

PREACHERS' STUDY PAPERS

HEBREWS

BOOK 2

CHAPTERS 8 - 13

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Abbreviations for Bible Books

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Eccl.
Exodus	Ex.	The Song of Solomon	Song
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Is.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Judg.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Amos	Amos
1 Kings	1 Kings	Obadiah	Obad.
2 Kings	2 Kings	Jonah	Jonah
1 Chronicles	1 Chr.	Micah	Mic.
2 Chronicles	2 Chr.	Nahum	Nah.
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Esth.	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Ps.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

New Testament

Matthew	Matt.	1 Timothy	1 Tim.
Mark	Mark	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philemon	Philm.
The Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	James
1 Corinthians	1 Co.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Corinthians	2 Co.	2 Peter	2 Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1 John	1 John
Ephesians	Eph.	2 John	2 John
Philippians	Phil.	3 John	3 John
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.	Revelation	Rev.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess.		

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REVIEW OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS SO FAR

The book of Hebrews was addressed to Jewish people who had professed their faith in Christ and who were suffering much trial and persecution. They were tempted to renounce their faith and return to Old Testament roots. The author's method of dealing with this problem was to extol Jesus Christ as the Son of God. He showed Christ to be infinitely superior to angels. There were a group of Old Testament followers who thought highly of angels and claimed they were equal, if not superior, to Jesus. No doubt they were preying upon the minds of these Jewish Christians. The writer of Hebrews also demonstrated that Jesus Christ was superior to Moses, the one through whom God gave the law at Mount Sinai. Chapters 4 to 7 of Hebrews are devoted to showing that Christ and his priesthood are greater than Aaron's priesthood. The significance of this was that returning to Old Testament roots would be to look to the Aaronic system as the basis of belief. Yet this priesthood was only a temporary arrangement, to be replaced by the everlasting priesthood of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is truly qualified to be a priest. He is unique and distinct from all other priests for he will never be replaced because of death. His is an unchangeable priesthood which has superseded the old priesthood.

THE NEW COVENANT :

BETTER THAN THE OLD



Hebrews 8:1-13

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Christ's finished work
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

While the priesthood of Christ has been distinguished from the Levitical (Aaronic) priesthood, it is also shown that there are important parallels between the two. The former priesthood prepared the way for the priesthood of Christ. It served as a type, or picture, in order to communicate truth regarding the reality of what was to be accomplished by the great high priest who lives for ever. As we begin the next section of the book we will be concerned with the way sinful people can find acceptance with God. The old covenant said that this was by obedience to God's law through Moses. This was impossible for sinful man to meet. The new covenant says that it is through faith in Christ and that there is no other way. It is this contrast that is worked out from 8:1 to 10:18.

What these verses mean



1. The minister of the true tabernacle (8:1-2)

Verse 1

The point of what we are saying is this:

What follows is the entire thrust of the book for the readers to understand and believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is an effective high priest. He is different from all the Levitical priests for they eventually died being sinners themselves. No Levitical priest could live for ever.

We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,

This is a summary of the main point of what has gone before. Christ, the great high priest, is exercising his ministry in the very presence of God. The Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins but he conquered death and lives for ever. This is the main point, the very core and heart of the gospel message: that the Lord Jesus Christ saves his people, keeping them throughout this present life until they are finally glorified. His sitting down indicates a completed task in contrast to the standing position of the Levitical priests (1:3; 10:11).

Verse 2

and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

The Lord Jesus Christ ministers in heaven whereas the Levitical priests served on earth. The Lord Jesus Christ entered the very presence of God. The true tabernacle is referring to heaven itself and the presence of God. This is the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with human hands. It is where Christ appears on behalf of his people (9:24). By contrast the earthly tabernacle set up by man (e.g. the temple in Jerusalem) was only a type of the heavenly sanctuary. The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled all that was typified under the old system and now ministers on our behalf in the reality of heaven in order to secure our eternal redemption. This is the basis of our Lord's teaching in John 4:21-24 abolishing the need for any external helps in worship. Christ is all we need.



2. The purpose of the priesthood (8:3-4)

Verse 3

Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices,

Here we have a reminder that there is a purpose to the priesthood. This has already been stated in 5:1. This is the function of the high priest as purposed by God and the Lord Jesus Christ is to follow this pattern. A priest is to represent men before God and to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer.

Therefore it is necessary that the Lord Jesus Christ has to have something to offer. In his case, there is a difference between him and the Levitical priests, for they offered an unending series of gifts and sacrifices (9:27; 10:1). Christ made but one offering, the sacrifice of himself which is never to be repeated (7:27; 9:25-28; 10:10, 12, 14). His present ministry in heaven is that of interceding on behalf of his people, which is based upon the sacrifice which has been offered and accepted by the Father.

Verse 4

If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.

The priests of the old priesthood ministered on earth. The Lord Jesus Christ is of a completely different order. He did not qualify to serve within the Levitical priesthood for he was not of the tribe of Levi (7:13, 14). More importantly the ministry of the Levitical priests was restricted to this world and their place of ministration was strictly limited to the confines of the tabernacle and the temple. The Lord Jesus Christ did die on earth, but his present priestly ministry of intercession transcends this world for he is now in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father. From there he ministers unendingly on behalf of his people wherever they may be found in the world.



3. The mediator of a better covenant (8:5-6)

Verse 5

They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. That is why Moses was warned when he was about to

build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”

The earthly tabernacle was formed as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make it. The concept of the tabernacle did not originate in the mind of Moses nor in that of any other man. Moses was not free to make things according to his own ideas. The tabernacle was constructed because this is what God had purposed and was designed to teach man in a typical way the need of reconciliation to God through blood sacrifices. There is no useful purpose in trying to discover any significance of the minutest detail of the tabernacle and its furnishings. In this book of Hebrews, which contains by far the greatest amount of teaching concerning the tabernacle, the writer goes no further than covering the basic principles of sacrifice, reconciliation and intercession. Further, it is emphasised that we are to worship God only according to the principles which he has ordained. We should not resort to the use of religious symbols because when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we have the reality of everything that God has granted us in his grace (Rom. 8:32; Eph. 1:3-6).



NOTE

Some think that Moses was actually shown a model or representation of what the tabernacle should look like. Others suggest that he was given a vision or sight of the structure in the heavenly world. All that can be said with certainty is that we do not know how this pattern was communicated by God to Moses. Moses did follow the instructions given to him by God and the earthly tabernacle was only a copy or shadow of that which exists in heaven. At present we do not know what glories await us and we have to confess that while they are very real they remain indefinite in form (1 Co. 13:12).

Verse 6

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

The writer now provides another contrast between the ministry of the Levitical priests and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is superior because he is the

mediator of a better covenant. The Lord Jesus Christ is the guarantee of the better covenant because his priesthood is everlasting and unchangeable. Moses was the mediator of the law (Gal. 3:19), which demanded complete obedience in order to evade death and eternal condemnation (Lev. 18:5; Luke 10:28). In contrast to the mediatorship of Moses and the covenant of the law, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). The old covenant was a legal relationship whereas the covenant sealed with the blood of Christ is established on better promises. The new covenant is effective and results in salvation and reconciliation instead of condemnation. The Lord Jesus Christ bore the condemnation of the law in the place of his people, and also fulfilled the law's requirements on their behalf. In returning to the glory of heaven in triumph he secured the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), who indwells and empowers the people of God to love the Lord and live according to his will. In every way the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is delivered from the curse of the condemnation of the law, because the Lord Jesus Christ became a curse for them (Gal. 3:10-13). This is the reality of what the better covenant provides in contrast to the covenant of the law.



4. The Son is superior to Aaron (8:7-13)

Verse 7

For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

This verse introduces the subject of the new covenant. The reasoning is exactly the same as is followed in 7:11 where it is shown that if perfection had been secured through the Levitical priesthood and the law then it would not have been necessary to establish a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Similarly, if the old covenant had been without fault it would not have been necessary to make a new covenant or second covenant. The implication is that the new covenant is without any flaws and is bound to achieve its objective. The old covenant was a revelation of God's moral standards and was also appointed by God as an instrument of condemnation. The law could not possibly justify the sinner, being unable to provide the righteousness that the sinner needs. The law was not able to change the sinner inwardly and supply the power to enable the individual to live in obedience to God. This God would do, but under the terms of the new covenant

HEBREWS 8:8

(Ezek. 11:19, 20; 36:25-27). This is why the new covenant is a better covenant established on better promises. The promises not only deal with the issue of sin but also provide a completely new heart to love the Lord and the power to live in a way that truly pleases God.

Verse 8

But God found fault with the people and said:

God found fault not with the old covenant itself, but in the proven inability of the people to adhere to its terms. The words that follow through to verse 12 are quoted from Jeremiah 31:31-34.

BACKGROUND NOTE:

The words spoken by Jeremiah, 31:31-34, were given to him by God at a time of terrible judgment. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been taken into captivity. The southern kingdom of Judah was about to suffer the same judgment. When all seemed lost with no hope for the future, God in his sovereign grace revealed that he would establish a new covenant. This new arrangement would not be marked by imperfection, weakness, unprofitableness and fault. The word given by the Lord to Jeremiah was the promise of the new covenant with a clear statement of what the Lord will do for his people under the terms of this covenant.

***“The time is coming, declares the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah.***

The prophecy declared by Jeremiah would be fulfilled in a future administration of grace and blessing. The time when these words were spoken was a day of darkness and disorder. The people were persistent in unbelief. They disobeyed and ignored the words of the old covenant, the promise of blessing and the warning of judgment (e.g. Deuteronomy 6, 11, 28). God does not disclose exactly when the new covenant would be established but we do know that it clearly finds its fulfilment through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is identified as the mediator of the new and better covenant. The Lord Jesus Christ when instituting the supper to be observed by his followers, said, “For this is my blood of the new

covenant” (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Co. 11:25). The Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated the new covenant and it is his blood with which the new covenant has been sealed.

Verse 9

It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

The new covenant is distinct from the old covenant, for the new covenant was not established according to the covenant that God made with their fathers when he led them by the hand out of the land of Egypt (Ex. 19:4-8; 24:3-8). In the covenant of the law God set out his moral standards for his people. Obedience to the law would secure material blessing (Deut. 28:1-14) and disobedience would bring down the curse of judgment (Deut. 28:15-68). So within this revelation of the new covenant God says the people in general did not keep the terms of the old covenant. They therefore became subject to condemnation and the covenant became void. The Lord turned away from his people and they suffered invasion and deportation into exile.

Verse 10

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord.

On the other hand God makes known what he will do for his people under the terms of the new covenant, of which there are three parts, all of an inward nature.

I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts,

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

The first two parts are set out. Instead of the law's being externally imposed, written on tablets of stone, it will be engraved upon the heart and live in the mind. To do the will of God will be an expression of love for the Lord flowing out of a regenerated heart (Ezek. 36:25-27; John 14:15, 21, 23-24; Rom. 6:17; 8:4; 1 John 2:3-5). Instead of the law's becoming a means whereby God is bound to disregard and abandon the disobedient to judgment, it becomes the seal through which God is bound to his people in unbroken fellowship. The people of God are his special possession (Acts 20:24; 1 Co. 6:19-20; 2 Co. 6:16; Eph. 1:14; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10; Rev. 21:3).

Verse 11

***No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
Because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.***

Under the new covenant each one of the people of God will know the Lord personally from the youngest to the oldest and from the most insignificant to the most prominent. There is no privileged class for there is only one mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. Each one will be taught inwardly by the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27; Acts 20:18; Eph. 1:17), by whom we come to know God directly (Is. 54:13; John 6:45; 17:3).

Verse 12

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

The third part of the new covenant is set out. God promises to deal with sin conclusively. Sin will be dealt with in such a way that it will no longer be a barrier which prevents fellowship between God and his people. Blessing will no longer be forfeited because of unforgiven sin. The hand of judgment will be lifted for ever. The source of such action is the mercy of God, which means he will act in a favourable manner towards the undeserving in dealing with their sin. God only deals with our sin through the propitiation made by the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter in what form wickedness and unbelief have been expressed, be it unrighteousness or perversity, failure to live according to God's moral standards, **all** will be forgiven. The sinner finds full and complete cleansing through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin is acknowledged, confessed and abandoned (1 John 1:7, 9). The conscience is cleansed, our sin will never be held against us by God. It is God alone who can obliterate the stain of guilt and erase the memory of sin.

Verse 13

By calling this covenant "new", he has made the first one obsolete;
We now have the conclusion regarding the relationship between the old and new covenants. The new covenant has made the first covenant obsolete. Because God clearly declared that he would establish a new covenant, **it** follows that his purposes regarding the old covenant would be fulfilled, or completed. Once the new covenant came into force then the old covenant would no longer be

required. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is the mediator of the new covenant, his work of sacrificing has been completed. He is ministering in the heavenly sanctuary and the new covenant is now being fulfilled. This means that the first covenant made through Moses is out of date. It has served its purpose and is no longer required according to the purposes of God. It has been superseded by the covenant which is better and based on better promises.

and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear.

What has become obsolete and growing old is ready to pass away. If Hebrews had been written after AD 70 then the author would have been able to write that the old had already vanished. However, in the light of the Lord's prophecy that the temple and its ritual would be destroyed in the near future (Matt. 24:1, 2, 15; Acts 6:14) it is quite possible that the author was anticipating the predicted end of temple worship some time soon. Whatever the case, how and when God would bring these things to pass does not make any difference to the fact that the new covenant had superseded the old. It was only a matter of time before everything connected to the old would disappear completely having been displaced by God already. By way of contrast the new covenant finds its ultimate fulfilment in the eternal state of the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:1-3). The new covenant will always be new for it will never be replaced by any other covenant. For this reason it is also called *the eternal covenant* (13:20, 21).



Summary

Two themes dominate this chapter. One is that our salvation is not dependent on any earthly priesthood. The second is that the new covenant and its terms are superior to the old covenant, making the old redundant. Christ's ministry as our high priest is in the presence of God fulfilling all that the Levitical priesthood represented and foreshadowed. Our Lord's priesthood could not be on earth because he was not from the tribe of Levi. Instead he ministers in the heavenly tabernacle, which is of an eternal nature. The earthly tabernacle was just a copy, an

Summary continued on page 156

Summary continued from page 155

illustration of the heavenly reality. Christ, whilst on earth, introduced the new and better covenant. It was not a “new idea”, for Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, had set out the details of the new covenant. The old covenant could only show up man’s inability to obey God’s laws and keep his standards. Instead of losing patience with his people, God introduced the new way. The better promises of the new covenant are better because they are not focused on external observances but on the work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme – God’s remembrance of sin

Verse 12 is one of the most surprising in the whole of the Bible. A very famous preacher in London named C. H. Spurgeon preached on this text in October 1882, . Here is an outline of what he said.

Introduction

When the Holy Spirit convicts people of their sin, they often despair of God’s acceptance of them. They must not put their hope in trying to do better, but in the mercy of God.

1. There is forgiveness

We know this because:

- (i) He has spared our lives
- (ii) He calls us to repent
- (iii) He has provided for our pardon in Christ
- (iv) He teaches us to ask to be pardoned

2. God both forgives and forgets

- (i) He has promised not to recall our sin
- (ii) There is but one way of atonement and that is totally sufficient
- (iii) There is no punishment for those God forgives
- (iv) This is true no matter how great our sins are

3. All this is possible

- (i) Because of Christ’s death in our place

- (ii) Because God's mercy is overflowing and his love is everlasting
- (iii) Because it is God's delight to forgive sinners and to rejoice in their reformation

Application

Therefore repent and believe



Focus Point: Christ's finished work

When our Lord said, "It is finished," at the end of his sufferings on the cross (John 19:20) he meant two things. Yes, the awful suffering had come to an end, but, more importantly, the great work of providing a way for sinful people to be reconciled to God was complete. Nothing else is needed for our salvation. What Christ accomplished on the cross was sufficient, needing nothing to be added or taken away. Four times in the book of Hebrews we read that our Lord sat down when he ascended into glory (1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). His saving work was complete.

This makes absolutely redundant any other kind of human priesthood. All our need is met in Christ alone. It also makes unnecessary any appeal to Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus, or to so-called saints in our prayers to God. We do not need any guidance from ancestral spirits or intervention of witch doctors. Such things would be supplements to the work of Christ and are an insult to him. They only arise from ignorance of his total and complete adequacy to provide a total and complete salvation. The same has to be said about rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem and the resumption of sacrifices based on Ezekiel chapters 44 to 48. Such an interpretation contradicts the teaching of Hebrews. Ezekiel's prophecy has to be understood in a spiritual manner.

There is a sense in which Christ has continuing work to do. He lives for ever to intercede for us, and furthermore he will one day return to take his people to himself for ever (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). But none of this adds anything to the completeness of Christ's death for the forgiveness of our sins and our access into the presence of God (10:18). It is this finished work that our Lord presents to the Father on behalf of his people.



Over to you

Do you take care to ensure that the confidence of your people rests in the unseen Christ and not in anyone else, anything external or material?

Examine closely your form of worship. Are there, for example, some things you do every time you meet which present the danger that your people start to trust in them as a way of worshipping and pleasing God? Using Hebrews chapter 8 how would you begin to deal with such hindrances?

How much importance is given to the place in which you meet for worship? Is it right for us to use words such as “tabernacle” and “sanctuary” in our Christian vocabulary?

THE OLD COVENANT



Hebrews 9:1-10



This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Interpreting the tabernacle and the temple
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The writer is preparing the way to begin a detailed explanation of the new covenant based on the parallels with the Old Testament rituals (9:11-10:18). He first describes the structure of the tabernacle as a kind of visual aid. This is to help his readers to understand the significance and purpose of the work of Christ. The reality of what Christ did is far superior to the pattern that was laid down in the Old Testament. What follows is a summary of the structure of the tabernacle, given in detail in Exodus chapters 25 to 40. The readers of Hebrews would have been familiar with this, so the purpose is not to inform them but to lay a foundation for his teaching.

What these verses mean



1. The earthly sanctuary (9:1-5)

Verse 1

Now the first covenant

The word “covenant” is not found in the original text but is supplied by the translators to provide greater clarity in the English

HEBREWS 9:1-2

version. This follows from 8:13 where the word “first” is used in reference to the old covenant.

had regulations for worship

The point of the verse is that the old covenant had its regulations for worship. There were clearly given procedures, which were to be followed by the Levitical priests, and which governed all aspects of tabernacle worship. No matter what type of sacrifice was being offered or what ministrations were involved, very strict stipulations were to be observed.

and also an earthly sanctuary.

But this entire worship took place in the “earthly sanctuary”, which is referring to the tabernacle set up by Moses at the command of God. The same would be true in principle of the temple. The tabernacle was “earthly”, or of this world, as distinct from the heavenly sanctuary. By contrast the Lord Jesus Christ, the high priest of the believer, ministers in heaven (7:26), where he is enthroned (8:1), not on earth (8:4). The earthly sanctuary is only a copy and shadow of the heavenly and true tabernacle (8:2, 5; 9:23). The writer is stressing the fact that the high priest of the old covenant ministered in an earthly tabernacle whereas the Lord Jesus Christ, the high priest of the new covenant, ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. The work of the Levitical high priest and his place of ministry were only symbolic of the eternal reality of the work and sphere of ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 2

A tabernacle was set up.

Verse 2 refers to the outer chamber of the tabernacle and its articles. The structure was divided into two parts by a veil or curtain and it is the outer part to which reference is made in this verse.

In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread;

Within the first part of the tabernacle was the “lampstand”, made of beaten gold (Ex. 25:31-40; 27:20-21). It had three branches either side of the main stem in order to form seven branches altogether. The seven lamps were to be kept burning day and night. The lampstand stood on the south side of the tabernacle. The second article was the table of showbread (Ex. 25:23-30; Lev 24:5-9). The bread was to be freshly baked each Sabbath day, and twelve loaves arranged in two rows of six were to be displayed. They were to be

replaced each week. The table of showbread ¹ (or Presence – see footnote) was to be placed on the north side of the tabernacle.

this was called the Holy Place.

This outer part of the tabernacle structure was called the “Holy Place”, which was twice the length of the inner part.

Verse 3

Behind the second curtain

There were two curtains in the tabernacle. The first one was hung at the door of the tent (Ex. 26:36-37). The second one, referred to in this verse, was hung to separate the inner and outer rooms of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:31-35). This curtain represented the barrier between the holy God and sinful man and was a constant reminder that the old covenant could not provide a permanent way into the presence of God. The curtain was finally torn apart through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 27:51), because an effective sacrifice for sin had been made through which the sinner has complete access into the presence of God (10:19-22). The symbolism of the curtain had served its purpose and was no longer required.

was a room called the Most Holy Place,

Behind the second curtain was the room called the Most Holy Place. It was also referred to as the Holy of Holies. To enter the Holy of Holies it was necessary for the high priest to pass through the second curtain from the holy place. Only the high priest could pass within the second curtain. This he was allowed to do only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

Verse 4

***which had the golden altar of incense* ²**

Reference is made here to the altar of incense as if it were situated in the inner chamber, the Holy of Holies. In Exodus 30:1-10 the altar of incense stood immediately in front of the second veil, in the holy place, the outer room. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the blood from the sin offering was to be put on the horns of the altar

¹ Sometimes it is spelt as *showbread*. It is also called the *bread of the Presence*. This name is also given to the table itself in Numbers 4:7.

