mentioned in Hebrews?

Heb. 9:28; 10:25, 36, 37 _____

Heb. 6:2; 9:27; 10:27, 30 _____

Heb. 11:16; 13:14 _____

Heb. 11:26, 39, 40 _____

Although the apostle refers to Christ’s second coming, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment, no timetable is given, either in Hebrews or in any part of the Bible. No doubt, it is more important to live a holy life than to know precisely when final events will play out, which is probably why the emphasis on the Bible is to be ready for the return of Christ, whenever it happens.

Future judgment is mentioned quite often in Hebrews. In 10:27, the judgment seems to refer to what we call “the executive judgment,” because the consuming fire is mentioned (see Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:9, 10). Whenever and however it all takes place, we haven’t been told; according to Hebrews, however, a few points come through:

1. God functions as Judge (Heb. 12:23).
2. He is going to recompense evil (Heb. 10:30).
3. He will reward His people (Heb. 11:26).

Though the emphasis in Hebrews is on the death of Christ and on His high-priestly ministry in heaven, there is still a clear focus on the end: judgment, Second Coming, resurrection of the dead, and the final reward. Why do you think that is so? As you ponder your answer, ask yourself this question, What is the purpose of Christ’s death and high-priestly ministry as depicted in Hebrews?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

patriarchs and the other men and women of God who lived before Christ have a share in the same inheritance of glory as is promised to believers in Christ of New Testament times.

Hebrews also gives us examples of those who did not live in this world as “aliens and exiles.” Esau rebelled against God and lost His inheritance, or birthright blessing, even though he did not commit murder or adultery. Nor was it some heinous sin that caused him to lose his birthright; instead, it was a need we all experience and must satisfy, or we die. It is the human need for food, for “a morsel of meat” (Heb.12:16, 17).

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Genesis 4:17; Matthew 24:24, 37; Luke 13:34; Hebrews 12:28; 11:16; 1 Peter 1:13; Revelation 21:2, 3.

1. How important is the second coming of Christ to the author of Hebrews? What part does it play in the message of this book as a whole? Would the book as a whole make sense without any idea of the Second Coming?
2. In some sense, the author of Hebrews believed he was living in the last days. Do you think he realized several thousand years would pass without the end having come? Should this affect our own belief that we are living in the last days? How?
3. Hebrews carefully refrains from giving a detailed chronology of end-time events. Yet, we as Seventh-day Adventists believe in the importance of a somewhat detailed knowledge of what these events will be. Would it be possible to conclude from Hebrews it is not important to be aware of the precise nature of end-time events?
4. What do you think the earthly Jerusalem represented to Hebrews' intended readers? How might their actual experiences have affected or altered these views? Was the earthly Jerusalem possibly a disappointment to them? Do you think they might have been emotionally attached to it nevertheless?
5. How literally are we to take the idea of a heavenly Jerusalem? Is there literally a city in heaven, and how would it differ from earthly cities? Why do you think God chooses to portray His kingdom as a city when cities are shown as a result of the Fall back in the book of Genesis?

Wednesday

September 24

THE HEAVENLY CITY.

Three passages in Hebrews talk about the heavenly city. What are similarities and differences in these passages? Heb. 11:10-16; 12:18-24; 13:12-14.

Old Testament believers, as well as followers of Christ, are on their way to the heavenly city. Hebrews 11:10-16 describes Abraham and the patriarchs as pilgrims heading toward the real homeland, the heavenly fatherland, the city of God. Old Testament times, New Testament times, it makes no difference: All of God's people end up in the same place *if they will endure patiently unto the end*. Again, this is a key theme in Hebrews: Don't give up!

The second passage describes the new-covenant community. The author makes an interesting contrast between Mt. Sinai, with all its fire and darkness and tempest and fear and Mount Zion (a common name for the earthly Jerusalem), the heavenly Jerusalem. Here, again, in a very poetic and powerful manner, he contrasts the old way with the new, letting the people know that thanks to Jesus they have a better revelation of truth than those who lived in the old covenant. In fact, believers are portrayed as having already come to the city of God. "The new covenant people . . . [have] already arrived at the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem and . . . are only waiting for the revelation of the 'unshakable kingdom' (v 28) they are about to receive."—W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), pp. 470, 466.

