

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.