² The Greek word used is “thumiaterion” which in the NIV and other English versions is translated here as “the golden altar of incense”. In other Bible versions the word is translated as “the golden censer”. The censer was the vessel in which the priest burnt fragrant incense on the altar.

HEBREWS 9:4-5

(Ex. 30:10). The writer places the altar within the inner chamber because he is writing in the context of the Day of Atonement. This is made clearer if “censer” is used instead of “altar of incense” (see footnote below). Normally the daily fragrant offering was made using bronze censers (Num. 16:39), but on the Day of Atonement a golden censer was used to carry coals from the altar of burnt offering. The angel in Revelation 8:3 had a golden censer for a momentous event. The writer is making it clear that the golden altar of incense belonged to the holiest place even though its location was in the outer room.

and the gold-covered ark of the covenant.

The ark of the covenant was the only article within the Holy of Holies behind the second curtain. This was a chest or box made of acacia wood overlaid on all sides with gold. Two gold rings were attached to each side through which special poles were passed to carry the ark whenever it was necessary to move it. The ark contained three treasures which had been placed in the ark at the direction of God.

This ark contained the golden jar of manna,

The first treasure was the golden jar that had the manna. In Exodus 16:33 the reference is simply made to a jar. Here the writer describes it as being made of gold, quoting the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint – LXX) where the reference in Exodus 16:33 is to a golden pot. Gold is used in the Bible as a symbol to represent something that is precious or lasts. The point is being made that Christ is being likened to an item in the tabernacle that was to be a reminder for generations to come of how God cared for the Israelites in the desert. The lasting preciousness of the jar only emphasises to all generations the lasting preciousness of Christ.

Aaron's rod that had budded,

The second treasure was Aaron's rod that budded (Num. 17:10-11). The rod represented the house of Levi. It had not only budded but blossomed and produced almonds (Num. 17:8). It was placed in front of the ark as a sign to the Jews to remind them not to grumble and to maintain the purity of the priesthood by keeping it in the Levite tribe. The Jews affirmed that in the day of Messiah the priesthood would flourish as Aaron's rod.

and the stone tablets of the covenant.

The third item which was found inside the ark was the pair of stone

tablets that bore the inscription of the Ten Commandments. This was God's moral standard for his people, a constant reminder or testimony of the requirements placed upon the people in covenantal relationship with God (Ex. 25:16; 31:18; Deut 9:9-10; 10:1-5).

Verse 5

Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory,

The description of the ark continues. Above the chest were the cherubim of Glory, fully attached to each end of the mercy seat (see below). They were two golden cherubim facing each other with their wings outstretched over the mercy seat (Ex. 25:18-21). The cherubim guarded the way to the presence of the glory of God, reflecting Genesis 3:24.

overshadowing the place of atonement.

The cherubim overshadowed the place of atonement or, as it is translated in other English language Bibles, the mercy seat. The mercy seat was a slab of gold and fitted exactly on the top of the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:17). The NIV translation, the place of atonement (or atonement cover), gives the meaning of the mercy seat. God manifested his glory at the mercy seat (Ex. 40:34-35; Lev. 16:2). It was here that the blood of the sacrifice was to be sprinkled on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:14-15) to atone for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:30, 33-34). The mercy seat was placed between the stone tablets of the covenant and the glory of God. The Lord Jesus Christ has been declared by God, through the gospel to the whole world, as the only atonement for sin (Rom. 3:25-26). Jesus Christ alone makes reconciliation through his blood between God and sinners (Rom. 5:9-11; Col. 1:20-22).

But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

Although there may be other aspects of the earthly sanctuary and its ministry that are intriguing and may contain symbolic teaching, the author does not want to spend time dealing with those matters. He is fully focused upon the central theme of atonement which is only found in the Lord Jesus Christ.



2. The limitations of the earthly sanctuary (9:6-10)

Verse 6

When everything had been arranged like this,

Following the brief description of the tabernacle and its contents the

author now demonstrates that all of the elaborate ritual associated with it was quite inadequate to provide eternal salvation.

the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.

Firstly, he refers to the work of all the Levitical priests. The duties involved in ministering in the first part of the tabernacle, the holy place, were the responsibilities of all the Levitical priests. Whenever the tabernacle was erected they were to tend the lamps each morning and evening (Ex. 27:20-21). They were to burn incense at the altar of incense each morning and evening (Ex. 30:7-8). Each week they were to prepare and replace the loaves on the table of showbread (Presence) (Lev. 25:5-9). 1 Chronicles 23:24-32 also contains a list of duties.

Verse 7

But only the high priest entered the inner room,

The ministry of the high priest in the Holy of Holies is described by contrast to the daily activity of the holy place. Only the high priest was allowed to enter the inner sanctuary.

and that only once a year,

The Holy of Holies was only entered once a year which was on the Day of Atonement. The high priest was not at liberty to enter at any other time (Lev. 16:1-2). He did not have an inherent right to gain access to this part of the tabernacle.

and never without blood,

When the high priest did enter the Holy of Holies he did so at the command of God, once a year and not without blood (Lev. 16:3). He had to follow a very precise series of regulations, involving the sprinkling of blood and offering of incense, the wearing of special clothing, and ceremonial washing (Lev. 16:4-34).

which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

The sacrificial blood which was shed that day was a covering for the sins of the high priest himself, as well as for the sins of the people. God was teaching the people that the way into his presence was closed to them because of sin and any hope of forgiveness could only be found through a blood sacrifice. He was also teaching them that there was no all-sufficient sacrifice under the Levitical system. The high priest who represented the people was himself a sinner. Both high priest and sacrificial victims were imperfect. The sins

which were being covered by way of this ritual are “sins committed in ignorance”. Any wilful sin would have constituted rebellion and a rejection of the covenantal relationship between God and the people. Therefore, those who sinned deliberately placed themselves outside of the terms of the covenant and could not expect mercy. This the writer implies in Hebrews 10:26-28. Sins of ignorance suggest the frailty of the human flesh and inherent sin which can only be absolved through an atoning and effective sacrifice.

Verse 8

The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed

Although the old system was imperfect there was purpose and design in it. It was a means through which God was teaching truth. The Holy Spirit was showing that the way into the holiest of all was not yet available. The inner sanctuary was symbolic of the presence of God and the veil meant that there was no freedom to enter the presence of God. This would only occur once the Lord Jesus Christ had given himself as that perfect sacrifice for sin (Matt. 27:51), and full atonement had been made (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.

This means that while the old system represented by the tabernacle and its sacrifices was still in force the way into God’s presence was not yet open. But now, through the Lord Jesus Christ, all of his people have been constituted priests because each one has full access to God (1 Pet. 2:5). This priesthood transcends all cultures of the world and is not restricted to gender or age.

Verse 9

This is an illustration for the present time,

Verses 9 and 10 demonstrate that the old sacrificial system was not intended to be permanent for it was a parable of what was to come. It was an illustration pointing to the present time. The entire system was symbolic, full of types and shadows which are now being fulfilled. The author will go on to show the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the Day of Atonement.

indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper.

The “gifts and sacrifices” that priests offered were only copies and

HEBREWS 9:10 and Summary

could not cleanse the consciences of the people who brought them. It is only the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ which can cleanse the conscience from the guilt of sin for he made a complete and never to be repeated sacrifice for sin (9:14; 10:22). The blood of the continual animal sacrifices drove home this important lesson. The slaughter and sacrifices of such creatures could never actually deal with sin (7:18-19; 10:1-4).

Verse 10

They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings —

Under the law there were numerous regulations covering food and drink. There were instructions relating to clean and unclean animals, which could and could not be eaten (Lev. 11:1-47). There was prohibition of wine when priests were ministering in the tabernacle (Lev. 10:8-11) and for those under the Nazirite vow (Num. 6:2-4). The law also stipulated various cleansings and sprinklings which were to be observed (Lev. 11:28, 40; 14:1-32; 15:1-33; 16:4, 28; Num. 8:5-19; 19:7-22, etc). But none of these ordinances could cleanse and sanctify inwardly for they were all of an outward nature. The Lord Jesus Christ alone can cleanse the soul from guilt (1 Co. 6:11; 1 John 1:7, 9), which he accomplishes through the power of his Word (John 15:3; Eph. 5:25, 26; 1 Thess. 2:13).

external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

The types and shadows were appointed by God to function for a limited period until the time of reformation. What is here indicated is a time when the insignificant, the inadequate, would be superseded by a better system.



Summary

The writer to the Hebrews gives a summary of the structure of the tabernacle. The readers would have been familiar with the detail. The purpose, then, was not to instruct but to emphasise that whilst there was the glory of the Old Testament structure, the fulfilment in Christ is even more glorious. The reference to the Most Holy

Summary continued on page 167

Summary continued from page 166

Place is to show that there is a means of entry into God's presence not dependent on a system of ritual. The weakness in the Old Testament ritual is further demonstrated when the writer turns to the functioning of the tabernacle, in the second half of the passage. The high priest entered the Holy of Holies only once a year whereas Christ is sitting for ever in God's presence. The high priest had to offer sacrifices to atone for his own sins, whereas Christ was sinless, making his sacrifice perfect. The high priest's offering had to be repeated because none of them by themselves provided reconciliation to God that gave lasting peace to the consciences of the people. The writer wants his readers to turn away from earthly priests and look to Christ for their means of access into God's presence. It is the only way of being assured that they would be right with God and know true peace of conscience.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme – The earthly tabernacle and its ministry

Introduction

Many people are religious. They follow a set routine or ritualistic practice. They find comfort in keeping to a set format. Often religious ceremonies follow the pattern of Old Testament practices. Hebrew Christians living in the first epoch of the New Testament church faced pressure to go back to the religious practices of the Old Testament. Today there are religions where the office and ministry of a priest continue to feature as an integral part of that religion. Our passage shows the weakness and folly of such thinking because it is all based upon the old covenant. This was only a type or shadow of the office and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore patterns based on the old covenant are no longer required. The old has been declared obsolete and not a valid means of approaching God. The Old Testament practices involving the earthly tabernacle and its ministry were only a type of the heavenly sanctuary and its ministry.

1. The earthly sanctuary and its contents

Under the old covenant very strict regulations were to be followed in tabernacle ministry.

- (a) There were two chambers in the tabernacle: the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Within the Holy of Holies was placed the ark of the covenant, which contained God's commandments. Above the ark was the mercy seat, the place of atonement. Attached to the mercy seat and rising above it were the cherubim of glory, signifying that the way to God's presence was protected.
- (b) This tabernacle was described as earthly and only a copy of the heavenly and true tabernacle. It was made of earthly material that would pass away.
- (c) This earthly tabernacle teaches that God can only be approached in one way; all other ways are barred. Sin has to be atoned for. This is only possible through Jesus Christ.

2. The limitations of the earthly sanctuary

- (a) All priests had access to the Holy Place, tending the lamps and altar of incense daily and the table of showbread (Presence) weekly. They did not have access to the Most Holy Place.
- (b) The high priest alone had access to the Most Holy Place but only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day he had to offer a blood sacrifice for his own sins and for the sins of the people.
- (c) He was not free to approach God at any time and had to follow precise instructions regarding ceremonial washing and wearing of assigned clothing.
- (d) God was teaching by the Holy Spirit that access to God was barred by sin.
- (e) None of the old covenant sacrifices could ever cleanse the conscience from the guilt of sin.
- (f) The earthly tabernacle and its ministry were never intended to be permanent.

3. The reality of the sacrifice of Christ

- (a) Christ has made a once-for-all sacrifice for sin.
- (b) His work of sacrificing is completed and is honoured by God, as he is now seated in heaven, the true tabernacle.

- (c) His sacrifice does cleanse the conscience of the sinner, delivering from the wrath of God against sin for ever.
- (d) This is according to the better promises of the better covenant.

Conclusion

Salvation is only found through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The old covenant and its sacrifices could never take away sin. Religious systems today are inadequate, as at best they can only be a shadow of the real thing. The old covenant pointed to the reality of the sacrifice of Christ. Practices based on the old covenant fail to point to the reality of Christ because they suggest that the worshippers have to earn their way into God's presence by complying with the rules or ritual of that religion.



Focus Point: Interpreting the tabernacle and temple

In Exodus chapters 25-40 we find details of the design and construction of the tabernacle. The temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem followed the same pattern (1 Kings 6-8). We need to be careful how we apply these details in relation to our worship today.

Not to copy

The first and most important principle is that we are not to copy these physical constructions because they are visual aids to help us understand spiritual realities. This means we do not need ornate buildings, nor should we regard our building or any part of it as sacred. Some people today, who are genuine and faithful followers of Christ, refer to the meeting place of their church (people) as the tabernacle or sanctuary. The area where worship services take place is looked upon as being so special that nothing else can take place there. This is a wrong understanding.

The same goes for furnishings and ministerial dress. We do not need candles (except if it is the only means of light) nor bread reserved for holy use. Altars, ornaments, pictures and statues have no function in worship and can easily become a distraction or focus of idol worship. It is interesting to note that many church groups do not possess their own premises and rent school classrooms or other community facilities for their worship services. Some

congregations gather under the shelter of a tree or a hastily constructed canopy. They then have no religious furnishings or artifices surrounding them and their worship truly has to be in spirit and truth. Ministers do not dress in special robes nor do they offer sacrifices of atonement.

In the architectural development of Bible-based evangelical churches of the past few centuries the pulpit has been the focal point in the building's design. This emphasises the centrality of the Bible and its teaching in the worship of God. Care is given that all the congregation can see the pulpit and conversely that the preacher can see the whole congregation in order to have eye contact.

Guided by New Testament teaching

The second principle is that we should only interpret the various parts of the tabernacle and its ritual in a way that is warranted by New Testament teaching. This means that it is very unwise for us to try to find meaning in obscure parts such as dishes and tent pegs. The writer to the Hebrews gave only the main features of the tabernacle and did not consider it appropriate to discuss the matters in detail (9:5). We are on safe ground when we see the tabernacle as a picture of Christ as the way to God. The apostle John seems to have had this in mind when he wrote of the Lord's making his dwelling (tabernacling) among us. Also the temple may rightly be seen as a picture of the church as a dwelling in which God lives (Eph. 2:19-22). The New Testament must always be our guide to our understanding of the Old Testament.



Over to you

Do your congregation think of the building in which you worship as a holy place? If so, how would you guide them using this passage?

Does the form of your worship service give the impression that worship takes on a fixed form that has become ritualistic and cannot be changed?

Why do you worship the way you do? What are your New Testament grounds for doing so? (See John 4:23-24)

THE HEAVENLY TABERNACLE:

GREATER AND MORE PERFECT



Hebrews 9:11-22

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The blood of Christ
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The passage from 9:11 to 10:18 brings us to a detailed description of the saving work of Jesus Christ. All that has gone before has prepared the way for this and the result is one of the most heart-warming presentations of the gospel. We should approach these verses with a sense of awe and gratitude.

In study 16 we are shown that the earthly tabernacle, its furnishings and all that took place in it were only a shadow or type of the heavenly tabernacle. While the curtain remained, all access into the presence of God was barred. The curtain was symbolic of the barrier which prevented sinful man from approaching God. The only occasion when man was allowed into the Holy of Holies was on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest was permitted to enter that earthly sanctuary in order to sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat above the ark of the covenant. We turn from the symbolism of 9:1-10 to the reality anticipated by those symbols. We move from the passing glory of the old covenant to the lasting glory of the new.

What these verses mean

P 1. The permanence of Christ's ministry (9:11-12)

Verse 11

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here,

The writer in the first part of chapter 9 has been emphasising the symbolic nature of the Levitical system. Now the time of reformation has come. What God said he would do is now being fulfilled. Christ has become the high priest over all the good things that have come. The new covenant is better for it is founded on better promises and provides a better hope. The old covenant and sacrificial system were incapable of providing such good things. It is the Lord Jesus Christ alone who is the effective high priest who ministers these good things now.

he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.

To say that the Lord Jesus Christ went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle means that he has entered the glory of heaven, the presence of God. This heavenly tabernacle has neither been constructed by the hands of men nor is it of this world. The earthly tabernacle was only a copy or figure of the true sanctuary of heaven (8:2; 9:24).

Verse 12

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves;

The Lord Jesus Christ did not gain entry into the heavenly sanctuary in the way in which the high priests of the old covenant entered the earthly Holy of Holies. They had to take the blood of bulls and goats, for their own sins and for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:11, 15).

but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood,

The author does not say that the Lord Jesus Christ took his own blood into heaven as the high priests took blood into the Holy of Holies. The Lord Jesus Christ completed his work of sacrifice on the cross and the entire thrust of the book is that his work of sacrifice has been completed and is not a continuing work. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross he made an effective sacrifice for sin and at that moment the temple curtain was instantly torn apart. The presence of God became accessible immediately (Matt. 27:51). This

was God's showing that Christ's sacrifice for sin was fully accepted, that his Son had accomplished in reality what the Levitical priests had never been able to do. The Lord Jesus Christ did not enter heaven to present his blood as the sacrifice for sin, nor does he have to present it repeatedly, pleading on behalf of his people. His sacrifice for sin is an accomplished fact and it is on this ground alone that sin is forgiven (10:17-18).

having obtained eternal redemption.

The ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is complete and his place in the presence of God is permanent. Through Christ's own sacrifice on the cross and God's accepting it by receiving him in heaven, eternal redemption has been secured for his people. The word "redemption" was associated with slavery. The slave's freedom could often be secured through the payment of a ransom price. Christ paid a ransom price with his own life to rescue his people from the slavery of sin and the kingdom of darkness. It was a permanent release, for eternity, because of the nature of the Son of God. The high priests of the old covenant were unable and completely inadequate to be able to secure such redemption. They were sinners themselves and they were shackled to a system that required unending sacrifices, for it was not designed to provide eternal redemption. Both Paul and Peter declared that redemption in Christ is not limited by time for it is rooted in the eternal plan of redemption (Eph. 1:4, 7; 1 Pet. 1:18-20).



2. The effectiveness of the sacrifice of Christ (9:13-15)

In these verses the writer contrasts the ineffectiveness of the sacrifices of the old system and the effectiveness of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 13

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer

This is a reference to the ritual of the Day of Atonement when a bull was sacrificed for the sins of the high priest (Lev. 16:11) and a goat for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:15). The ashes of a heifer played their part in the ceremonial cleansing of any person who had been in contact with a dead body (Num. 19:1-22). These ashes were to be used to prepare "the water of purification". The application of this water was to establish ceremonial cleansing after contact with dead bodies.

sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

The ceremonial offering could only deal with the outward and superficial and not with the inward and radical. The animal sacrifices could not purify the conscience and deal effectively with the problem of sin.

Verse 14

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ,

The writer is now measuring and comparing the inferiority of the blood of animals and ashes of a heifer with the blood of Christ. He moves from the lesser to the greater. The inferior could only cleanse outwardly and ceremonially but now we move to the superior, the blood of Christ, that cleanses the soul inwardly.

who through the eternal Spirit

The writer provides three reasons why the blood of Christ is truly effective, cleansing the conscience from moral pollution and providing forgiveness, establishing fellowship with God (1 John 1:7). Firstly, the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ was through the eternal Spirit. There are two views regarding the meaning of “the eternal Spirit”. One is that it is a reference to the person of the Holy Spirit, the second to the Lord’s own eternal spirit for he is the eternal Son of God (1:8-9, 10-12). The phrase and whole meaning can be understood both ways.

offered himself

The second reason why the blood of Christ is effective is that he offered himself. He was not an uncomprehending, helpless and reluctant victim as were the animals which were sacrificed. He came into the world for this reason, to offer himself (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Titus 2:14). The Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life willingly and deliberately on behalf of his people (John 10:17-18), for each personally (Gal. 2:20) and also collectively (Eph. 5:25). He knowingly submitted himself to crucifixion (John 12:27, 32).

unblemished to God,

Thirdly, Christ offered himself without blemish to God. He was the perfect substitute sacrifice. The animal sacrifices were to be without any physical defect or blemish. The Lord Jesus Christ was without any moral or ethical spot. He was entirely blameless, absolutely pure (John 8:46; 2 Co. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:19; 3:18). All that God required of man was completely fulfilled in the life of his Son,

without any deviation whatsoever from the will of God (Heb. 10:5-9). The perfect man gave himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of his people.

cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death,

The blood of Christ is truly effective, for the repentant sinner finds inner cleansing through faith in Christ. The purpose of Christ's death is to cleanse the conscience from dead works. Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the believer is delivered from the emptiness of all former religious aspirations, turning from his sin in repentance. It is God alone who in sovereign grace enables the sinner to repent of all forms of sin. Dead works are characteristic of the sinner who is dead in sin (Eph. 2:1-3) and alienated from life in God, and whose end is death (Rom. 6:21, 23; Phil. 3:19). God promised cleansing from the deathly and contaminating works of the flesh under the terms of the new covenant (Ezek. 36:25-27).

so that we may serve the living God!

When the conscience is cleansed from the guilt of dead works, the sinner is liberated to serve the living God. God's purpose in saving us is that we shall live for him and serve him in newness of life (Rom. 6:4; 2 Co. 5:17). Everything about the former life was tainted by death. Now that we know the living God, everything to do with him is living and dynamic in contrast to our former way of life. Dead works and the living God are wholly incompatible.