Hebrews 13:12-14 presents a contrast between the earthly Jerusalem, which Jesus was forced to leave (He was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem), and the future city, "the one to come," the one all of God's faithful followers are promised as their home.

Focus especially on Hebrews 13:14. What does the author mean when he says that we have "no continuing" city? What's the point he's making? Why don't we have such a city? Why can't we have one here, even if we wanted one? Once you answer that, ask yourself, Do I live as though I really believe that I have no continuing city? Or am I living as though this were my permanent home? Matthew 6:19-21 will help you find the answer.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Hunger is a legitimate need. The Bible instructs us, however, in feeding our bodies to remember they are the temples of the Holy Ghost and to abstain from polluting them. But Esau did not lose his birthright blessing by eating unhealthful food. He ate neither pork or blood-filled meat, forbidden by the old covenant, or the Old Testament version of Hostess Twinkies. Instead, he sold his birthright blessing for a bowl of nutritious, healthful lentil stew. He lusted for something intrinsically good, but he lusted for it more than he lusted for the approval and blessing of God. This is a cautionary tale for all of us who, in our act of abstaining from patently odious sins—adultery, sexual perversion, gluttony, profanity—place above God the things that seem innocent and good and rob ourselves of our birthright in Jesus.

WITNESSING

When Daniel was born, he received a \$50 savings bond as a gift. Although it is rightfully his, his father is presently holding it. When he turns 18, Daniel will be able to take possession of his savings bond and cash it in.

Similarly, Christ holds for us the priceless gift of immortality and the riches of salvation. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4, 5). “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then . . . joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:16, 17). As God’s adopted sons and daughters, we have received an inheritance. We have received eternal life and a heavenly home called the New Jerusalem. Although it is rightfully ours, the Father is presently holding it. When Jesus returns, we will be able to claim it.

The Lord does not want any of us to be left behind, so He delays His coming in order to give us time to choose Him. And He is counting on you and me to help our brothers and sisters get ready. We must tell them of His soon coming and that He is bringing with Him the gift of eternal life. He wants each one of us to be ready to claim our inheritance.

Jesus exhorted us to have the faith and trust of children as a condition for claiming that inheritance. Have you ever observed how excited children become when they anticipate a holiday or a visit? They look forward to it for weeks, their eyes aglow, and talk of nothing else. One little girl, Katy, gets very excited when her grandmother comes to visit. On the day of Grandmother’s arrival, Katy can be found looking through a window watching and waiting for her grandmother to come. When Jesus comes, whom will He find watching and waiting for His return?

Thursday

September 25

THE SANCTUARY AND THE SECOND COMING.

As we've seen, and studied this whole quarter, the book of Hebrews cannot be understood apart from the Hebrew sanctuary service. In fact, it would be hard to understand the plan of salvation, particularly the death of Christ as the substitutionary sacrifice for sin, apart from an understanding of the Jewish sacrificial system. The whole plan of salvation is built around the concepts and symbols first revealed in the Old Testament sanctuary; in Christ, they reach their fulfillment.

We've seen, too, that Hebrews, while focusing on the past (Christ's death) and on the present (Christ's ministry in heaven), also looks toward the future, to the Second Coming and all that it entails.

Thus, Hebrews links the Second Coming with the sanctuary. How could it not? If the sanctuary points to salvation, and salvation is consummated in the Second Coming, then by necessity the sanctuary must be linked to the Second Coming. It's hard to see how one logically could be separated from the other. No wonder, as Adventists with a sharp focus on the Second Coming, we have a distinct sanctuary message to present to the world.

In what ways does the author of Hebrews in the following verses link the sanctuary motif to the second coming of Christ?