Verse 15

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant,

Through his shed blood the Lord Jesus Christ became the mediator of the new covenant. The writer has already identified the Lord Jesus Christ as the guarantor of a better covenant (7:22) and the mediator of a better covenant (8:6), which is the new covenant. The new covenant was required because of the inadequacy of the old covenant (8:7-12). What the old covenant lacked, the new covenant more than compensates for, as it secures the reality of heavenly and eternal blessing.

that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance —

The writer uses the expression "those who are called" for the first time in this book. Those who are called are those people whom the Holy Spirit "calls" to put their faith in Christ. Such people belong to God (Heb. 3:1) and are called effectively from the world through

the gospel (Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14). They are the ones that God promised to Abraham, the innumerable company of his spiritual descendants. Those who are called will take their places in the new heavens and new earth, the former things giving way to the realities of the eternal inheritance (Rev. 21:1-5).

now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Eternal inheritance has been made possible because Christ died as a ransom. This was one of the purposes of his death so that he would secure forgiveness and reconciliation on behalf of those who had violated the terms of the old (first) covenant. This was something which all of the offerings of the Levitical system could not do. Those sacrifices were only effective outwardly and formally. The death of the Lord Jesus Christ is not only effective for those who have sinned since he came into the world, but is also the ground of redemption for all Old Testament believers. Together Old and New Testament believers form one redeemed people, made perfect through the substitutionary death of Christ alone.



3. The example of a will (9:16-17)

Verse 16

In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it,

The writer now emphasises the connection between the benefits of the new covenant and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. This he does by reminding his readers of the principle observed regarding an earthly will and its benefactors. A will is covenantal in nature, although there are important differences between a will and a covenant (an agreement). A covenant involves two parties and does not necessarily involve the death of one of the parties. But a will does. Under normal circumstances the will does not become effective until the benefactor dies. The death of the benefactor is essential in order for the beneficiaries to receive the inheritance.

Verse 17

because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living.

In this way the death of the Lord Jesus Christ has made way for the new covenant to come into full effect. At his death the “Keep Out” sign was removed through the inner curtain of the tabernacle being

torn apart. In his will, which is the gospel, Christ left for his followers an eternal inheritance, access into the heavenly sanctuary. Through Christ's resurrection and ministry in the heavenly sanctuary God gives the blessings of the inheritance of eternal life.



4. The consecration of the tabernacle (9:18-22)

Verse 18

This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood.

The ratifying of the new covenant by the blood of Christ was foreshadowed in the Old Testament ritual. The old covenant was established by following this principle (Ex. 24:3-8). The writer now refers to the old covenant and Moses.

Verse 19

When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people.

Moses had reported to the people all that the Lord required them to observe. He recorded the commandments in a book, and then built an altar. Young men were appointed to bring burnt offerings and peace offerings of oxen which were sacrificed to the Lord. The shed blood was divided into two parts and half was sprinkled on the altar. Following the reading of the commandments from the Book of the Covenant to Israel, the people responded, "All that the Lord has said we will do."¹ Moses then sprinkled the people with the remainder of the blood. Water, scarlet wool and hyssop were used in the cleansing of the leper (Lev. 14:1-9), and also in the application of the water of purification prepared from the ashes of the red heifer (Num. 19:6, 9). Moses may have followed this same method of sprinkling when inaugurating the first covenant. Regarding the sprinkling of the scroll, it is suggested that it would be reasonable to understand

¹ The writer's summary does not coincide exactly with the Exodus record that we have outlined here. In Exodus there is no mention of calves (or goats as in some translations), only oxen. Nor is anything said of water, scarlet wool, and hyssop and the scroll being sprinkled. Calves could have been young oxen. When the Lord ratified his covenant with Abraham a three-year old heifer and a three-year old ram were used (Gen. 15:7-18). The blood of a bull and the blood of a goat were also sprinkled on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement to which reference has just been made (9:7). We do not know exactly why the writer describes the inauguration of the first covenant in this way.

on the strength of the author's inspired words that Moses did sprinkle the scroll just as he had sprinkled blood upon the altar.

Verse 20

He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep."

These are not the exact words of Moses for Exodus 24:8 says, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." While not precisely the same there is no difference in meaning and spirit. The people pledged their obedience to the commandments of the covenant and were sprinkled accordingly to seal this covenant relationship. The writer's words echo those spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ when he instituted the Lord's Supper, "This is the blood of the new covenant" (Matt. 26:28; 1 Co. 11:25). When believers receive the elements at the Lord's Table they are declaring their faith in the completed sacrificial work of Christ. They are beneficiaries of the new covenant and with renewed hearts and minds pledge their loyalty and obedience to Christ, having been sprinkled with the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:2). They are a renewed and devoted people, not yet perfect but filled with the anticipation of seeing Christ and of being made like him (2 Co. 3:18).

Verse 21

In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies.

The theme of the sprinkling with blood is continued. Once again there is no reference in Exodus to the tabernacle and its contents being sprinkled with blood by Moses. The tabernacle and its contents were to be consecrated with oil, likewise Aaron and his sons (Ex. 40:9-16; Lev. 8: 10-13). However, blood was an integral part of the ceremony of consecration, for the blood of the sin offering was to be applied to the altar (Ex. 29:12; Lev. 8:15) and also to be sprinkled on Aaron and his sons (Lev. 8:30). For the sin offering a ram was to be killed and its blood sprinkled on the altar (Ex. 29:15-16). This was followed by a second ram, whose blood was sprinkled on the altar, and on Aaron and his sons (Ex. 29:20-21). Jewish tradition was that the tabernacle and its entire contents were consecrated with both oil and blood, and may well reflect what actually took place to which the writer now refers.

Verse 22

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

The writer establishes the principle that there is no salvation except in shed blood. There were some exceptions in which ceremonial cleansing involved water rather than blood (Lev. 15 and Num. 19), but even there some blood shedding took place through animals (Lev. 15:14, 29; Num. 19:2). However, underlying all the ordinances of the old covenant was the basic principle that without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Blood was indicative of the life that had been given (Lev. 17:11). The shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is the very heart of the gospel. It is only through his shed blood that cleansing is experienced and the sinner reconciled to God, fully and freely forgiven (Rom. 3:24, 25; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7).



Summary

The earthly tabernacle was only a shadow or type of the heavenly tabernacle. The curtain in the earthly tabernacle was symbolic of the barrier which prevented sinful man from approaching God. This was because the offering of the high priest was not sufficient (9:9).

He performed outward ritual that could only provide symbolic, outward cleansing. This imperfect way pointed ahead to the great once-for-all sacrifice for sin. The ritual bloodshed of animal sacrifices had never been truly effective because no animal can take the place of a human being. By contrast Jesus offered himself to God in the place of his people. He offered his spotless life to God in the place of our disobedience and breaking of God's laws. The way into the presence of God was now opened for all believers. The Lord Jesus Christ ministers in the heavenly tabernacle (sanctuary), which is perfect and superior to the ministry of the earthly tabernacle. The earthly tabernacle said, "Keep out"; the heavenly tabernacle says, "Come to me." The writer is showing his readers how they are being pressured into taking a retrograde step. The earthly tabernacle, its furnishings and the activities of the high priests

Summary continued on page 180

Summary continued from page 179

(assisted by the Levites) show us in detail, despite their shortcomings, the way that our sins have to be dealt with. Jesus Christ, as the high priest for his people, was able to enter the heavenly tabernacle and provide that perfect sacrifice.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: The heavenly tabernacle and its meaning (9:11-17)

Introduction

The earthly tabernacle was only a shadow or type of the heavenly tabernacle. The curtain, which guarded access to the Holy of Holies, was symbolic of the way to God being barred by sin. For access to be gained to the presence of God sin must be removed and dealt with conclusively. The Lord Jesus Christ, through his once-for-all sacrifice for sin and his present ministry in heaven, the true tabernacle, has opened the way to God for all believers. This way is not restricted to certain individuals at particular times.

1. The permanence of Christ's ministry

- (a) The Lord Jesus Christ is the high priest who secures eternal blessing. The good things are guaranteed to all believers by the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- (b) The Lord Jesus Christ ministers in the reality of the heavenly and eternal tabernacle.
- (c) The Lord Jesus Christ does not have to enter heaven repeatedly for his sacrifice of himself is once for all. His work of sacrificing is complete and permanent. The moment he died on the cross the temple curtain was torn in two and access to God's presence was immediate. This is reality and not merely symbolic.
- (d) Therefore he has obtained eternal redemption for all who trust in him. His sacrifice does not need repeating.

2. The effectiveness of the sacrifice of Christ

- (a) The sprinkled blood of animal sacrifices was effective outwardly but not inwardly.
- (b) The eternal Son of God came into the world to give himself

willingly as a sacrifice for sin. Therefore his sacrifice is:

- i. of eternal worth and secures eternal redemption.
 - ii. willing and determined on behalf of his people, individually and collectively.
 - iii. perfect, for it was without any moral or ethical defect.
- (c) The shed blood of Christ does cleanse the conscience from the guilt of sin.
- (d) He delivers from dead works, reconciling to God the sinner previously alienated from God.
- (e) He liberates the sinner, to serve and worship the living God.

3. The blood of Christ seals the new covenant

- (a) He became the mediator of the new covenant through his death.
- (b) His shed blood is efficacious on behalf of all believers, Old and New Testament alike.
- (c) His shed blood secures the realities of the promised eternal inheritance.
- (d) His death was necessary in order for the beneficiaries to receive the promised inheritance.

Conclusion

To fail to persevere in the Christian faith is to forfeit the blessings of the new covenant which include the promised eternal inheritance of the new heavens and earth. For the readers to fail to persevere, they would be following the fatal example of the Israelites who fell short of the earthly inheritance through unbelief and disobedience.



Focus Point:

The blood of Christ

The blood of Christ has always been central in evangelical doctrine. This is offensive to some people who regard such teaching as belonging to primitive religion and not part of the Christian faith. But references to the blood of Christ in the New Testament are so frequent that we cannot ignore them (e.g. Luke 22:20; Rom. 5:9; 1 John 1:7). The apostle Peter called the blood of Jesus precious (1 Pet. 1:19).

There are students of the Bible who reject any idea of the wrath of God needing to be appeased. For this reason they see the death of Christ as the final act given in devotion to God. They say that “life is in the blood” and that references to blood underline the total

commitment of Christ to the will of his Father. What they say about the life of Jesus is true. The burnt offering described in Leviticus chapter 1 is a picture of our Lord's total self-giving to God as a sweet-smelling savour.

It is quite wrong, however, to think that this is all that the New Testament means by the blood of Christ. The most frequent meaning is indeed the appeasing of God's wrath (Rom. 3:25). This is one of the many things that bind the New Testament and the Old Testament. The blood of a lamb had to be sprinkled on the houses of the Israelites so that they would be spared the judgment that came to the Egyptians. God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Ex. 12:13). In all the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus chapters 1 to 7, the emphasis is on the blood of the animal that was offered, signifying that the guilt of the offerer was transferred to the animal that then bore the punishment. All this was a foreshadowing of the atoning work of Christ for us (John 1:29). He died in our place, taking our guilt and our punishment (Eph. 1:7, Heb. 9:22).

Our salvation is not only in the birth and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor is the death of Christ to be seen as martyrdom or a death for a cause. It is the blood of Christ alone that appeases the wrath of God and secures freedom for the transgressor. The theological term used to describe this is *propitiation*.

This emphasis on the blood of Christ has an important implication. It shows the seriousness of sin. Sin cannot be treated lightly and ignored. It was sin that made the sacrifice of Christ so necessary.



Over to you

Does the ascension of Jesus Christ have as big a place in your ministry as his birth, death and resurrection?

Have you discovered how useful the tabernacle can be in teaching the gospel to new believers and children?

There may be much superstition, witchcraft or other outward ceremonial practices in your society. How does this passage help you to address these issues and help your congregation?

CHRIST'S PRIESTLY SERVICE:

SUPERIOR AND COMPLETE IN
EVERY WAY



Hebrews 9:23-28

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Christ's personal return
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

These concluding verses of chapter 9 give us a comparison between Jesus' ministry and that of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. There are three appearances of Jesus Christ; on earth, in heaven as our high priest and at his return to earth. These contrast with the appearances of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Firstly the high priest would appear before the people at the altar of sacrifice in the temple courtyard, then when he entered the Holy of Holies and thirdly when he emerged from the tabernacle and people knew that God had accepted his offering. The writer focuses upon the glorious effect of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What these verses mean

Verse 23

It was necessary, then,

Our study passage is linked to the last part of Study 17, verses 18 to 22, i.e. the consecration of the earthly tabernacle. Even the splendour of the tabernacle (temple) Solomon built in Jerusalem

was inadequate. The animal sacrifices offered within the tabernacle could not overcome the huge chasm between God and man, as demonstrated by the existence of the curtain. Something else was required.

for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices,

The earthly tabernacle was only a copy (type, figure, shadow) of the reality of the heavenly tabernacle. The earthly tabernacle and all its contents had to be purified (cleansed) in order to fulfil their appointed purpose. This was to show God's great plan of how he was going to rescue his people through Jesus Christ. The ceremonial cleansing took place at the time of the inauguration of the first covenant, as stated by the writer in the preceding verses.

but the heavenly things themselves

In parallel with the earthly tabernacle the writer now seems to imply that heaven itself needs to be cleansed with better sacrifices. This raises the question: in what sense are heavenly things cleansed? Various suggestions have been made regarding this point. The best way to deal with this difficult phrase is to consider the main intention of the author, which is to emphasise the absolute superiority of the blood of the new covenant over that of the old. The book of Hebrews has already covered the glorious triumph of the sacrificial work of Christ, his resurrection and exaltation, his eternal high priesthood and his being now seated at the right hand of the throne of God. In a way these things are beyond our human understanding. What we can say is that heaven itself is affected by the unique and completed sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has made heaven accessible to sinners because when sinful people approach God in the name of Jesus Christ, they are covered by the virtue and value of his cleansing blood.

with better sacrifices than these.

Another question is raised by the author's use of the term "better sacrifices" when referring to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The use of the plural is probably to form the parallel with "these", which refer to the rites of the old system. These sacrifices were superseded by one complete, perfect, unique and effective sacrifice for sins. Therefore the sacrifice of Christ is "better", guaranteeing the "better covenant" which is founded on "better promises".

Verse 24

For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one;

The value of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is that he entered the holy place of the heavenly tabernacle. He has not entered an earthly tabernacle constructed by the hands of men, as did the Aaronic high priests (9:11). The two compartments of the earthly tabernacle were only copies or types of the heavenly tabernacle.

he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

The heavenly tabernacle is heaven itself, the very presence of God, for Christ has entered heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. In contrast to the ministry of the Aaronic high priests who entered the Holy of Holies to represent the people, the Lord Jesus Christ has entered the presence of God to secure access to God for his people. We are able to follow him with confidence and boldness right to the throne of God. The high priests of the old covenant did not actually have access to the presence of God and therefore were able to do nothing more than represent the people of God in a tabernacle that was only a copy of the greater and more perfect tabernacle.

Verse 25

Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again,

The Lord Jesus Christ is not in the presence of God re-offering himself as the sacrifice for our sins. The Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished what the Aaronic high priests could not possibly do. The sacrifice of himself is unique and perfect and truly effective. This he did on the cross and it is on the grounds of that completed work that we may approach God through him as our Mediator. While we continue to live in the imperfection of this body of flesh we still sin, but the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is continually applied to cleanse us from all sin (1 John 1:7-2:2).

the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year

The writer once again emphasises the significance of the sacrificial work of Christ in contrast to the ministry of the high priests of the old covenant. His is a completed work; their work was repetitious. Those high priests could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year, and they had to do this every year. Christ entered the heavenly tabernacle once for all and there he continues his ministry permanently and effectively.

with blood that is not his own.

The high priests of the former administration could only enter the inner tabernacle by virtue of the blood of the sacrificial victim, the blood of a bull for their own sins, and the blood of a goat for the sins of the people. These high priests were sinners themselves and could not possibly make effective atonement for sin. In contrast, the Lord Jesus Christ by virtue of his own perfection, the single sacrifice of himself, effectively deals with the sins of his people.

Verse 26

Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world.

The writer stresses further the finality of the sacrificial work of Christ. If the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is not of a once-for-all nature then it means that he would have to experience death repeatedly. It would indicate that the sacrifice of himself was neither perfect nor of infinite value. While the concept of the repeated animal sacrifices of the Aaronic high priests is understandable, the idea that a person should offer himself in death more than once is inconceivable and impossible.¹ Just as the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world as a human being once, so he died once.

But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Christ appeared when he came to this earth and took on a human form. He was born at Bethlehem as a baby and grew up in Nazareth. At the age of 30 he began his public ministry. This appearing was for the express purpose of dealing with sin conclusively (Mark 10:45; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 3:5). His coming into the world was once for all time. The end of the ages means the final phase of time, which the Bible calls the last days (1 Pet. 1:20). He became a human being in order to experience death and in this way to deliver his people from the tyranny of death. He came into the world to be the unique sacrificial lamb who really does take away sin (John 1:29).

¹ The rediscovery of this doctrine by the Reformers in the 16th century challenged the practice of the Roman Catholic Church. To this day the priests of the RC Church participate daily in the *sacrifice of the mass*. According to Scripture this is unnecessary. It also implies that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice was insufficient and therefore Christ needs to be sacrificed in the mass again. Bible-believing Christians would look upon this as blasphemous.

Verse 27

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

In the experience of human beings, men are born, live and die but once. The only exception to this rule will be those believers who will still be living at the time of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this world. Enoch and Elijah are two exceptions from the past. The point the author makes is that man dies but once, and after death comes judgment.

Verse 28

so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people;

Just as Christ died but once, so this is true in the history of all men, other than the exceptions already noted. Death is the result of sin and is inescapable (Gen. 2:16-17; Rom. 5:12; 6:23). Death itself is a judgment that disobedient and unbelieving man brought upon himself. The Lord Jesus Christ through his once-for-all death delivers from eternal judgment. He died as a substitute and as a sin-bearer (2 Co. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

For the many whose sins he bore he will appear a second time. Physical death is not the final judgment. Final judgment comes after death at the time of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who reject his substitutionary death in unbelief have no hope of eternal life and glorification and can only wait in fear of judgment. But those who trust in Christ wait eagerly for his return. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns it will not be to deal with our sins, for this he did when he came the first time and died on the cross. Sin, according to the terms of the new covenant, is no longer remembered by God and is fully absolved. Instead, believers anticipate the glories of the eternal inheritance and of seeing Christ and being made like him (1 John 3:2). The believer's salvation will be complete.



Summary

The blood of Christ is the focal point of the Christian faith. Salvation (restoring the broken relationship with God because of sin) depends upon Christ's death and the shedding of his blood as an atonement for our sin.

In Christ there is complete salvation. By his death he deals with the penalty of our sins. Christ's death covers sin committed under the terms of the old covenant, which is also forgiven. In this way the Old Testament believers become partakers of the spiritual and eternal inheritance. The earthly tabernacle and all that took place within it, overseen by sinful earthly priests, was teaching people how salvation would come. The very fact that animal sacrifices were a continuous, daily activity and people were barred from entering the place where atonement was made, showed the inadequacy of it all. All pointed to the real and true way; everything was but a shadow of the real thing. Christ, as the sinless high priest, could enter the heavenly tabernacle without having to offer himself again. He did not need to die again and again, like the continually sacrificed animals of the earthly tabernacle. His sacrifice on the cross was sufficient and did not need to be repeated. He removed sin by his own death and sacrifice, that would last for the rest of the age of this present world.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme – A three-fold perfect salvation

Introduction

Hebrews chapter 9 closes with the statement that Christ will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him. At first reading this may cause us to be uncertain about whether we are saved. Yet we read from other parts of Hebrews that Christ's work is finished, totally sufficient to cover all our sins. How do we make sense of all this? The Bible speaks about Christ's work of salvation for his people in a three-fold aspect.

1. Christ's work in the past

This relates to when he appeared the first time in human form on this earth. His purpose in coming was to save his people from their sins. He achieved this by dying on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of those for whom he died. Those who trust in Christ as their substitute and Saviour can say with assurance that they are saved (Eph. 2:8; Titus 3:4-5).

2. Christ's work now

Christ works now through his Spirit within people's hearts. The ascended Lord gave us the Holy Spirit to deal with the continuing presence of sin in our hearts. By heart we mean the person's inner being, what is often termed the soul. This work of the Spirit is called sanctification and because of it we can speak of being saved from the power of sin (Phil. 2:12-13). This continuing work of salvation is overseen by Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, having been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

3. Christ's future work

This is when Christ will appear on earth in visible form for the second time. This will be the final act in the believer's salvation. The believer will be rid completely of the presence of sin. Sin will not be present in the new heaven and new earth. The believer's glorified body will be reunited with the born again soul. Salvation will have been completed and will last for ever and ever (Rom. 8:22-23; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 9:28).

Conclusion

The believer can often go through an experience as if they are being saved again. Christ's presence can be so close and intimate that they may consider that they had not been saved before. Yet they were saved when they first trusted in Christ for salvation. Their life is a continuing experience of being saved, experiencing such precious moments and encouragements. All will be completed when Christ returns. That is the great hope for the Christian believer and helps him or her in their present life. 2 Corinthians 1:10 ² summarises this three-fold salvation experience.

² He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us ...



Focus Point:

Christ's personal return

The New Testament frequently speaks of our Lord's return to earth to bring about the completion of God's plan of salvation from sin (Matt. 24:30; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 1:7, 22:20). These texts show that Christ himself will return, which must be insisted upon because false teachers have taught otherwise. Some have denied the whole idea of our Lord's return as they reject anything supernatural and the authority of Scripture. Others try to avoid a literal physical return of Christ by saying that texts that speak of it are referring to Christ's resurrection or to times of spiritual revival.

Many people have made a special study of this subject and have devised schemes designed to show when Christ will come, and the order of events surrounding his coming. We are warned of the dangers of such schemes (Acts 1:7) and it is best to concentrate on the promise of his coming and its purposes.

The Scriptures make clear that Christ himself in person will return in glory, surrounded by hosts of angels, and that he will be seen all over the world. It will be his day of vindication after ages of opposition and rejection (Matt. 24:27-31).

Many important events will take place when Christ returns. Here are some of them:

1. The resurrection of the just and the unjust (John 5:27-31).
2. The judgment of all, appointing believers to eternal life and unbelievers to eternal condemnation (2 Thess. 1:6-10, Rev. 20:11-15; Matt. 25:46).
3. The eternal union of Christ with his people (1 Thess. 4:13-16).
4. The reward of Christ's servants (Matt. 25:14-23; 1 Tim. 4:8).
5. The ridding of the world of every vestige of sin and its effects and the bringing in of the new heaven and new earth (1 Co. 15:50-57; Rom. 8:22-25; 2 Pet. 3:10-13).

Further reading on Christ's second coming can be found in the James Preachers' Study Papers in a Focus Point in Study 14, page 134.



Over to you

How central is Christ in your preaching? Are you able to direct people to him even if you are preaching from the Old Testament?

Do your people have a correct understanding of how their sins were removed? Can you help them from this passage?

How are your worship services conducted? Is there any hint of doing things that were done in the earthly tabernacle of the Old Testament? What should be the focus of your worship service?

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE:

ONCE-FOR-ALL



Hebrews 10:1-18

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: An eternal council
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The writer has been persuading his readers of the futility of turning from Christ back to Old Testament religion. The main argument is the perfection of Christ as the believer's high priest. Christ's priesthood is far superior to the priesthood of the Old Testament that was inadequate and only temporary. The subject of Christ as the great high priest began to be developed from 4:14. The writer has been making reference to the insufficiency of the Aaronic priests by describing the repetitive nature of their work. This is contrasted to Christ's priestly work which needed to be carried out just once and was perfectly satisfactory for the rest of time. The writer now concludes the argument by bringing these two opposites out in their fullness. It is the writer's final plea for his readers to grasp the great truth that Christ is the complete fulfilment and therefore the end of all the Old Testament ritual.

What these verses mean



1. The inadequacy of the Aaronic sacrifices (10:1-4)

Verse 1

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves.

Here is a repetition of the shortcomings of the Old Testament ritual. It has already been pointed out that the law and the tabernacle and its ministry were but shadows. A shadow is like a sketch by an artist showing a suggestion he has in mind but lacking substance and completeness. The law and the related sacrificial system lacked substance as shadows and they were not the real thing. It is Christ alone as the high priest of the new covenant who secures the reality of the promised blessings, described here as the good things that are coming.

For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

The fact that offerings for sins had to be made repeatedly showed that those sacrifices were ineffective in dealing with sin and unable to make the sinner perfect. Perfection is understood as referring to the cleansing of the conscience which is only found through faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not moral perfection but the gift of a complete cleansing in God's sight through Christ's perfect sacrifice.

Verse 2

If it could, would they not have stopped being offered?

If the conscience had been cleansed by the animal sacrifices then there would not have been any need to offer sacrifices continually.

For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.

The animal sacrifices continued and so did the guilt of the worshippers. Had the animal sacrifices been able to make things perfect then the worshippers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. Fear of God's judgments arises from the knowledge of sin, and it is only through the shed blood of Christ that the conscience is delivered from the sense of moral guilt before God.

Verse 3

But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins,

The sacrifices of the old system constituted a perpetual reminder of sin. They emphasised separation from God by sin and the vital need to remove sin. However, because of the repetitious nature of the sacrifices it meant that the sacrifices themselves were not perfect and could not possibly deal with sin conclusively. Each year, on the Day of Atonement, the people, including the high priest, were visibly reminded of their sinfulness and of the need of a perfect sacrifice for sin to provide forgiveness and reconciliation. In contrast to these constant reminders of sin God provides under the terms of the new covenant the promise that their sins will be remembered no more (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12).

Verse 4

because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Although ordained of God the animal sacrifices of the old system could not possibly atone for sin for that is exactly what they were, animal sacrifices. No matter how perfect physically the animal may have been it could never have served as a moral substitute for God's highest creature. Only man, who is a rational and responsible being, can serve as a proper equivalent and substitute for man. The Son of God became a human being so that he might die and offer himself as the perfect man, absolutely pure and free of sin and then through his resurrection and exaltation guarantee eternal life for his people.



2. The death of Christ fulfils the will of God (10: 5-10)

Verses 5-7

The writer now turns to the Old Testament to provide biblical proof that the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the will of God in offering himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin. The reference is to words spoken in Psalm 40:6-8.

Verse 5

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said,

This paragraph is introduced by the word "Therefore" to show the link with the preceding section. The words are directly applied to the Lord Jesus Christ when he came into the world.

***“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;***

A body was prepared for the eternal Son of God through the sovereign and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35). In that body, given to him by God his Father, the Lord Jesus Christ fully obeyed the will of the Father, even to the point of death (Phil. 2:8; 1 Pet. 2:22, 23). It was the Father’s will that he should die, laying down his life for his sheep (John 10:11-18), for the Father had purposed to save a people for himself through his Son (Matt. 1:21; John 6:37, 39).

Verse 6

***with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.***

God did not want sacrifices that were devoid of humble and living obedience. He had no pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin. All of the sacrifices in the world can never form an acceptable substitute for personal obedience, repentance and faith. Under the terms of the new covenant God declares that he will form a people who have a heart to do the will of God and fulfil his Word (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10). The Lord Jesus Christ sealed this covenant promise, securing the salvation of his people through his total obedience to the will of the Father, tasting death in his body (2:9-10). His obedience obtained eternal salvation for the believer, cleansing the conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).

Verse 7

Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—

The Old Testament Scriptures are full of references to the Lord Jesus Christ and bear testimony to his person, his incarnation, saving work on the cross, resurrection and exaltation (Luke 24:25-27, 44; John 5:39, 46; 1 Co. 15:3-4).

I have come to do your will, O God.’”

The writer continues to quote the words of David as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. That the Lord Jesus Christ should come into the world to do the will of God is based upon the Scripture. His death on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin was according to the sovereign will of God and was not a secondary purpose because the Jews rejected Christ as their King.

Verse 8

First he said,

In verses 8 - 10 the writer explains the significance of the scripture just quoted.

“Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made).

The sacrifices of the old system were offered according to the requirements of the law as commanded by God. The people, however, brought their sacrifices and made their offerings but their lives dishonoured God. God was displeased with them because of the lack of true repentance and a loving commitment to God.

Verse 9

Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second.

God knew that this would happen and he had already provided (his will) for the ritual to be abolished (the first). In this way the old covenant and its sacrificial system are replaced by the new covenant (the second), through the unique and perfect once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

Verse 10

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Through Christ's fulfilling the will of God by his sacrifice, all those who have trusted Christ are “made holy”. This phrase does not describe the person's condition of personal purity, but the position of being set apart as God's possession (1 Co. 1:2, 6:9-11). This means that salvation is more than forgiveness of sin; it is being acceptable before God. The writer emphasises again that Christ's offering is absolutely adequate and final, for it accomplishes everything which the animal sacrifices could never do.



3. Christ's death perfects eternally those that are sanctified (10:11-18)

Verse 11

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

The superiority of the sacrifice of Christ is emphasised further for it is a completed work in contrast to the incomplete work of the Levitical priests. Once again the readers are reminded of the imperfect nature of the old covenant sacrifices as they were offered continually, daily and yearly. The priests were engaged in this unending ministry. The reason that such repeated sacrifices were required was because they could not take away sins.

Verse 12

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins,

In contrast to the ministry of the old covenant priest, the sacrificial ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is a completed work. The sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely perfect for it is a single sacrifice that is effective for all time. It does not have to be repeated. The sacrifices of the old system had to be repeated because of their imperfection.

he sat down at the right hand of God.

The completed work of the Lord Jesus in offering sacrifice is demonstrated by his return to the glory of heaven, where he is seated at the right hand of the Father. He did this after having died on the cross. He is no longer engaged in offering sacrifice for sins. His work as Saviour is complete and now he rules with authority as the King.

Verse 13

Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool,

The Lord Jesus Christ is not inactive at the right hand of the Father for he intercedes for his people, helping and supporting them throughout the trials and difficulties of life. The writer here is making clear how the Lord Jesus Christ is administering his kingdom. He is subduing his enemies and all who oppose his kingdom. The enemies of God will not only be subdued after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ but are being subdued already through his present reign at the right hand of the Father. The

complete conquest of the enemies of Christ and God is assured for he has already defeated Satan through his death on the cross (John 12:31-32, 16:11, 33). The delay in the return of Christ is to prolong, as it were, the day of grace and salvation (2 Co. 6:2). God is extending his mercy and longsuffering so that the unrepentant may yet be saved (2 Pet. 3:9-10).

Verse 14

because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.

The single, unique sacrifice of Christ accomplishes what the law and the old covenant could never do. His death is truly effective in the lives of all who trust in him for he secures eternal life on their behalf. Acceptance by God is immediate upon the person's trusting in Christ. The effect of Christ's sacrifice is also a continuous one for the believer as his life changes and he becomes more like Christ in his behaviour and character. This is what is meant by the phrase "being made holy" and is also described by theologians as sanctification (see Focus Point in study 20 on page XX). This process of change in the believer is linked to Christ's being seated at the right hand of the Father, acting on behalf of the believer through the work of his Spirit.

Verse 15

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this.

The writer quotes Jeremiah 31:33-34 as biblical proof that forgiveness is only found in the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Scriptures, having inspired and guided men to record God's revelation to them in writing.

First he says:

It was God who spoke in this way through the prophet Jeremiah.

Verse 16

***"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord.
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds."***

God said that he would make a covenant through which he would completely transform his people, changing them inwardly and dealing with their sins conclusively. No longer will the law be

HEBREWS 10:16-18 and Summary

written on stones but be written upon the hearts and minds of people. External obedience to rules will be changed to an internal transformation of the person. Now the person will want to obey God because their heart and mind has been changed. They will do this because they want to do it not because they are told to do it. A person can only experience this inward change because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 17

Then he adds:

The writer reminds us of something else that was included in Jeremiah's prophecy, something really remarkable.

“Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

Under the new covenant God will not remember his people's sins. He chooses to treat his people as though they had never committed all those lawless deeds.

Verse 18

And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

The taking away of sin is only found through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 26:28; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 10:43). The new covenant, which provides for the forgiveness of all sins and lawlessness, has superseded the old, having been sealed with the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ is superior to all that existed under the old covenant, its sacrifices and priesthood. There is no reason why anyone should abandon the Christian faith and return to the ways of Judaism.



Summary

The writer, in this part of the book, makes one further application of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ to demonstrate his superiority over Aaron. He provides further proof that the old covenant has been superseded by the new covenant. He does this firstly by showing the inadequacy of the animal sacrifices that were offered under the old covenant. This was demonstrated by the constant repetition of these acts that did not remove the guilt of the

Summary continued on page 201

Summary continued from page 200

worshippers. The blood of animals could not possibly take away the sins of the people. By contrast the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, completed on the cross, fulfilled the will of God. The writer demonstrates this by quoting from Psalm 40 where God the Father prepared a human body for his Son, Jesus. It was the Father's will that Jesus, through death, should save his people. This was more important than external religious ritual, such as animal sacrifices. The old and external sacrificial system had to be continual; the sacrifice of Christ was once-for-all. After his sacrifice was completed, Christ ascended into heaven to sit at the Father's right hand to rule as King. The culmination of this rule will be that all Christ's enemies will become his footstool. The difference between the old and new covenant is that the new will not be written on stone, but on the hearts and minds of the people. Again the writer quotes from the Old Testament, this time from Jeremiah. The prophet foretells the inward transformation that will supersede the external observance of rules. Added to all this is the promise that God will no longer remember the sins of his people. Any idea then of returning to the old ways or of re-establishing the old covenant sacrifices some time in the future fails to understand the temporary purpose of the former ceremonial system and its replacement by a more wonderful and lasting way.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: Why did Jesus Christ come?

His life was one of sorrow and grief. The climax of his life was the agony of bearing our sins. Why did he do it?

1. Christ came by agreement

- (a) The plan originated in the mind and heart of the Father.
- (b) The Son was in harmony with what was planned and the love that motivated it.
- (c) The Son agreed to take the responsibility of the terrible suffering involved.

2. Christ came willingly

- (a) He was not forced to do it by human need or demand.
- (b) Although the Jews and Romans were involved in his death, Christ gave himself.

3. Christ came obediently

- (a) Though he was tempted to avoid the cross, he did not yield to that temptation (Matt. 4:1-11, 26:39; John 12:27).
- (b) Christ completed the work he was given to do (John 17:4, 19:30).

Application

Our Lord is a Saviour to be worshipped, loved and trusted completely.



Focus Point:

An eternal council

One of the ways in which we can be helped to be sure of our security in Jesus Christ is to remember that we have been loved with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). When we turn to the New Testament we find a number of clues as to what this means. Such verses as John 17:2, 3, 6; Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 10:5-7 and 1 Peter 1:20 point to a plan for the redemption of God's chosen ones. The plan was devised and determined in eternity, in the heart and mind of God, before the creation of the world.

Bible scholars have deduced from the New Testament evidence that there is an eternal council in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit agreed to the plan and to the part that each would play in it. This is sometimes called the Covenant of Redemption. This covenant is between equals, the three persons of the Trinity. The Father devised the plan to give the Son an innumerable company of people as an inheritance; the Son agreed to carry out the plan and to endure the suffering involved; the Spirit undertook to bring the plan to completion in the lives of those whom God chose (the elect).

By contrast the covenants God made with man were between two unequal parties. God imposed a range of benefits and requirements on those who claimed to be his people. God made covenants with Noah (Gen. 9:1-17), with Abraham (Gen. 17:10-14) and with Moses

(Ex. 19:19). The new covenant, sometimes referred to as the Covenant of Grace, is of the same kind (Jer. 31:31-34). In these covenants God does not say that if people obey him he will save them from their sins. Rather he says that he will overpower the people's resistance, make them his, forgive them and provide all that they need. God goes further by promising that he will give his Spirit to his people enabling them to obey his laws.

The apostle Paul covers the whole scope of God's plan in Romans 8:29-30.

Those whom God foreknew (loved before time)

He justified (because of the atoning death of Christ) and

He also glorified (completing the work within the believer).

The Salvation of God's people is rooted deeply in eternity in the very being of God.



Over to you

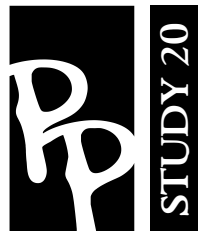
How do your people view the gospel? Do they see it as Jesus Christ giving eternal life only or that he saves from sin by putting the person right with God? Without forgiveness there cannot be new life.

How do you pastor those believers who lack spiritual assurance? Reminding them of decisions they may have taken in the past or anything they have done will not help them. Rather they need to be taken to the plan of God made before the world began (Jer. 31:3).

How much of your preaching and teaching focuses on the once-for-all atoning work of Christ? How has the understanding of this passage helped you in the way you will preach?

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

AND HIS PEOPLE



Hebrews 10:19-25

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Sanctification
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

So far in the book the writer has been convincing his Hebrew Christian readers of why they should not give up their Christian faith and return to the old way. He has demonstrated the superiority of Christ in everything. Angels, the patriarchs and high priests of the Old Testament were all inferior. Christ's new covenant was better than the old one. The remainder of the book is largely concerned with the need to maintain the Christian life. Our present passage provides a kind of introduction to that theme. The basis of a healthy Christian life is a living fellowship with God that has been made possible by Jesus Christ (10:19-23) and a living fellowship with God's people, our fellow church members (10:23-25).

What these verses mean



1. Confidence to enter the presence of God (10:19 – 21)

Verse 19

Therefore,

There is no break in the reasoning between what has been written and what is to follow. There is a link between the doctrines explained and the applications of them that follow to the end of the book

brothers,

But before the vital application of the teaching of the high priesthood of Christ begins, the readers are addressed as “brothers”. In view of their present faltering in the faith, the writer does not want to give the impression that he has passed judgment upon them as not being genuine believers. That status will become apparent according to how they respond to the truth and the teaching of the book.

since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

The way into the very presence of God has been opened up in such a way that all believers may enter that presence with confidence. Believers may approach God with confidence through the Lord Jesus Christ. The writer has already written about this in 4:14-16 when showing how Jesus is the believer’s high priest. (See also Ephesians 3:12.) Previously access to God was barred by the sin of man and no-one could enter his presence. Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and it was only permissible to do this once a year, and only when the high priest took the sacrificial blood with him. Now believers have a high priest who ministers perpetually on their behalf in the very presence of God. We do not dare approach God on the strength of our own virtue but only through the merits of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, his own sacrifice.

Verse 20

by a new and living way

Believers are encouraged to enter the presence of God by the new and living way. The old way was by the earthly tabernacle, which was only a type of the heavenly sanctuary. It lacked substance and

was of no permanent value. The way of the Lord Jesus Christ is “new”, in contrast to the old, and because it is the new covenant. It will never become obsolete or be superseded by any other way. It is also “living” because this way is guaranteed not by dead sacrifices but by a living rescuer and exalted high priest. Christ himself told his disciples in the upper room that he is the “way” and “the life” through whom we must approach God (John 14:6). This is the way of truth and therefore there is no other way into the presence of God.

opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,

The new and living way of entering God’s presence had to overcome the veil of the old covenant that barred the way. That obstacle was removed by being torn apart (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). This barrier, both in its physical and symbolic sense, has gone for ever. This happened because the Lord Jesus Christ dealt with sin through the suffering his body endured as he gave himself to die on behalf of his people. When the Lord Jesus Christ established the Lord’s Supper he broke the bread and spoke of it as being symbolic of his body “which is broken for you” (1 Co. 11:24). It is through his broken body that the veil which once prevented access into God’s presence has been torn apart and the way opened up.

Verse 21

and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

This way into the presence of God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, is for all believers of all cultural backgrounds and historical ages. Our earlier studies of the book showed how the Lord Jesus Christ is the believer’s high priest. He ministers in the presence of God on behalf of his people as the forerunner, guaranteeing their entry into the eternal rest (6:19, 20). He is the high priest who is seated at the right hand of the Father having completed his work of sacrificing (8:1). Christ now reigns in glory waiting for the day of the complete subduing of all his enemies (10:11-13). He is the high priest of the good things to come promised under the terms of the new covenant (9:11). He is the high priest who lives for ever and intercedes for his people so that they will be saved eternally (7:24, 25) and who has dealt with sin through the once-for-all sacrifice of himself (7:26-27). He is the high priest who is over the household of God and who therefore is superior to all the members of the household. He is over the entire household of God, which consists of all genuine believers from both old and new covenant times.

2. Four exhortations (10:22-25)

Back in 4:14-16 the writer stressed the practical consequences of Christ's being a great high priest. Since then the writer has added reason upon reason for his call to his readers to go on with the Lord Jesus Christ and not turn back. Now the author confirms these same truths and builds further upon them. It is not sufficient to marvel at the greatness of Christ and all that he did for sinful people. If that is all we have done, being impressed with what we have had brought before us, then we have failed to grasp its meaning and challenge. We must not stay with mere head knowledge because in the end it will condemn us. Head knowledge is very important because it is the ground upon which our faith is built. However it must lead to action. As we come to verse 22 we are still in the same sentence that began with "Therefore" in verse 19. What the writer is saying is that as a result of the doctrine he has laid out in the first part of the book, there has to be action by the reader. There are four exhortations, each one beginning with the phrase "let us". What is in the head must now be applied to the relationship the believer has with God. This is spiritual progress or what we could call development.