Heb. 9:24-28 _____

Heb. 10:11-13 _____

Heb. 12:22-24 _____

The second advent of Christ is the consummation of what Jesus had done on the cross and of what He is doing as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Both His death and His high-priestly ministry would be of no avail without the Second Coming.

Final salvation will become a reality when Jesus returns and takes His people to Mt. Zion, to the future city, the heavenly Jerusalem, where they can live in the direct presence of God. The teaching about the sanctuary and the teaching about the last things belong together and should not be separated.

Dwell again on the emphasis and importance the book of Hebrews has placed on the sanctuary service in heaven. How does this emphasis strengthen our faith that as Adventists we are on the right track, with strong emphasis on the heavenly sanctuary, as well?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: The typeface most newspapers use for astounding events is called “second coming” type. These are large, bold, heavy, black letters reserved for only the most stupendous, amazing, front-page news. “Second coming” typeface was used to announce the surrenders of Germany and Japan, marking the end of World War II; the assassination of John F. Kennedy; the shooting of President Reagan; and other dramatic events of universal importance. One day the world will witness the great event for which the “second coming” type was named. And that surely will be a “headline event!”—Adapted from *Parson’s Bible Illustrator CD-Rom*.

Thought Questions:

1. Newspapers use large, bold print to announce big news. What methods should the church use to spread the big news of the Second Coming? Why are some methods more effective than others? Why is it important for the church to be the bearer of such news?
2. The inscription on the dome of the U. S. Capitol reads, “One far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves.” When the dome was erected, some God-fearing official ordered that inscription to be etched, believing the truth of the

Second Coming was vital to the concern of the nation. Many, many years have gone by since the Capitol was built. Even more years have gone by since Christ returned to heaven. In what ways has the passing of time dampened the enthusiasm of the Church? With every year that Jesus’ coming is delayed, do you think Satan gains more of an advantage over the final outcome of the world? Explain.

Application Questions:

1. What are some of your personal experiences that can be given a “second coming” typeface? How do these experiences represent your hope of Jesus’ second coming? What is the role of Jesus in your life as you make future plans? In light of your preparation for Jesus’ second coming, how limited or extensive should your plans on earth be?
2. To the question “What is the secret of your success?” D. L. Moody answered, “For many years I have never given an address without the consciousness that the Lord may come before I have finished.” How can you develop the same kind of intensity and zeal? What are the elements in your life that keep you from developing this kind of an attitude?

FURTHER STUDY: Study James 5:1-11 and Revelation 22:6-21 and reflect on our glorious hope, as well as on the challenges and promises listed in these passages. Read also Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, pp. 283–287, 297, 298, 304–306.

Note: “We are homeward bound. He who loved us so much as to die for us hath builded for us a city. The New Jerusalem is our place of rest. There will be no sadness in the city of God. No wail of sorrow, no dirge of crushed hopes and buried affections, will evermore be heard. Soon the garments of heaviness will be changed for the wedding garment. Soon we shall witness the coronation of our King. Those whose lives have been hidden with Christ, those who on this earth have fought the good fight of faith, will shine forth with the Redeemer’s glory in the kingdom of God. It will not be long till we shall see Him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. And in His presence, all the trials and sufferings of this life will be as nothingness. ‘Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.’ [Hebrews 10:35-37.] Look up, look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path that leads through the gates of the city of God into the great beyond, the wide, unbounded future of glory that is for the redeemed.” —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 287, 288.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Why do the New Testament and also Hebrews present such a strong message about end-time events? Why are end-time events, such as the Second Coming, so important to the Christian faith?**
- 2. Look again at the Ellen White quote above. How does her statement about those who fought “the good fight of faith” fit in perfectly with the basic message of the book of Hebrews?**
- 3. According to some of the texts this week, those who have accepted Christ have, even now, eternal life. How would you explain what this means to a non-Christian, who sees Christians go to the grave just as nonbelievers do?**

SUMMARY: As guests and strangers in this world, we are on the move toward a goal, the heavenly city. We are on the way to see God face to face.