Verse 22

let us draw near to God

The first exhortation begins with a statement that is at the very heart of the gospel and of Christian experience. Every Christian believer is a priest (1 Pet. 2:5-9) with access to God. There are no restrictions, to the time of day or circumstances. It is amazing that a believer can, without any physical movement of any kind, wherever he or she may be and however they feel, by faith enter the very presence of the eternal God. This has all been made possible because the Lord Jesus Christ is in the presence of God as the believer's high priest. The believer has that facility so freely available and therefore he or she is encouraged to use it.

with a sincere heart

Though the way into God's presence is completely open for the believer, the approach has to be right. There are two characteristics which the writer sets out. Firstly drawing near to God has to be done with a sincere heart. This means trusting completely and only in Christ. There is to be no trust in oneself or any kind of outward ceremony.

in full assurance of faith,

The second attitude the believer must adopt in drawing near to God is without wavering or hesitation. This is because the person's confidence is in Christ and not in himself. This is not arrogance but humble dependence. God is to be approached with the absolute conviction that the believer comes to him through the Lord Jesus Christ alone. This is the only way in which worship is accepted by God (1 Pet. 2:5).

having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience

A reason why the believer can approach God with confidence is because Christ has assumed the guilt and suffered punishment in the believer's place (1 John 3:19-20). As the believer comes to God the heart is cleansed from the conviction of moral guilt through faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanses the conscience from dead works so that the believer may worship or serve God acceptably. The dead works may be in the form of the ceremonies of the old covenant or according to the meaningless traditions of culture and the world (Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). Whatever the case, genuine believers will desire to worship the living God acceptably, in spirit, and not in empty and lifeless forms (1 Thess. 1:9-10). The writer is surely borrowing the idea of sprinkling from the Old Testament ceremonial rituals with which his readers would be very familiar (e.g. Lev. 14:7).

and having our bodies washed with pure water.

A second reason is given why the believer can draw near to God. The writer again is referring to a physical ritual of the Old Testament but applying it as a spiritual truth. Levitical priests approached God having been washed with water (Ex. 29:4). In Exodus 30:17-22 Moses is given instructions about a bronze basin in which the priests were to wash before they entered the Tent of Meeting. The believer's body is washed through the cleansing and purifying power of the Holy Spirit. It is probably in this sense that we should understand the words of the Lord Jesus Christ spoken to Nicodemus in which regeneration and cleansing are prerequisites for citizenship in the kingdom of God. The cleansing takes place through the application of the Word of God to the life of the individual (Eph. 5:26).

Verse 23

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,

The second exhortation is for the believer to hold tightly to the confession of his/her hope. This is to be done without wavering. There have been similar calls made earlier in the book (see 3:6, 14, 4:14). Jesus warned his disciples that the Christian life would be beset by trouble (John 16:33). These Hebrew Christians were experiencing severe persecution and opposition. This was why many were tempted to turn away from Christ. The call here, as elsewhere, is to persevere, not to give up. One reason for this is that no matter what the believer suffers in this life, there is then a glorious “hope” awaiting him, if he remains faithful (Matt. 24:13).

for he who promised is faithful.

The Christian hope is rooted in the unchanging promises of God and the believer flees to this hope in which he finds refuge (6:18). As that verse declared this hope proves to be sure and steadfast and is like an anchor that takes hold within the presence of God. God is faithful and he will remain true to his promises. The writer will deal with this further in chapter 11 with examples of those who in the past have been unswerving in great trials and testings.

Verse 24

And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

The third exhortation concerns the way in which the readers of the book are to regard others. There is an essential link between drawing near to God, remaining faithful to him and his Word and having a relationship with God’s people (the three elements of faith, hope and love). It would appear that this particular group of believers was neglecting other believers. Previously they had shown great concern for their fellow believers, especially those who had suffered for the faith, including the writer (10:32-34). But since then they had become preoccupied with themselves. This selfish spirit was proving to be provocative, creating tension and bad feeling among the believers in the local congregation. Believers are to love one another (John 13:34-35). God has set his love upon his people and demonstrated his unselfish spirit in giving his Son to be the atonement for their sins (1 John 4:7-12). This is the example his people are to follow. Those who are genuine believers will love each other (1 John 5:1) and are to do so fervently (1 Pet. 1:22). Church

members are to be deeply and continuously concerned for each other. This is more than just sitting together in meetings for worship. A church is a living body in which each member has a vital relationship with all the others. To spur one another on means to urge one another to Christlike conduct. A church should be a loving, caring community.

Verse 25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another —

The fourth exhortation. It would seem that some of the believers had become slack in their church attendance. This may have been out of fear in the face of persecution. In doing so, they were a discouragement to the believers who did meet together, no matter what the cost. The following principles that feed off each other arise:

- Spiritual coldness leads to neglect of fellowship
- Neglect of fellowship leads to spiritual coldness

If believers are to be constantly concerned for the spiritual welfare of other Christians, they will need to be in constant fellowship with them. Encouraging one another involves getting alongside fellow believers to strengthen their resolve to persevere. It will also involve lovingly and tenderly warning some believers if they are in danger of going astray.

and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This describes the day of our Lord's return. It will be a day when every believer must give an account of their Christian life. One test on that day will be how the Christian has treated fellow believers. This day will be a day of glory for the church of Christ. The fellowship of believers now is a preparation for that day.



Summary

The writer has completed his explanation of the superiority of the Son to the prophets, Moses and Aaron, all of whom were vital parts of the old covenant. His purpose was to encourage his readers to persevere in the Christian faith rather than resort to the ways of Judaism. He now focuses attention upon the importance of faith and how that Christian faith must be lived out. The Christian life is rooted in the atoning work of Christ. From that basis the believer is able to have confidence about coming into God's presence. This is a new way, differing from the old way by not having to depend on dead animal sacrifices. Christ is the living sacrifice who ministers in the presence of God on behalf of his people (Christian believers). As a result of this access to God through Christ the believer is exhorted to draw near to God in sincerity. This can be done because the person's trust is completely in the Lord Jesus Christ. They have been cleansed and purified by the Holy Spirit. God keeps his promises and access to him by this way can be wholly depended upon. Being assured of this upward relationship the believer has also to give attention to the relationship with other believers. Believers should show the same selfless love and attention to others as they have experienced from Christ. This involves encouraging each other in love and doing practical and helpful things. This cannot be done when isolated, so it is vital that believers meet. When they do all believers should endeavour to be present. It is a good habit to develop and believers should not neglect opportunities of gathering together.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme – The quality of church fellowship (10:24-25)

Introduction

There are three reasons why church life should be of the highest quality. Firstly it is the evidence that Christ is alive, secondly it is

a powerful witness to unbelievers, and thirdly it strengthens discouraged or wavering believers.

1. Quality church life requires that we have a close relationship with each other

Our text shows that this means three things:

- (a) We must consider one another. We are to be concerned for each other's physical and spiritual welfare. This concern is to be continual, not just a passing thought or occasional interest. This concern is also to be real, not vague or superficial.
- (b) We must spur one another on. Our object has to be to establish a community of love and mutual service.
- (c) We must encourage one another. This will mean getting closer to others to share their burdens, to strengthen them, and perhaps at times gently to warn them if they are in danger of going astray.

2. Quality church life requires that members regularly meet together

This is essential if we are to pay close attention to each other, and to develop love and trust out of which a loving fellowship grows. We see that fellowship is more than sitting in the same congregation and singing the same hymns. Church life is the function of a living spiritual body (1 Co. 12:19-27).

Conclusion

Both these things are true: carelessness about attending church fellowship leads to spiritual coldness. Spiritual coldness leads to carelessness about attending the fellowship.



Focus Point:
Sanctification

Sanctification is the process, enabled by the Holy Spirit, by which believers grow in Christlikeness and are prepared for everlasting glory. The basic meaning of “to sanctify” is “to set apart”. Sanctification is a progressive work of the Holy Spirit in believers by which he makes them increasingly holy (set apart for God). This is the work of making them conform more and more to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29). The work is never completed in this life, but will be complete in heaven.

There are a number of false ideas even among Bible-believing churches as to how this process is worked out. Some deny that it is a process but happens in an instant of total commitment. Others say that it is entirely the work of the Spirit and that we must simply believe that it is happening. We are told “to let go and let God”, or that we must stop fighting against sin and let the Lord do it for us.

All this kind of teaching is contrary to Hebrews 10:19-25 where we have a persistent call to action. Sanctification is indeed the work of the Spirit (Eph. 3:16) but he does not do the work for us. He enables us to persevere (12:1), to fight (Eph. 6:10-18) and to grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:18).



Over to you

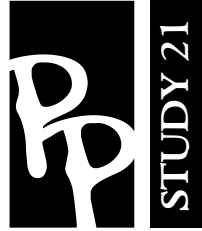
How do you teach Christian doctrine? Is it as a subject to be learnt or do you strive to show what effect it should have on the lives of your people?

What is important to you in your ministry: building up numbers in the church roll or developing a loving Christian community? Does your answer mean you have to change what you preach and teach?

Is your church so dependent on you that it would collapse if you were taken away?

WARNING AND

ENCOURAGEMENT



Hebrews 10:26-39

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: God's wrath
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

This passage falls into two parts. The first part, verses 26-31, is a warning against apostasy. The second part, verses 32-39, is an encouragement to persevere. The writer is continuing to build on what he has written before. The old arrangement has been replaced with a new one. It is not a matter of choosing one or the other. The old way is finished with and cannot be returned to. The new order opens up a direct way to God that the old covenant could not achieve. There was nothing wrong with the old covenant itself; the fault lay with sinful man who could not keep his part of it. In the new covenant the Lord Jesus Christ makes all the difference. He made a sacrifice that deals effectively with sin. Believers have full access to the presence of God through the Lord Jesus Christ alone. To turn away from these privileges is a rejection of truth. This would be deliberate disobedience and bring about inescapable consequences. There is no alternative to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor is there any neutral ground.

What these verses mean



1. Warning against apostasy (10:26-31)

Verse 26

If we deliberately keep on sinning

The writer emphasises the nature of disobedience. His readers would have been familiar with the distinction Numbers 15:22-31 makes between deliberate and unintentional sin. Deliberate sin is described as being defiance against God. A person with this nature is careless about the consequences (1 John 3:6). Such an attitude is characterised by the constant repetition of sinning.

after we have received the knowledge of the truth,

The deliberateness of such a sinful attitude is highlighted because such a person has heard of the truth. They do not defy God in ignorance but do so in a calculated way. This happens when a person understands the truth in his mind but there is no heart commitment to God. They know of the sacrifice that Christ made but look upon it as though they have no need of it.

no sacrifice for sins is left,

Jesus said that he is the way, and the truth and the life (John 14:6). There is no other way of salvation. If God's provision of salvation is rejected for whatever reason, then there is nothing left, there is no alternative for dealing with sin. People in this position put themselves under the judgment of God for there is no other way of salvation.

Verse 27

but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

When a person deliberately cuts himself (herself) off from God and the way he has provided then the only prospect is fearful and frightening. What awaits such a person is a judgment that is declared in terms of burning. This judgment is an inextinguishable fire which flows from the very person of God. The fire of God's judgment is indicative of the intensity of his wrath (Matt. 3:10-12; Mark 9:43-49; Luke 3:9, 16, 17; John 15:6; 2 Thess. 1:8; 2 Pet. 3:7; Jude 7). In the case of the readers they would be rebelling knowingly against the covenant sealed with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, rejecting salvation and choosing judgment.

Verse 28

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

The writer turns to a specific law found in Deuteronomy 17:6-7 where the offence was idolatry. Under the old covenant all cases of apostasy were to be handled with all due severity. To safeguard against wild or false accusations and to ensure the rightness of the verdict, the corroborating testimony of two or three witnesses was required in all instances of idolatry or attempts to lead others into idolatry. Idol worship is turning away from God and his truth and replacing it with something else. Idolaters are described as deaf and blind (Is. 42:18-20) and eventually they will become like the idols they worship. Idol worship is demonic and therefore ends in death. Under the old covenant there were to be no exceptions and there was no provision for extenuating circumstances or mercy (Deut. 13:6-11).

Verse 29

How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished

To turn away from Christ is more serious in God's sight even than breaking the law of Moses. If apostates under the old covenant were to be dealt with so strictly and put to death, then it is reasonable to understand that those who turn away from the gospel of the new covenant will be dealt with even more severely. They will suffer eternal death. God in his justice holds the individual to account according to the amount of light that has been given. The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility (Matt. 10:14-15; 11:20-24; 12:39-42). We are given three reasons why those who turn from the Christian faith are reckoned as guilty and deserving of eternal punishment.

who has trampled the Son of God under foot,

The first reason is that Jesus Christ was not just one more prophet who could be spurned. He was not to be treated as a leader of some new religion. He was the final Word to man from God who created and sustains all things. Furthermore he was God himself in human flesh. To turn away from Christ is to side with those who crucified him (Matt. 21:31-41; John 1:10-11).

who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant

The second reason for the seriousness of turning away from Christ

HEBREWS 10:29-31

is that people who turn away do not regard the blood of Christ as precious and vital to salvation (1 Pet. 1:18; Matt. 26:28). They treat the shed blood as nothing special and having no heavenly significance.

that sanctified him,

Those who at one time received the knowledge of the truth (v. 26) and for a time ordered their lives accordingly were in a literal sense set apart from those who were ignorant of the gospel. It is in this sense that they were sanctified, which literally means set apart.

and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

The third reason is that the Spirit is insulted. It would have been through the work of the Holy Spirit that they heard the gospel and for a time responded to it. Now to spurn the gospel is to insult the Spirit who had brought them this far. To depart from the gospel is to dishonour both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. No wonder the Father is offended.

Verse 30

For we know him who said,

The warning is concluded with two further Old Testament quotations to emphasise the seriousness of apostasy. They are from Deuteronomy 32:35-36.

“It is mine to avenge; I will repay,”

Paul quotes this text from Romans 12:19 dealing with God’s right to punish those who forsake Christ. The Old Testament quotation refers to the way in which God says he will destroy the enemies of his people. The application to the readers of Hebrews is that those who set themselves outside the new covenant will be destroyed as enemies.

and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”

The second quotation signifies that God will examine and sift his people and separate the genuine believer from the false. God will not allow his Son to be insulted. The Lord knows those who are his (2 Tim. 2:19) and his judgments are always based on truth (Rom. 2:2). He never makes a mistake.

Verse 31

It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The final declaration is that God is not to be trifled with. If we turn back from the faith the judgment of God is certain and will not be

averted by our simply saying we no longer believe. God remains the same no matter what our response. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. All other gods are false and therefore powerless. God is the one true God and he is the living God. All stand accountable to him as the God of all the earth. By rejecting the gospel the apostate cannot dismiss God or escape from him and instead falls into the hands of God to be confronted by him as his Judge. The day of judgment will be a fearful experience for all who do not know Christ as Saviour, and even more so for those who have deliberately turned away from him (Hos. 10:8; Zeph. 1:14-17; Luke 23:30; Rev. 6:15-17).



2. Encouragement to persevere (10:32-39)

Verse 32

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.

All through this book we are being warned about how far people can go in a Christian profession before turning their backs on it all. We have seen in 6:4-5 that they have the knowledge of the truth and received the light. We have to face the fearful possibility that this truth and light may prove to be superficial and temporary. Here we may see that such people may even go through much hardship because of the faith they profess.

Verse 33

Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.

The persecution had been intense. It involved public abuse, perhaps organised and official, at the hands of community and religious leaders. Paul found that the greatest opposition to the gospel was generated by unbelieving Jews who acted viciously and with intense hatred. In the case of the believers addressed in this book they had stood loyally with their brethren who were abused to an even greater degree. They did not allow their own comparative safety to lead them to abandon their suffering fellow believers, the unity of the body being maintained. Nor did they allow the public reproach to deter them from adhering to the Christian faith.

Verse 34

You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

The public shame and humiliation heaped upon some members of the local congregation provided the opportunity for these believers to show their love for their brethren who had been imprisoned. In spite of the brutal treatment shown to these Christians, the people to whom these words were written identified with those imprisoned for the faith. At some point they had joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods. Either as part of the original or ongoing storm of persecution, or because they had supported their imprisoned brethren, they had seen their homes and businesses destroyed. This they endured without complaint. No doubt they were disowned by unbelieving family members and probably severed from all matters regarding future inheritance. But they refused to buckle. Their conviction was that they have a better and an enduring possession in heaven. Their earthly possessions and inheritance were disregarded for they were seen as being of this world and of no lasting value. Instead their faith was focused upon that which is of eternal and enduring worth (Matt. 6:19-21; Luke 12:16-21; Acts 26:18; Col. 3:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; 1 John 2:15-17).

Verse 35

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

After joyfully accepting such suffering and abuse for Christ's sake, then to turn their backs upon him would be to throw away their confidence. It would be as if the gospel and the hope of the promised inheritance were worthless. This would be irrational. What Christ has secured for believers is real and definite, the ground of confidence and boldness. The Israelites allowed discouragement and difficulty to carry them into apostasy (Num. 14:3; Deut. 32:15-18). Lack of conviction will result in a similar failure if these believers do not come to their senses. Through Christian confidence, especially in the most adverse of circumstances, believers are to remember the great reward. This is the inheritance that is in Christ, which is eternal life. This is none other than union with God himself.

Verse 36

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Believers are to faithfully endure no matter what suffering and discouraging circumstances may arise in life. This is the will of God. To give up is to give up doing the will of God. Apostasy is disobedience.

Verse 37

For in just a very little while,

The phrase is very similar to that in Isaiah 26:20 – “For a little while.” The writer to the Hebrews uses the phrase to preface the words from Habakkuk. The prophet Isaiah calls upon the people to take refuge in their homes during the period of God’s judgment. They are to wait patiently until the time of danger has passed.

“He who is coming will come and will not delay.

This quotation is from Habakkuk 2:3-4 refers to a time of judgment, to the defeat of Israel’s enemy. The writer here is applying the prophecy to the final restitution of all things when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. Habakkuk calls upon the people of Judah to anticipate God’s judgment against the nation through the form of the Chaldean (Assyrian) invaders. The time of judgment will come upon the people without any doubt whatsoever. The people of Judah must be prepared through trusting in God alone, patiently waiting and persevering, never for a moment drawing back in unbelief. Believers are to persevere to the very end, knowing that Christ will return to this world in power and glory at which time he will judge the whole world and glorify his people. Through cleaving to Christ alone by faith, the believer is delivered from the condemnation of his sins (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Acts 4:12; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 6:23).

Verse 38

But my righteous one will live by faith.

And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”

The prophet Habakkuk was perplexed at the way God was ordering the affairs of the nation. At the heart of God’s reply to his questioning was the challenge that his people must trust him. They must live by faith in God. Justification through faith alone is the basic principle of biblical Christianity. The words of Habakkuk are quoted by Paul to demonstrate the truth of saving faith (Rom. 1:17;

HEBREWS 10:38 and SUMMARY

Gal. 3:11). The writer of Hebrews will continue on the theme of the importance of faith in the next chapter. Anyone who turns aside from the way of faith incurs the judgment of God from which there is no escape.

Verse 39

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Here the author declares his conviction that his readers are genuine believers and will persevere in the faith. A very strong warning regarding apostasy has been issued but the weight of evidence points in the direction that indicates their genuine faith. But anyone who turns away from the faith will face inevitable destruction. Destruction is the end of those who do not believe (Phil. 3:18-19; 2 Pet. 3:7). Turning away from the faith is evidence of unbelief and not being a part of the people of God (1 John 2:19). Persevering in the faith is the demonstration of being an heir of righteousness through faith. The writer has a pastoral heart and is cautiously hopeful of the spiritual state of those to whom he writes. He has reminded them of the need to live by faith and now he will encourage their faith by quoting a list of people who are great examples and who are commended for their faith.



Summary

Turning away from faith in Christ cannot be a mere decision of personal preference without serious consequences. Such a thing is an insult to God and merits his wrath. The writer therefore uses all kinds of arguments to urge his readers to persevere in the faith.

He draws their attention to the seriousness of deliberate sin, which is what they would be committing if they turned away. He spells out the judgment that came upon those who deliberately sinned in the Old Testament days. The reason for such action on God's part was that rejecting his Son was an insult. God will not let such a thing go and he has the right to vindicate his Son. However, for the believer in Christ there is encouragement. The writer reminds them of their early days of

Summary continued on page 223

Summary continued from page 222

trusting in Christ and the sufferings they went through knowing that they were temporary moments they were passing through. They knew better things were waiting for them that would last for ever. The readers are being urged to persevere, not to give up, to have patience. Habakkuk, a prophet in the Old Testament, could not understand all that was going on. God replied to his questions by saying that the righteous ones will live by faith. They may suffer and be puzzled by things that happen but their trust in God will see them through. Living by faith is an unchanged principle and transfers into the New Testament. Today Christians are accepted by God because of the faith they have in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ at Calvary. There is nothing else that counts and so the believer has to persevere in faith in Christ alone.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme : Final perseverance

Introduction

Final perseverance means going on with the Lord to the end of our days on earth and not defecting from the faith (Matt. 24:12-13). There are two aspects to which we must give attention.

1. God's promise

God has promised to bring all who trust in Christ through every trial to the last and then they will be in his blessed presence in eternal glory. This should save us from discouragement and despair when we suffer challenging experiences and when we fall into grievous sin or failure.

2. Our responsibility

God's promise does not mean that we do nothing. The Spirit who leads us to Christ for salvation at the same time gives new life (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12-13). This means that:

- (a) the Spirit within enables us to go on with Christ (Eph. 3:16)
- (b) calls to obedience and holiness are futile unless addressed to those who have the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:13-16)

- (c) we should daily seek the Lord's help to enable us to persevere. He uses all kinds of means for this:
 - (i) the promises, challenges and warnings of Scripture
 - (ii) the Lord's Supper
 - (iii) the fellowship we have with other believers in church life
 - (iv) the painful experiences of life (Rom. 5:3-5)
 - (v) Peter reminds his readers of the trusting and persevering example of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:21-23)

Conclusion

Both aspects, God's promises and our responsibility, are essential. To rest on the promises of God without obedience, or to seek to obey in our own strength without the Lord's enabling, are equally futile.



Focus Point: **God's wrath**

When we ask what God is like we must be sure to look into the Bible for the only reliable answer. Human opinion in this, as in everything else, is liable to distortion. This can only mislead us with serious consequences for our spiritual welfare and our everyday conduct.

Following human ideas leads either to a god who is nothing but angry against evil or to one who has no holiness but who condones evil in all its forms. The argument that many make that a loving God could not possibly eternally condemn sinners is in deep error, because it does not recognise the holiness of God, which must judge and condemn sin utterly. Only in the Bible do we discover that God has made himself known as totally hating sin and showing love to sinners.

Many people reject the idea of the wrath of God. One reason for this is that they can only think in terms of human anger. This is a mistake because there are at least four differences between our anger and God's wrath.

1. Our anger tends to arise within from self-centred resentment or from self-righteous indignation. God is angry against sin because his holy nature reacts against anything that is corrupt (Is. 5:24-25; Rom. 1:18).

2. We tend to lose control of ourselves; we descend into temper and become unreasonable. But God is slow to anger (Ex. 34:6; Jonah 4:1-2). God always acts according to reason and truth.
3. Our anger tends to be unpredictable and inconsistent, whereas God's anger is always to be expected and is never variable.
4. Human anger tends to cool after a time, but God's anger remains until his justice is satisfied or its cause is removed (Josh. 7:26).

At the end of time the day of wrath will destroy all that is evil. The fact that God is slow to anger should not lead people to think that they need not repent. Repentance is essential if they are to be saved by Christ from the wrath to come. (A Dictionary of Bible Knowledge, I. Stringer, Grace Publications).

The wrath of God is exhibited most clearly in the cross of Jesus Christ. There his wrath against sin is fully expressed in the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the same amazing display of God's glory we see this abounding love, because it was out of his sheer mercy that he caused his Son to bear the suffering of his wrath for our sins so that we might be saved.



Over to you

How balanced is your preaching ministry? There is a need to warn and to encourage. Take stock of your sermon notes from the last year.

How seriously do your people look upon sin? Does it matter to them or do they mourn over their shortcomings and failures, that they may have grieved the Spirit? Has your preaching lacked the terrible expectation of God's judgment?

Do you notice any of your congregation waning in their faith where once they were on fire for God? How would you make this passage applicable to their lives?

FAITH IN ACTION:

DEFINITION AND PRE-FLOOD ILLUSTRATION



Hebrews 11:1-7

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The meaning of faith
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The writer has carefully demonstrated the importance of relating to God through faith alone and of patiently enduring throughout life. The only way in which the promises of God can be realised by the believer is through faith, especially the hope of the eternal inheritance. It is only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his once-for-all sacrifice for sin that we can enter the very presence of God. There will be difficulties to be faced in this life but these are to be overcome through faith and not by compromise. To turn back from the promise of the new covenant sealed with the blood of Christ only results in the displeasure of God for he has declared that the “just shall live by faith”. The writer now presents many examples of believers who demonstrated by obedience to God the reality of the promises of God. Their faith took firm hold upon the reality of what God had promised although what God had promised could not be seen physically.

What these verses mean



1. Unseen reality and faith (11:1-3)

Verse 1

Now faith

This verse is best understood in the light of the fact that the faith that is being explained is a spiritual gift (Eph. 2:8). Here a definition of faith is provided. This is not intended to be an exhaustive definition as verse 6 contains an elaboration of the essence of biblical faith. The writer is showing what it means to believe in the promises of God.

is being sure of what we hope for

As on other occasions in the book faith is connected to hope. When most people talk about their hopes the element of confidence is entirely absent. They have certain longings and aspirations but the future is random and unpredictable. The outcome is by no means guaranteed.¹ Biblical hope is the certainty that God will keep his Word, including as yet unfulfilled promises. The use of the word “sure” is a guarantee, like a document proving the ownership of a property. What the writer is explaining is that if a person has faith then that in itself is proof that the person has possession of eternal life and all its blessings. These blessings are mainly focused on the promises of God about the future inheritance in glory. While faith and hope are two different elements, there is an indivisible link between the two.

and certain of what we do not see.

The author goes on to describe faith as placing our trust in things we cannot see but which are still real. Faith enables the Christian believer to be sure about spiritual realities to which the unbeliever is blind. It is not a vague hopefulness but a God-given certainty about things that are impossible to prove. Faith is not a gamble but it is based on knowledge.

Verse 2

This is what the ancients were commended for.

This verse forms the connection between biblical faith and the spiritual forefathers whose lives were shaped by faith in the

¹ J. P. Arthur (No Turning Back: Grace Publications)

promises of God. This kind of faith made godly men and women in the past the great examples they are. They persevered in the faith, confirmed by the fact that they received from God a favourable report. They were not more clever or better than others, but they exercised the gift of faith and are therefore rôle-models for all Christian believers.

Verse 3

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Faith must have an object. It is nonsense to say, "I have faith," unless that faith reaches out to something or someone. Spiritual faith is trusting in God, not a man-made idol or a product of human thinking or speculation. Faith is in God who has made himself known in the Bible and is the one who made the world. None of us were present when the world began so we cannot prove anything about what has happened. Spiritual faith bridges the gap, with certainty that the origin of creation is God himself. Before he spoke there was nothing apart from him (Ps. 33:6-9). God gave existence to everything (Ps. 90:2); he brought it into being.



2. Faith as exemplified by pre-flood believers (11:4-7)

Verse 4

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.

The first example of faith in action is Abel and speaks of a humble reliance on the mercy of God. The record of his life is found in Genesis 4:2-8. Abel and his older brother Cain were the children of Adam and Eve. According to what they had been taught, both brought sacrifices to worship God. Abel was a shepherd and brought the best of the firstborn lambs of his flock to God. Cain, who was a farmer, presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. As the two brothers worshipped, God demonstrated in some tangible manner that he accepted Abel and his worship but rejected Cain and his worship. Various suggestions have been made as to why God accepted Abel and his offering and rejected Cain and his offering. The author of the book of Hebrews through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit makes it abundantly clear that faith was the difference.

By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings.

Abel was a believer and Cain was not. It wasn't the nature of their respective offerings which made the difference. There is no detailed information in the early chapters of Genesis as to how God was to be worshipped other than through faith. Cain's problem was inward and was one of attitude (Gen. 4:4b-6a). God rejected Cain and his offering because of the condition of Cain's heart. Cain's inner state made himself and his offering unacceptable. Abel, being a believer, was accepted by God and the tokens of his worship were received. The word "offering" is a general term which means "present". How God accepted the sacrifice of Abel is not indicated in Genesis but it was by this means that he was commended as a righteous man. God spoke well of the gifts Abel brought. Abel's worship flowed from a heart filled with faith, and because of faith he was reckoned as righteous. Righteousness is received from God through faith alone (Gen. 15:6) and it is through faith that the righteous live (Hab. 2:4; Heb. 10:38; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11).

And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

A final word is given about the example of Abel. Though he is dead, yet he still speaks. Abel through the example of his faith and righteousness still speaks to us today. This is especially relevant as far as the original readers of the letter were concerned. Abel worshipped God acceptably through faith. God cannot be approached without faith, no matter how correct the outward forms followed by the individual. Though Abel was viciously murdered by his jealous and angry brother he still lives in the presence of God because he was a believer .

Verse 5

By faith Enoch

The second illustration provided by the author is Enoch. Once again very little is written about this man in Genesis 5:18-24. The only other information contained in the Scriptures about Enoch is that he prophesied of the sure coming judgment of God against the ungodly (Jude 14-15).

was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death;

The author's initial reference to this believer was that he did not die a physical death. Enoch was a believer who, because of his faith in

God, walked with God. This means that he lived in harmony with God's revealed will and sought to please God. From Jude we know that he spoke clearly of coming judgment, suggesting he was a preacher of the Word of God, calling sinners to faith and repentance and warning of the certain consequences of unbelief and disobedience.

he could not be found, because God had taken him away.

Enoch's life on earth was not terminated in the usual manner of death for he was not found because God had taken him. He was suddenly and supernaturally removed from this earthly existence. Whether the translation of Enoch was witnessed by anyone is not recorded and one can presume that people looked for Enoch and did not find him. This was a demonstration of the power of God over death and of the certainty of the hope of deliverance from condemnation and judgment through faith. Elijah was a second example of one being taken and not experiencing death (2 Kings 2:11). A search was made for Elijah (2 Kings 2:15-18). The fact that no-one could find these men only emphasised that God had translated them. A similar translation will be experienced by all believers who are still living at the time of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this world in power and glory (1 Co. 15:50-52; 1 Thess. 4:15-17).

For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

As was the case with Abel so Enoch received a commendation from God. The evidence of Enoch's faith was his walk with God. This was proof of the reality of God and his promises. Faith is much more than observing mere religious forms; it is a life of communion with God. God was pleased to use Enoch as an example for all believers to show the certainty of the glorious hope of the resurrection, and of deliverance from eternal death. His life and godliness remain as a pattern to be followed by believers at all times.

Verse 6

And without faith it is impossible to please God,

The particular case of Enoch prompts the writer to apply the important truth that it is impossible to please God without faith. This applies to all who claim to acknowledge God. The writer in stressing the importance of faith is providing instruction regarding the nature of biblical faith. God has determined that his highest

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creature is to relate to him through faith, living trust and humble obedience. This is what was required of Adam and Eve in the very beginning (Gen. 2:16-17). God, through his Word, was to be trusted and obeyed. Adam and Eve's disobedience constituted rebellion against God, unbelief and the rejection of the truth of his Word. In this way they removed themselves from God and acted as if he did not exist. To be without God is to be without hope (Eph. 2:12), suffocated by darkness and ignorance and blindly gripped by sin (Rom. 1:22-25; Eph. 4:18, 19).

because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists

The obvious first requirement in relating to God through faith is to believe that he is. This implies that God is personal and distinct from the creation, that he is transcendent and yet approachable. Faith must have an object and God is the supreme and eternal object for all true faith. A relationship with God cannot be had without faith and he cannot be approached through outward forms alone.

and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

In coming to God it is required to believe that he rewards those who diligently seek him. In the context of the letter the idea of approaching God is to be understood in the sense of coming to the God of grace who provides salvation for undeserving sinners through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer comes to God with confidence when coming by faith alone in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the high priest, has made effective atonement for our sins, to enable the believer to approach God with boldness and confident expectation of obtaining mercy and grace. Such coming to God is not to be thought of as only occurring in public services but on a daily basis resulting from walking with God. This was true in the life of Enoch. Believers are to diligently seek God through prayer and the study of his Word, consciously endeavouring to do the will of God in all spheres of life. This requires application and discipline with a thankful and humble spirit for all of God's mercies (Rom. 12:1-2). God will reward all who seek him in this manner. The reward is God himself and knowing him more intimately (Gen. 15:1). If we believe in the grace of God alone we deny any merit to faith and any expectation of rewards on the grounds of our own efforts. Whatever may be praiseworthy in the life of the individual is the fruit of God's grace (Phil. 2:13; 1 Co. 1:29-31).

Verse 7

By faith Noah,

The third illustration of faith in the period prior to the flood is that of Noah. The life of Noah is recorded in Genesis 5:28-9:29. There Noah is introduced to us as one who found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). He is described as being blameless, a man who walked with God (Gen. 6:9). Noah was also a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5) who during the period of God’s grace and longsuffering and his own construction of the ark called the world to repentance (1 Pet. 3:19, 20).

when warned about things not yet seen,

Noah demonstrated his faith in God when he prepared an ark after being divinely warned of things not yet seen. The great and universal flood of God’s judgment against sin was still unseen but this was a reality to Noah who believed it would take place as revealed by God (Gen. 6:13).

in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

God instructed Noah to build the ark according to precise plans and dimensions. These Noah followed (Gen. 6:14-16; 7:5). Out of Noah’s faith flowed godly fear. Genuine faith produces respect and reverence for God and his Word. Noah’s faith and obedience resulted in the saving of his family, his wife, three sons and their wives (Gen. 7:13; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5). The appointed means of judgment, the universal flood, was also the instrument of salvation. Noah and his family were saved through water. The waters bore the ark above the destruction below.

By his faith he condemned the world

Through his obedience to God Noah visibly and dramatically condemned the world. Life went on unchanged, people were unmoved by the preaching of coming judgment and the construction of the ark (Matt. 24:38; Luke 17:26-27). People were defiantly disobedient to the call to repentance and callously indifferent to the longsuffering and patience of God (1 Pet. 3:19-20).

and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Through faith Noah received the righteousness of God. Not until the New Testament is the glorious truth fully spelt out that believers receive the righteousness of God. This means that believers are made acceptable to God by the righteousness of Christ. This comes

through faith alone in Christ (Rom. 3:21-22; Phil. 3:9). Noah and all the Old Testament believers were heirs of that blessing.



Summary

What matters to God is a genuine trust and belief in him as the Creator God (faith) and an obedient submission to him (walking with God). Man is a fallen creature, being in open rebellion against God, and consequently deserves God's judgment. The Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, came to earth to rescue people from this situation. He gave his own perfect life as a sacrifice and atoned for the sins of the people he came to save. The only way a person can be accepted by God is if they match God's perfection. To come to God on the basis of our own merit and obedience will utterly fail because we are sinners, breaking God's laws every day of our lives. We cannot improve ourselves by keeping to religious ritual and ceremony. The only way available is to trust in God's way, which is to believe in his Son and his death on the cross. This involves a humbling submission to Christ's authority for every part of the person's life. When a person trusts in Christ Christ's perfectness is imputed to the believer (reckoned to him). God looks upon that person and sees the perfection of his Son. This is what the writer of Hebrews is demonstrating through the lives of Old Testament believers. Abel, Enoch and Noah show through their lives how they trusted in God by faith and not in any other way. God looks upon them as being righteous men. This is the great lesson for the Hebrew Christians reading this book. It is not by observing religious laws and practices. It is by faith alone, in Christ alone.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: Biblical faith and its object (11:1-3, 6)

Introduction

People believe in all sorts of things. They can be taken in by hearing what others say or it may be the customs that have been passed down to them. People may believe in things that they want to happen, such as a cure for an illness. It may be that people believe in a particular philosophy or a politician who will get things done. Patients often believe in the diagnosis the doctor makes of their condition. In all these cases there is an object to which the trust is directed. The writer to the Hebrews has carefully demonstrated the importance of relating to God through faith alone and of patiently persevering throughout life. This faith (belief) must be concentrated only in the Lord Jesus Christ and his once-for-all sacrifice for sin. What is this faith? How does it work? Is it the same sort of thing that people show in doctors or political philosophies? Biblical faith is presented to us in the opening verses of chapter 11 of Hebrews as a dynamic principle and power in the life of the believer.

1. Faith defined

Faith is the substance, the assurance or title deed of the Christian hope. What is hoped for is what God has promised. What God has promised is an eternal inheritance. This is still unseen but is very real to the man of faith. Faith then is the evidence or conviction of those things which God has promised. Through faith we have hope in what we cannot yet see. It is because of faith that the hope of the eternal inheritance will never be extinguished by the difficulties of life.

2. Faith is fundamental to our knowledge of God

Through faith we receive all true knowledge of God. True knowledge of God is rooted in his being the source and sustainer of all life in the universe. All things were created by God from what cannot be seen, that is from the power or energy of God. All things were created through the dynamic power of God's spoken Word. All people are accountable to God because he is the sovereign Creator God. God saves sinners through his Word and will judge the world

through his Word. Faith brings about an understanding and acceptance of these things.

3. Faith is the means through which man is to relate to God

The elders or forefathers received a good testimony from God because of faith. Faith is the means that God has appointed through which we are to relate to him. We are to believe that God is personal, true, living and distinct from the creation, but approachable. God wants us to seek him diligently. He will reward all who do seek him diligently with the greater sense of his personal presence.

Conclusion

God can only be known through faith. That faith is to be rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ, as God's Son and the Saviour of men. God is to be sought diligently through prayer, the study of his Word and humble obedience.



Focus Point:

The meaning of faith

The word "faith" is used with a number of different meanings.

1. Optimism or hopefulness. People say, "I have faith" or "If I didn't have faith I would give up." Most often this has no reference to God, but is a simple hopefulness without good reason that the problem will be solved satisfactorily.
2. Natural trustfulness. We all exercise this kind of faith when, for example, we believe the aeroplane we fly on will reach its destination safely. Or that the chair we want to sit on will not let us down. This is not often called faith, but is sometimes used to explain saving faith (see point 5 below). This is unwise because in each case the faith may prove to be misplaced because of human unreliability.
3. Doctrinal assent (James 2:23-24). It is possible to give assent to all the doctrines of Scripture, that God exists and oversees all human life and yet not to trust personally in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and its consequences.
4. Discipleship (John 2:23-24). This is admiration for Jesus Christ, his teaching and his miracles. There may even be a desire to seek to live according to his teaching. But in itself it all falls short of trust in Christ as the only Saviour.

5. Spiritual faith (Eph. 2:8; Heb. 11:6). This is the gift of God as it is a faculty of the new life he gives us when we are born again. It enables us to renounce all our own efforts to earn our salvation and to trust in Christ alone to put us right with God. Faith in Christ gives us access to God. This is called **saving faith**. By this faith we are enabled to live the Christian life, to serve the Lord and work for him.

Faith is an active principle that carries the whole man with it, and in it, hand and heart, will and affections, body, soul and spirit. There is no act so absorbing in its reach, and so total in its momentum, as the act of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (W. G. T. Shedd).



Over to you

Think of your congregation and consider where their faith is centred. How many would clearly say that they trust no-one or nothing else except Jesus Christ? How should you respond?

How can you apply the commendations of Abel, Enoch and Noah to your people? Are there practical applications that will help them in their situations?

Do the lives of those you shepherd demonstrate a clear faith in Christ? If not, where does the problem lie?

FAITH IN ACTION:

ABRAHAM AND HIS IMMEDIATE LINE



Hebrews 11:8-22

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The promised land
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

In this chapter of the book the author demonstrates the manner in which men and women of the Old Testament era exercised faith in God. Faith became the motivating principle in their lives, the certainty of what is not seen. The promises of God are real and, grasped by faith and no matter what the circumstances, these believers lived their lives in an unearthly way. They regarded themselves as pilgrims with no permanent place in this world, for they were citizens of the world to come which God had promised. Although their understanding was limited by the amount of revelation given, yet they were fully persuaded by faith that God would fulfil his promise of the eternal inheritance. It is not surprising that the writer gives much consideration to the example of Abraham. His faith is outstanding and his life provides many lessons about the nature of faith and the reality toward which faith looks. In these verses we also notice the brief reference to Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

What these verses mean

Verse 8

By faith Abraham,

The story of Abraham extends in Genesis from 11:27 to 25:11. His call from Ur was the beginning of the Hebrew race. This call was to the one to whom all Jews looked as their father (John 8:31-41). His example of faith is used by the apostle Paul as the basis of his teaching about justification by faith alone (Rom. 4; Gal. 3:6-9, 29). The author of Hebrews demonstrates Abraham's faith by picking out three things in his life that tested that faith with increasing intensity.

Pp

1. The test of God's call to total commitment (11:8-10)

when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

The first evidence of Abraham's faith was unquestioning obedience. God called Abraham to leave Ur and to go to the land of Canaan (Gen. 11:31-12:9). Abraham had no idea what lay ahead of him but he trusted God completely. This was remarkable since Ur was a place of godlessness and idolatry (Josh. 24:2). Abraham had nothing to confirm what he was doing; he had nothing more than God's promise. The Scriptures do not tell us how God spoke to Abraham. On departing from Ur Abraham and his wife Sarah were accompanied by his father Terah and also his nephew Lot. They settled for a period in Haran. However, following the death of Terah, in faith Abraham renewed his journey to the unknown destination in spite of having accumulated considerable wealth (Gen. 12:1-5; Acts 7:4). It was not until Abraham reached Canaan that the Lord appeared to him and spoke once again, assuring Abraham that this was the promised land (Gen. 12:7). Until that moment Abraham had been travelling towards the unknown and unseen land. This was the promised inheritance and, with no map to guide him other than faith, Abraham journeyed into the unknown, confident that God would fulfil his Word.

Verse 9

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

The second evidence of his faith was willing submission to God's

plan. Ur was a large city and a part of early civilisation. He went from that situation to the primitive experience of living in tents where he raised his family. Remarkably, the land that God had promised as an inheritance was never possessed by Abraham for he lived there as in a foreign country. God did not actually give Canaan to Abraham as an inheritance, but Canaan remained the inheritance for Abraham's descendants. The transient nature of his life continued in those of his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. At the death of Abraham's wife Sarah he purchased the necessary land for burial from Ephron the Hittite, in spite of Ephron's offering it free of charge (Gen. 23:3-20). At no time did Abraham attempt to take up permanent residence in Canaan. He acknowledged before Ephron and his people that he was a foreigner and visitor (Gen. 23:4).

Verse 10

For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

The reason why Abraham lived as an alien was because his faith looked beyond the land of Canaan. The third evidence of his faith looked to the spiritual, eternal city which is the inheritance for all who have the same kind of faith (12:22; 13:14; Rev. 22:1-5). Abraham had come to understand this by faith. He looked beyond the material world and anticipated the reality of the eternal city of God. The nature of this transient way of life with no permanent dwelling place was a clear testimony to this conviction. The land of Canaan was only symbolic of the yet unseen glory to come.



2. The test of the humanly impossible (11:11-12)

Verse 11

By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

The background to these verses is in Genesis 12:2, 18:11-15 and 21:1-3. Abraham was about 100 years old and his wife Sarah 90 when God said that Sarah would give birth to a child. Some may question the place of Sarah within this list of worthies as she laughed in unbelief when the Lord appeared to Abraham at Mamre (Gen. 18:1). When admonished by the Lord, Sarah's unbelief quickly turned to godly fear. She must have embraced God's Word

HEBREWS 11:11-13

with faith as the promise was repeated (Gen. 18:13-14). Then by faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed and she bore a child when she was past the age to do so. Abraham was fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. Paul writes that Abraham's faith was strengthened (Rom. 4:20) rather than shaken when faced with the human impossibility of the promised child.

Verse 12

And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

The miracle happened and Abraham became the father of many nations (Rom. 4:18). The promise of Genesis 12:2 was fulfilled giving rise to a nation impossible to number (Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 22:37). From this single and most unlikely couple, so advanced in years, came a multitude of descendants. This was exactly as the Lord had promised Abraham (Gen. 15:5; 22:17), reaffirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:4) and also to Jacob (Gen. 32:12). This was fulfilled in the sense of physical descendants as pointed out by Moses (Deut. 1:10; 10:22; 26:5; 28:62). But this promise finds its complete fulfilment in the innumerable spiritual descendants of Abraham gathered in from all nations and cultures of the world through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gen. 12:2-3; Gal. 3:7-9, 29; Rev. 5:9; 7:9).

Summary of the teaching so far (11:13-16)

We could put the next four verses in brackets as they are a kind of pause for reflection on what has been said so far in this chapter. What the writer states applies also to those he is yet to mention.

Verse 13

All these people were still living by faith when they died.

Those whom the author had in mind will have been the patriarchs, and also Abel and Noah. Enoch was excluded as he did not see death. The point is that each one of these believers died, but death did not destroy their faith, nor did death cancel the promises of God.

They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

In the face of death these men continued to believe in the promises

of God, hoping in those things which are unseen but which become increasingly real during the experience of dying. At the beginning of the chapter faith was defined as being sure *of things hoped for*. The faith of Abraham and his family did not focus on the land but on a future spiritual inheritance of which the land was a picture. The land was to them a lodging place on their way to glory. The eternal promised inheritance had not yet been realised. If their hopes had been rooted in an earthly inheritance then death would have gained a total victory over them, their hopes shattered and unfulfilled.

And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

What the patriarchs knew in death was the fitting climax to their lives for they described themselves as strangers and pilgrims on earth. They openly confessed that as far as their earthly life was concerned they were aliens in this world and their experience was that of travellers. As noted previously, this was the confession of Abraham before Ephron (Gen. 23:4). Jacob spoke in this way before Pharaoh (Gen. 47:9). David expressed himself in a similar way (1 Chr. 29:15; Ps. 39:12). They understood that they did not have any permanent dwelling place in this world for this was not their home. They did not belong in this world. All believers are described in this way (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11).

Verse 14

People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

After a believer in Christ has begun a life of faith, he can be tested and troubled, often to the extent of being tempted to return to his former way of life. This was the situation that the readers of this book were in. Abraham and his family must have been tempted like that, but they preferred an unknown life with God rather than a familiar life without him. This would speak directly to those to whom Hebrews was written.

Verse 15

If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

The patriarchs lived the life of faith in Canaan with no settled residence and they did not consider returning to Mesopotamia. It is natural for the alien living in a foreign country to think often about

HEBREWS 11:15-17

the homeland and even long for the opportunity to return to friends and the familiar environment. This was the problem of the Israelites who, having left Egypt and begun the journey to Canaan, in unbelief longed to return to the old ways. The readers of Hebrews were experiencing the same pangs but the author encourages them to persevere as those still travelling, to follow the example of the patriarchs. The lives of the patriarchs involved suffering, difficulties, testing and trials. The Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest, also journeyed along this same pathway (2:9, 18; 4:15; 12:2). He never turned back because he resolved to accomplish the will of his Father, and was able to rejoice over the rescue of his people.

Verse 16

Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.

The patriarchs through patient endurance have borne clear testimony that they desire a better, heavenly country, that is one superior to that which they had left. Everything of this world, including Canaan, is marred by sin, whereas what is heavenly is perfect, eternal and glorious.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

A son may be disfigured by disease, but his father will not be ashamed of him. Rather he will care for the son and speak of him to others. The Old Testament people were by no means perfect, but they were God's people and he proclaimed himself to be their God (Ex. 3:6; 4:5). God cares for them now and provides for them a glorious future (John 14:2; Rev. 21:1-3). Believers have to endure patiently throughout life, fixing their eyes firmly upon the Lord Jesus Christ and following his single-minded example. This is what the readers of this book need to do (12:1-2).



3. The test of life's mysteries (11:17-19)

Verse 17

By faith Abraham, when God tested him,

The command that God gave to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering was a test of his faith in God and of his obedience to God (Gen. 22:1-12). To the human mind God's command was a mystery for two reasons. Human sacrifice as practised by the pagan nations

in their idol worship was condemned by God, and God had promised that a great nation would arise through Isaac.

offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,

Even though Abraham could not understand what God was doing, he trusted that the God in whom he believed was too wise to make a mistake. Abraham did not allow his natural fatherly love for his son to prevent him from obeying God. God knew exactly what would happen and the test or trial of Abraham's faith is to be seen as a proof of his faith. What God required did not shake his faith but instead served to strengthen it and demonstrate again the reality of God's unchanging promises. Abraham would press on in the pilgrimage of faith with even greater determination knowing that God's Word would never fail (Gen. 22:15-18).

Verse 18

even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

It was particularly through Isaac that God would fulfil his covenantal promise (Gen. 17:19). By the time that God gave the command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Isaac would have been more than a child, and likely a teenager. Abraham would have seen that Isaac was beginning to mature into manhood. We do not know if Abraham ever questioned how God's command could be reconciled with what God had promised. However, we do know what Abraham concluded.

Verse 19

Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

If necessary Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from death to fulfil all that he had promised through Isaac. While this point is not stated in Genesis it is implied in the words of Abraham to his two servants, "and we will come back to you" (Gen. 22:5). Abraham and Isaac would go and worship, and although worship would involve the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham and Isaac would both return from worship. If God had fulfilled his promise through his power in the birth of Isaac then why couldn't God give Isaac a second time, even in restoring him from death through that same power? This event was so real and dramatic that it was as if Isaac had truly died and been raised from the dead.

4. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (11:20-22)

Brief mention is made of these three patriarchs. In each case their faith had God and his promise to Abraham as its foundation. They held firmly to the conviction that they were the beginning of a great nation and that God had a great future for them. Their faith was not disappointed or dissolved when facing death nor was their hope of the promised inheritance diminished by the thought of death,

Verse 20

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

This account is found in Genesis 27:22-33. Jacob tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing of the firstborn which belonged to Esau. This paternal blessing was according to the culture of the time. Jacob's action was sinful but this did not undo the sovereign will of God as revealed to his mother Rachel (Gen. 25:22-23). Spiritual posterity would flow through the line of Jacob, a believer, and not through Esau, an unbeliever. This was according to God's prerogative, choice and wisdom (Rom. 9:10-13). Although Isaac eventually realised that he had been tricked by Jacob he refused to revoke the blessing he had given to Jacob (Gen. 27:37). Isaac, in faith, came to understand that Jacob and his descendants stood as the heirs of the promised inheritance and not Esau and his descendants (Gen. 28:3-4).

Verse 21

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons,

One generation on and Jacob blesses the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. The very same principle is observed (Gen. 48:1-20). When it was obvious that Jacob did not have long to live, Joseph visited his father, taking with him his two sons, Manasseh, the firstborn, and Ephraim. Jacob symbolically adopted his grandsons as his own sons in the context of the promised inheritance. He then invoked the patriarchal blessing upon them. Joseph very deliberately steered his older son Manasseh towards Jacob's outstretched right hand to receive the blessing of the firstborn, and Ephraim to Jacob's left hand to receive the lesser blessing. But Jacob just as deliberately crossed his hands and blessed Ephraim as the firstborn. When Joseph saw what was happening he tried to change the position of his father's hands but Jacob explained that Ephraim was to receive the blessing of the firstborn. This Jacob did, fully

expecting God to fulfil the promise of the inheritance. Jacob's faith was quite undimmed by the approach of death.

and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Previously Jacob had made Joseph swear that he would bury him in Canaan (Gen. 47:29-31). Jacob acted in this way, in faith, believing that his family and descendants would eventually return to Canaan, the promised inheritance. This prospect filled his heart with thanksgiving and he worshipped God as he bowed down at the head of his bed (leaned on top of his staff in the Septuagint translation¹ of Genesis 47:31). Jacob's body may have been weak through age but his faith was stronger than ever.

Verse 22

By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

Over fifty years later Joseph would make a similar request before he died. Like his father Joseph was fully convinced that God's purpose would be fulfilled and that there would be a return to Canaan. Joseph had lived in Egypt for ninety-three years and had risen from being a slave to a position of great power and prominence. But during that time Joseph never forgot what God had done for him and where he truly belonged. What was more important than anything else was the eternal inheritance. Therefore as he lay dying he looked to God with undiminished faith to fulfil his Word regarding the promised inheritance. He spoke with conviction of the unfailing faithfulness of God (Gen. 50:24, 25). When the Israelites departed from Egypt, Moses took Joseph's remains with them (Ex. 13:19) and Joshua eventually laid them to rest in Canaan (Josh. 24:32).



Summary

In life and death the patriarchs looked by faith beyond the material blessing and earthly prosperity to the realities of the world to come, the hope of eternal life. Their example was set before the Hebrew Christians to

Summary continued on page 248

¹ The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Scriptures from the Hebrew. See Introduction to the book of Hebrews in Book 1 of the Preachers' Study Papers, page 4 for further background information.

Summary continued from page 247

help them see through the pressures of their physical lives in their own day and look beyond, trusting in God's promises being fulfilled in Christ. Abraham had no way of researching and checking out God's call to leave Ur and travel to a distant land. He believed in the things he could not see or prove. God began to fulfil his promises through the impossible. Abraham and Sarah were old and childless, yet God carried out his promise that through Abraham's line there would be a mighty nation. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son. Abraham's faith was further proved when God told him to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him. Whilst obeying God and preparing to carry out the sacrifice, Abraham still believed that God was going to keep his promise through Isaac. If he sacrificed him then his faith told him that God would still use Isaac because he could raise him from the dead. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph maintained this trust in the God who had promised the land and nation.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: The testing of our faith

Introduction

God causes challenging things to happen to us to test our faith. He does this to strengthen our faith so that we discover more about him and his trustworthiness. God allows things to happen to witness to unbelievers that he has power and is real.

1. The test of commitment

Like Abraham we are called to leave our own way of life for one of complete trust in God, his love, wisdom and power.

2. The test of the humanly impossible

Like Abraham we are called upon to believe that God is able to do for us what we cannot do ourselves. We cannot live the Christian life following Christ in our own strength. God gives us strength by his Spirit. We cannot serve the Lord in such a way

that other people will be converted apart from the Lord's working through us. We cannot by ourselves achieve perfection to be able to enter God's presence when we die, but he will do it for us.

3. **The test of things we do not understand**

Like Abraham things happen to us that do not make sense. The disciples followed Jesus and yet they met a terrible storm (Mark 4:35-38). A very successful preacher or key church worker is suddenly taken ill and dies. Our financial resources suddenly collapse and we cannot support the Lord's work. We must not be surprised when we are tested, but we must realise that this is essential to our growth in the Christian life.

Conclusion

A person who has faith in Christ has a total trust that Christ died to save him from the judgment that he deserves. Instead of eternal death Christ has secured eternal life. There is no way that this can be proved in a scientific way. God has revealed all the things that a person needs in his Word. There are historical narratives, instructions and promises to help us. Abraham had but a fraction of all this information and believed God, proving this in the trials of his life. God will test the legitimacy of our faith and we have much more to turn to than those living in Old Testament times.



Focus Point: **The promised land**

Some Bible students believe that God's promise to Abraham of the land of Palestine means that this piece of land is to this day the rightful possession of the Jewish people. The belief affects the political attitude of many governments including that of the United States of America. However, a clearer understanding of Scripture would seem to result in the following conclusions.

1. Abraham did not see the land as the final fulfilment of God's promise (Heb. 11:10).
2. The "seed" of Abraham, who were heirs of the promise, were not his natural children. The seed are all who shared his faith (Gal. 3:26-29).
3. The land, like the nation, was an arena in which God would reveal himself and work out his purpose of salvation through Christ whom he would send.

4. The land is a picture for us of “rest” in Christ and the enjoyment of the “milk and honey” of gospel blessings. The fact that in their history fighting was involved in the occupation of the land confirms it to be a picture of the Christian life, as one which includes rest in Christ but at the same time the ongoing battle with sin.
5. The ultimate fulfilment of the promised land is the new heaven and earth which Christ will usher in at his coming (Heb. 11:10, 15-16; 2 Pet. 3:11-13).



Over to you

How do you think the example of Abraham can help you when dealing with a person who is unsure of their faith?

What are your people really taken up with in their lives? How much do you need to steer them away from their present earthly attitude to a future heavenly perspective? How can this passage help you do that?

Has your preaching and teaching concentrated on the keeping of rules? Have these studies challenged this and should there be a major shift in the way you bring the gospel to your people?

FAITH IN ACTION:

MOSES AND THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN



Hebrews 11:23-29

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Conscience
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The seven verses of our study passage focus upon the life of Moses and particular events in which faith was displayed as holding to the evidence of things not seen. Along with Abraham Moses was a hero for the Jewish people. The Hebrew Christians who were under pressure to revert to Old Testament religion would have held Moses in much awe. If they were to examine the life of Moses they would begin to recognise the faith that he displayed and, as a result, it would encourage these Jewish waverers to go on with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our study begins with Moses' parents, whose faith provided a wonderful grounding for Moses' commitment to the Lord.

What these verses mean

Verse 23

By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

The first event concerns the parents of Moses, Amram and Jochabed (named in Ex. 6:20). The manner in which they viewed their

HEBREWS 11:23-25

newborn son could be understood as the expression of their natural feelings. But Stephen's inspired speech before the Sanhedrin indicates that there was something more at work than natural affections. Stephen says that Moses in his infancy "was well pleasing to God" (Acts 7:20). This strongly suggests that Amram and Jochabed through faith, and possibly special revelation given to them by God, believed that God had given them a very special son. For this reason their faith prompted them to do all they could to protect this child, keeping him hidden in their home for three months. Because of their trust in God and desire to please him, Amram and Jochabed were not afraid of the king's command. This command required that all baby boys were to be thrown into the river (Ex. 1:22). When they were unable to keep the secret of the birth of this baby boy any longer they prepared a waterproofed ark to hold the baby somewhere along the river bank, hidden among the bulrushes. They clearly believed that God would protect Moses. Their faith did not collapse in the face of Pharaoh's cruel and destructive command.

Verse 24

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

The early years Moses spent being raised with his mother bore fruit. Jochabed had carefully instructed Moses in the saving knowledge of God, through faith, of the promised inheritance, of the promise of deliverance from bondage, and of how he himself had been preserved in the midst of destruction and of his being raised up as the deliverer of God's people. All of this Moses embraced by faith (Acts 7:25).

Verse 25

He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

Moses knew where he truly belonged and decisively turned away from power and prestige. He was a child of God and identified himself with those who knew nothing but the drudgery and pain of being slave labourers. He did this in the strong conviction that God would deliver his fellow Hebrew people out of their bondage (Ex. 2:11-14; Acts 7:23-28). The life of comfort and security was abandoned in favour of pursuing a life devoted to God by faith. Obedience to God was more important than all that Egypt had to

offer. What is of this world is only temporary and passing away, but what is of the world to come is eternal and permanent (2 Co. 4:17-18; 1 John 2:17).

Verse 26

He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

By faith Moses rejected the world and its wealth. Moses had some understanding that God would raise up One who would bring eternal deliverance and impart eternal judgement (Deut. 18:15, 18-19; Acts 7:37, 38; John 5:46). For Moses the details of the person and work of the promised Redeemer would not have been clear. However, Moses consciously chose to obey God knowing that as a result he would bear the stigma of one who belonged to God rather than this world. His faith would be rewarded through knowing God in an unbroken communion in the life to come (Ps. 16:10-11; 17:15; Heb. 11:6; Rev. 22:3-4).

Verse 27

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

This verse has been a source of debate as some assume that it refers to the time of the exodus. Yet it is noted that only Moses is mentioned as leaving Egypt and not the entire nation. This incident is also referred to prior to the institution of the Passover in the next verse. Moses abandoned Egypt at the time when he renounced all connections with the Egyptian court. Exodus 2:14-15 says that Moses was afraid and fled from the presence of Pharaoh. But it was not personal fear of Pharaoh but the awareness of his destiny as the deliverer of the covenant people that caused him to take flight. Had Moses remained in Egypt then he would have been executed. Therefore he escaped to Midian in faith in order to await God's time, a period of forty years. Moses did not forget God's purpose for him and the promise of deliverance. In faith Moses did not hesitate later to confront Pharaoh and demand the freedom for Israel to leave Egypt (Ex. 3:1-22; 4:1-17, 27-31; 5:1; Acts 7:29-35). The long years of exile in obscurity did nothing to obstruct Moses' view of the invisible God who cannot be seen with the physical eye. Through faith God is to be trusted and adored and he is known through Christ alone (John 1:18; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; 1 John 4:20).

These last three verses show us how the New Testament revelation adds to what the Old Testament record explicitly tells us, indicating the spiritual dimension of Old Testament faith.

Verse 28

By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

The institution of the Passover was an act of faith and not a matter of merely establishing a religious ceremony. Moses was instructed by God to conduct the Passover in a particular way. There was a clear purpose to this in its initial observance and in succeeding years it would serve as a memorial for future generations (Ex. 12:1-28, 43-49). The Passover was the means of deliverance appointed by God for all who acted in faith and trusted in the Lord's promise of salvation from the plague of the death of the firstborn. Every home where the doorposts and lintel were sprinkled with the blood of the designated lamb was passed over as the Lord went through the land of Egypt that night. Where there was no faith, there was no sprinkled blood and the judgment of God fell swiftly, silently and irrevocably on every home without exception (Ex. 12:29-30).

Verse 29

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

Once the Israelites had left Egypt, faith was put to the test immediately. Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he decided to recapture the Israelites (Ex. 14:5-9). The slowly moving Israelites realised that Pharaoh and his approaching army meant trouble but there was no way of escape as the Red Sea lay in front of them. In fear the Israelites lifted up their voice to God for deliverance and also complained to Moses. Moses responded with a clear call to trust God (Ex. 14:10-14). The Lord assured Moses that Israel would safely cross the barrier of the Red Sea on dry ground and then he would destroy the Egyptians with these same waters (Ex. 14:15-31). That night God protected Israel, prepared the way across the Red Sea and led Israel to safety. When the Egyptians attempted to follow they were destroyed. Faith in the power of God and his Word was fully vindicated.



Summary

The examples of faith in the lives of Old Testament believers in this chapter all show that the life of faith is always one of challenge and often suffering. Our study has focused on Moses, beginning with his parents.

They defied Pharaoh's order that all Hebrew boys were required to be killed at birth. Their faith in God overcame fear because they believed that God had a special purpose for their son. Moses is an example of the cost of obedience to God and of the faith that perseveres in and through the challenges of that obedience. He separated himself from the comfort and luxury of palace living to be with God and his people. Moses spent forty years of his life in the wilderness as God prepared him for the great task of leaving Egypt. When the crucial time came he trusted in the Passover and persuaded the people to mark the doorframes of their houses with blood. When cornered by the chasing Egyptian army, Moses and the people believed that God would provide a way of rescue and that they would not perish. They survived as they crossed the dry land of the Red Sea; the Egyptian army perished. In all these examples faith is an active reliance on God and his promises. There was nothing else to give strength to that faith.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: How God prepares us for service

Introduction

Our early years may not seem important or they may be perplexing. Later when we look back we realise that in everything that has happened to us God was preparing us for his work. The life of Moses is a wonderful example.

1. The influence of godly parents

Moses' mother cared for him in his early years (Ex. 2:1-10). We don't know when she handed him over to Pharaoh's daughter but undoubtedly she would have nurtured him in the knowledge of

God and his truth. The fruit of this care is not always immediate. It took Moses forty years to come to his decision (Acts 7:23).

2. The powerful godly influence in hostile surroundings

After leaving his mother, he was under the constant and powerful influence of privilege, riches, idolatry and sinfulness. He would also have a good education. The knowledge he gained and his familiarity with the court were to be put to good use in later years.

NOTE: No experience or knowledge gained in earlier years is ever wasted. It is all part of God's preparation.

3. Commitment to God

The attraction of the privileges of the palace, its wealth and idolatry, failed to replace the early parental influences.

(a) Moses separated himself from the splendour and sinfulness of the Egyptian court.

(b) Moses separated himself to God and to his people.

4. The mistakes at first

Instead of waiting for God's time, Moses tried to serve God his own way and by his own wisdom (Ex. 2:11-14). Mistakes are part of our preparation for what God wants us to do.

5. The quiet years

Moses spent forty years in obscurity (Acts 7:30). This also was an essential part of his preparation, as he learned many lessons, including patience and humility before God. After our conversion, it is good for us to go through a time of quiet patient learning about God, his Word and his ways. This was Paul's experience (Gal. 1:14-18) and he warned Timothy not to ignore its importance (1 Tim. 3:6).

6. Time for action

God knew when his man was ready for his work (Ex. 3:1-10) and although Moses was hesitant (Ex. 3:11-20) he obeyed God's call to him. We may be settled in a quiet life, but we must always be prepared for God to disturb our peace and call us to some specific service for him.



Focus Point:

Conscience

The conscience is a faculty of the inner being of every person. The word is derived from Latin and means “knowing together” or “joint knowledge with others”. Conscience is a moral awareness, distinguishing between right and wrong. It then urges the person to that which he recognises to be right and restrains him from doing that which he recognises to be wrong. In the Bible the word *conscience* does not appear in the Old Testament. However, the idea is well known and is expressed by the term “heart”. The word appears many times in the New Testament. For example it appears five times in the book of Hebrews (9:9, 14; 10:2, 22; 13:18).

In addition to urging and restraining, the conscience passes judgment upon man’s decisions and actions. It condemns an action when it is in conflict with that person’s conviction. It does this by causing an inward disquiet, distress, shame or remorse. It commends, when man has acted in conformity with his convictions.

When the Holy Spirit begins his work in a person, his conscience becomes sensitive to the fact that he has broken God’s laws and has offended him. This is part of what is meant by “conviction of sin” (John 16:8). The guilty conscience can only find peace when there is a trust in Christ and in his redeeming death, in the individual concerned, rather than any trust in self.

The conscience does not err. It is the standard which forms the basis upon which the conscience acts that may be in error. The conscience can be dulled or even deadened. This is a condition when the conscience ceases to function because of repeated disregard of its warning voice. Paul speaks about a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2). The idea behind this was the application of heat to a wound to stop infection. It had the effect of deadening all the surrounding tissues that never revived.

A society may practise “freedom of conscience”. This is where people are free to believe, practise and propagate any religion whatsoever, or none at all. “Social conscience” is the merging together of the individual moral consciousness into a group moral consciousness.

Conscience is a gift of God. It is the guardian of morality, justice and decency in the world. Conscience functions in all people including those who do not know God's law (Rom. 2:15). The conscience is an irrefutable testimony to the existence of God.

Source used: Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Paternoster).



Over to you

Do you give attention to the home life of your church members, encouraging those who are parents to provide their children with a good example of faith and godliness?

In your preaching and teaching how do you endeavour to prepare your people for service in the work of the kingdom of God?

What do you consider will convince people in your congregation to lead a godly life; a total trust in God's promises or obedience to God's rules? Does your preaching reflect that?

FAITH IN ACTION:

PROVIDING STRENGTH FOR LIFE AND DEATH



Hebrews 11:30-40

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Inheritance
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The writer is providing his readers with a series of examples of men and women of the Old Testament who trusted in God and believed in his promises. No matter how great the physical obstacles, faith proved to be the means through which they received blessing and saw the fulfilment of God's promises. However, one promise, the realisation of the eternal inheritance, was yet to be fulfilled. But each one of these believers remained undaunted, persevering in the faith to the end, not even death causing them to waver. They had begun the pilgrimage of faith and nothing would be allowed to make them falter as they journeyed towards the still unseen heavenly country, the eternal city designed and built by God for all of his redeemed people. Their understanding of salvation through a mighty Redeemer may have been limited because of the gradual unfolding of the plan of redemption, but their faith remained firm, to await the fulfilling of the ultimate promise according to God's wisdom and time.

What these verses mean

Verse 30

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

The author does not select any examples of faith from the period of the wilderness journey, for it proved to be a forty-year period of unbelief and general apostasy as mentioned earlier (3:7-4:10). The major event as Israel prepared to occupy Canaan was the capture of Jericho. But Jericho stood as a massive obstacle to possessing the land. Joshua, the newly appointed leader, was assured of the Lord's presence in his commission (Josh. 1:1-9). He sent out spies to assess the city's defences (Josh. 2:1) and also spent time viewing the situation personally (Josh. 5:13-15). The Lord's means of delivering the city into the hands of Israel was going to be a work that was entirely of God. Joshua, being the man of faith that he was, did not hesitate to obey the Lord's instructions. The whole company of Israel was to march around the city in a particular order, the armed men first, followed by seven priests blowing on rams' horns, the ark of the covenant carried in the prescribed manner, and finally the rest of the people. The city was to be encircled once for six successive days. On the seventh day the procession was to march around the city six times in complete silence, and then on the seventh circuit the priests were to deliver a long blast on the rams' horns which was the signal for all the people to shout with a great shout. The Lord's promise was that the walls of the city would fall completely (Josh. 6:1-6). Joshua and Israel obeyed the Lord's command, trusting in his Word. Therefore they saw the complete collapse of the walls of Jericho. The city was taken as promised by God. It was the persevering faith of Joshua and Israel in the power of God and his Word that brought down the walls of Jericho.

Verse 31

By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

In the midst of the destruction of Jericho one family did survive, preserved by the grace of God. The deliverance of Rahab was through her faith in the God of Israel. She had heard about the mighty acts of the Lord, his deliverance and protection of Israel. This had opened the eyes of her understanding to acknowledge that this God is different from all other gods. He is the true and living

God, sovereign and all powerful. Rahab was therefore confident that the Lord would give Canaan to Israel and that she herself could trust him for deliverance (Josh. 2:9-13). She did not perish with those who were disobedient. Rahab was different from the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho for in faith she had received the spies. She welcomed, entertained and protected them when the rest of the people in the city had acted in defiance of God, shutting up the city and imagining that they could withstand the power of God.

Rahab's faith is remarkable in the light of three obstacles. As a woman she would be very undervalued in her society; she was immersed in idolatrous practices; she was a prostitute until she came to faith in God. It is by the grace of God that each sinner is transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and cleansed by the blood of Christ (1 Co. 6:11). The kingdom of God is opened to the repentant and believing but remains closed to the self-righteous and unbelieving (Matt. 21:31-32; Luke 7:37-50). Rahab, although a foreigner, became one of the many from all nations who are included within the covenant of redemption (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Gal. 3:8). Rahab married Salmon and was the mother of Boaz who in turn married another non-Israelite, Ruth, who was the mother of Obed, the grandfather of David (Matt. 1:5). Rahab and Ruth, two non-Israelite women, were honoured as members of the messianic line, forerunners of the innumerable multitude of Gentiles who find eternal blessing through the fulfilment of the promise of the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 32

And what more shall I say?

Having provided his readers with seventeen different examples of biblical faith, the writer now concludes this great chapter by simply mentioning some other names. He makes some general statements regarding the way in which many other believers overcame the very worst of circumstances through faith in the promises of God. Their faith is the evidence of things not seen. The writer begins with the question to indicate that any further elaboration is unnecessary.

I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets,

Time does not allow for any more detailed biographies. A random

HEBREWS 11:32-34

sampling of men from the time of the Judges and Kings is provided. From Judges the following are selected; Barak (chapters 4-5), Gideon (6-8), Jephthah (11-12) and Samson (12-16). Then there are Samuel (1 Sam. 1-25) and David (1 Sam. 16 - 1 Kings 2).

Barak led Israel against Sisera, the Canaanite, with the assistance of Deborah, his foot soldiers overcoming the chariots of the oppressor by the power of God.

Gideon and his band of three hundred triumphed over the Midianite hordes.

Jephthah overcame the armies of the Amorites and Ammonites

Samson was the victor over the Philistines.

Three men, Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29) and Samson (Judg. 13:25) are described as being endued by “the Spirit of the Lord”. This strongly suggests that they were all men of faith in spite of personal fault. Samuel was a man of integrity and faith and David, for all his faults, was described by God as “a man after my own heart” (Acts 13:22).

Verse 33

who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,

These next five verses contain statements regarding what men and women accomplished through faith in God. Those just mentioned in the previous verse and others subdued kingdoms to establish secure borders for Israel. They administered justice, ruling fairly, and doing what was right. This was the example of Samuel (1 Sam. 12:3-5), David (2 Sam. 8:15) and Solomon (1 Kings 10:9). Their faith grew to embrace what God had promised, especially regarding the promised inheritance of the land (Josh. 21:43-45; 1 Kings 4:20-25; Neh. 9:7-9, 23-25). Elijah was sustained during the three years of drought by the unfailing promises of God, who provided for him, firstly by the ravens (1 Kings 17:1-6) and then by the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-24). Those who “shut the mouths of lions” were Samson (Judg. 14:6); David (1 Sam. 17:34-36) and Daniel (Dan. 6:22).

Verse 34

quenched the fury of the flames,

Quenching the violence of fire was true of Daniel’s three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, who were bound and thrown into

Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. They remained quite undaunted and were fully prepared to lay down their lives, their faith in God undiminished (Dan. 3:16-18). They knew the presence of the person of the living God in the midst of their fiery ordeal (Dan. 3:25).

and escaped the edge of the sword;

David escaped the edge of the sword when hunted by Saul (1 Sam. 18:11; 19:10-12; 21:10). Elijah had his life threatened by Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-2) and Elisha was at odds with King Ben-Hadad of Aram (2 Kings 6:14, 31-32).

whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

Many of these believers were deeply conscious of their personal weakness but by dependence upon God received the necessary strength to persevere in the faith, obediently following God's Word. Samson brought down the temple of Dagon, David killed the giant Goliath and Hezekiah was raised from sickness. All were made victorious through faith, becoming powerful in battle and turning to flight the armies of the aliens.

Verse 35

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released,

The writer continues with further examples of those who triumphed through faith. Women received their dead raised to life again, like the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24) and the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:18-37). Others were tortured, for by faith they refused to compromise their trust in God and his Word (Jer. 20:1-3, 7-8; 37:13-16, 21; 38:6).

so that they might gain a better resurrection.

All those believers looked forward to a better resurrection, meaning that they all held in their hearts, through faith alone, the hope of eternal life and of entering the heavenly country.

Verse 36

Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.

There were other believers who also faced intense hardship along the way of the pilgrimage of faith. They faced trials of mockings and scourging, of chains and imprisonment. Joseph was unjustly

HEBREWS 11:37-38

imprisoned (Gen. 39:20) as well as the prophets Micaiah (1 Kings 22:26-27), Hanani (2 Chr. 16:7-10) and Jeremiah.

Verse 37

They were stoned;

Other forms of persecution are mentioned. Zechariah was stoned in the days of Joash (2 Chr. 24:20-21). This must have been true of other prophets, as the Lord spoke of such stonings (Matt. 23:31, 37; Luke 13:34).

they were sawn in two;

This may be referring to the tradition that Isaiah suffered such barbaric treatment during the reign of Manasseh. There is no specific reference in the Old Testament Scriptures to anyone being put to death in this way.

they were put to death by the sword.

This could be referring to Urijah who was murdered by Jehoiakim (Jer. 26:23). Elijah spoke of prophets being killed by the sword (1 Kings 19:10).

They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated—

Other believers' persecution did not end in death, but their faith carried them through banishments and lingering sufferings. Sheepskins and goatskins suggest wandering in the desert in rough clothing. The ill-treatment would have been torture.

Verse 38

the world was not worthy of them.

Although such individuals were rejected and despised by the world, in the sight of God the world was not worthy of them. The world does not acknowledge God (1 John 2:15-17; 5:19) but the world is overcome by faith (1 John 5:4). The Lord Jesus Christ taught his followers that all believers find the blessing of God when they stand clearly in the way of faith in spite of the fierce opposition of the world (Matt. 5:11, 12; John 16:33).

They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

They may have been deprived of clothing and home and hunted by the world like wild animals, but none of these believers renounced his or her faith in order to alleviate suffering. Elijah was known by his desert dress (2 Kings 1:8). Obadiah hid in caves the young men

training as prophets in the days of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 18:4, 13). Many of those the writer had in mind here were people who suffered terrible torture and martyrdom during the years before the coming of Christ.

Verse 39

These were all commended for their faith,

Each of these believers bears the stamp of God's approval. They persevered in the faith without faltering to the very end, quite undeterred by hardship arising from their faith in God. Pleasing God was more important than anything else in the world.

yet none of them received what had been promised.

However, they did not live to see the fulfilment of the coming of the promised Redeemer, but they still exercised faith and looked with hope to the promise of eternal life in him. They did not fall short of the promised inheritance. Believers living in the present age do so in the hope of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who die before his coming are not disqualified from the hope of the resurrection. In the same way these Old Testament believers are not disqualified from any of the blessings of the full redemption secured by the Lord Jesus Christ. They died in hope.

Verse 40

God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

God in his sovereign wisdom has purposed that many more will be added to the number of faithful believers. The Old Testament believers will be perfected through faith in the promised Redeemer as part of one unified company of the redeemed (Heb. 12:22-24; Rev. 5:8-10; 7:9-17). The pain and suffering known by these believers from the former age did not prevent them from persevering in their pilgrimage through this world. So the readers of this book are encouraged to endure with the same resolve, to press towards the mark in the hope of the resurrection unto life (Phil. 3:10, 14).



Summary

Faith is demonstrated as trusting in God, his wisdom, love and power, and his faithfulness to his promises. The focus of all those Old Testament characters was not in temporal blessings, but in eternal safety, security and satisfaction. Nevertheless, they achieved great things in this life because they were clear about the reality and glory of their eternal inheritance. This blessing would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ (the promised Redeemer) and would be shared by all who trust him in every age. None of the examples mentioned in this chapter was without sin. Some of them had glaring faults, but they were saved through their faith (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8). This whole chapter 11 was a powerful message to the readers of Hebrews whose sufferings were real, but not so acute (12:4) as those mentioned in verses 35-38.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: The triumph of faith

Introduction

The author of Hebrews is providing examples of men and women who persevered in faith. No matter how great the physical obstacles, faith proved to be the means through which they received the blessing of God and saw the fulfilment of his promises. However, one promise, the eternal inheritance, was yet to be fulfilled. But not even death caused these believers to waver in hope of this promise being fulfilled. They pressed on to the very end of life as pilgrims journeying to the eternal city of God. Although having limited revelation and understanding, they possessed eternal life and exercised faith in the promised Redeemer.

1. The city of Jericho was taken through faith

- (a) This city had to be taken in order to possess the promised earthly inheritance.
- (b) Precise instructions were given by God, which were to be followed in order to take this city.

- (c) By obeying God's Word the Israelites demonstrated that they trusted God and his power.
- (d) The walls of Jericho collapsed because they were destroyed by the power of God.
- (e) God must be trusted and obeyed in order to enter the promised eternal inheritance.

2. The deliverance of Rahab was through faith

- (a) Rahab believed what she had heard of God's power to deliver Israel and destroy her enemies.
- (b) Rahab believed that she would be preserved by God when the city was destroyed by God.
- (c) Therefore Rahab received the spies peaceably, identifying with the people of God.
- (d) Rahab was saved from destruction through faith in God and his mercy.

3. The promised inheritance was possessed through faith

- (a) The judges and kings of Israel triumphed over the enemy through faith.
- (b) Other believers received the blessing of God through faith. They continued to exercise faith in God no matter how difficult the circumstances.
- (c) Other believers persevered in faith, no matter how hostile the world was towards them.
- (d) Not one of these believers gave up or compromised and therefore they received a good report from God.

4. The promised eternal inheritance will be realised through persevering faith

- (a) The Old Testament believers did not see the realisation of the promised eternal inheritance.
- (b) God in his wisdom has purposed that all believers should obtain the eternal inheritance together.

Conclusion:

As the Old Testament believers did not give up in the faith in spite of having to experience difficulties and opposition, so all believers must persevere in the faith. Unless we cleave to the Lord Jesus Christ with all our heart we will fall short of the promised eternal inheritance. We will only enter that inheritance by obeying God and patiently enduring to the end.



Focus Point:

Inheritance

The general meaning of *inheritance* relates to property or other possessions received by an heir. In the Old Testament *inheritance* does not necessarily relate to hereditary succession or possession. There are some laws that do deal with succession to the headship of the family, with consequent control of family property (Gen. 15:3-5; Num. 27:1-11; 36:1-12; Deut. 21:15-17).

The concept of *inheritance* occurs early on in the Old Testament when God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. This was not a passing down through the family line upon death. Israel's possession of the land rested solely on the gift from God. They would enter the land only through the Lord's helping them to conquer their enemies by hard fighting. The victory was not by their self-effort (Josh. 21:43-45). This inheritance had to be divided by lot among the tribes by divine approval (Num. 26:52-56; 33:54; Josh. 14:1-12). The land was to be possessed and enjoyed for ever. This was conditional upon faithfulness to God (Deut. 4:26; 11:8-9). The land was given to Israel but it also remained the inheritance of God, his special portion of all the earth (Ex. 15:17; Lev. 25:23; 1 Sam. 26:19).

In addition to land being the inheritance of God, Israel also is God's inheritance (Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 32:9). God chose Israel to put in the land and both are his inheritance. Likewise the faithful of the nation came to regard God himself as their inheritance (Ps. 16:5; 73:26; Lam. 3:24). The Levites did not have any land and their inheritance was only God (Num. 18:20-26).

In the New Testament the concept of heir inheritance is accepted as an Old Testament practice. In Hebrews, for example, the new covenant is stated to be a better inheritance to be possessed by the followers of Christ than the inheritance Israel received. Christ claims to be the heir of God (Mark 12:1-11; Heb. 1:2). Romans 8:17 states that those who are in Christ are joint-heirs with Christ of the inheritance. Christ can claim his inheritance by right because he is the only begotten Son. The believer receives his inheritance by grace (God's undeserved favour) as he is an adopted son of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

The inheritance is the kingdom of God with all its blessings (Matt. 25:34; 1 Co. 6:9; Gal. 5:21). While the enjoyment of this kingdom begins in this life (the kingdom is already present, brought into being by Christ's coming to the earth) its full possession is in the future (Rom. 8:17-23; 1 Co. 15:50; Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Source used: *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Paternoster)



Over to you

Do we try and comfort people with a hope that faith will lead to relief from their trouble? Do we have authority to do that when we study this passage? What can a preacher do?

There is an emphasis in the verses of our study of people finishing their lives well. The apostle Paul writes about finishing the race well. What implications does this have for your preaching and for those in your congregation?

How do you think this passage compares with the "wealth and prosperity" gospel that is so prevalent in different parts of the world today? If you have come under the influence of this teaching, how does it stand up to the teaching of Hebrews 11?

ACTION TO TAKE, DISCIPLINE

TO ENDURE AND THE NEED TO PERSEVERE



Hebrews 12:1-17

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Discipline
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

We now move into the last part of the book, chapters 12 and 13. The author has stressed that God has spoken through his Son, that his Son became man, that his Son is greater than Moses and Aaron through his everlasting priesthood. Also the writer has drawn the clear distinction between the new covenant (centred in Christ) and the old covenant (represented by Moses and Aaron). Having shown the superiority of Christ, the writer calls on the Hebrew Christians to persevere by following the example of many who lived in the Old Testament era. The writer's intention was not to draw attention to the people, but to the object of their faith for which they suffered and died. That object was the promise of God that they would receive a glorious spiritual inheritance. Some of them may have dimly understood that this blessing would focus on a "coming one". The readers of this book knew who that "coming one" was. They were well acquainted with his life, death and resurrection. As true heirs of their ancestors they must fix their eyes on Jesus and have full confidence in him. Being in the family of God they must understand that the Father will exercise discipline and correction. They knew the Old Testament so this subject would not have been new for them (Prov. 3:11-12).

What these verses mean



1. The supreme example of the Lord Jesus Christ (12:1-4)

Verse 1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,

In reminding his readers of the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, the writer draws upon the imagery of the sports arena and portrays believers as participating in a race. The way to victory is exactly the same as that of the pilgrim on a journey. Just as the journey must be completed to reach the desired objective, so the race must be completed in order to gain the prize. All believers are participants in this race but not in the sense of competing against each other but as athletes who are single-mindedly endeavouring to secure victory. The readers are pictured, together with the author, as competitors on the track. The witnesses are the believers from previous generations who have persevered and triumphed in their respective race and now form the rows of spectators watching the present generation of believers competing in the race of life. They are witnesses who have borne a clear testimony and overcome difficulties and the world by faith (Rev. 12:11). Some did lay down their lives for the faith but now they all form a glorious throng to encourage and inspire by their example every living believer to resolutely endure to the very end of the race.

let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,

Athletes who compete in races make sure through disciplined training that they do not carry any surplus flesh or bulk. All unnecessary clothing is removed at the time of the contest (1 Co. 9:25, 27). There may be things in the life of the Christian that are not essentially sinful but are not conducive to growth and perseverance in the Christian life. These should be carefully evaluated and laid aside. In particular the Christian athlete is to cast aside the sin which so easily gets in the way of competing in the race. Sin will always slow down and impede the Christian athlete and must be discarded (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 4:20-24; 5:8-14; Col. 3:1-11; 1 Thess. 5:4-10; 1 John 2:15-17).

and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

The athlete has prepared himself for action. The readers of the book

had made a good start to the race (10:32-34) but now they lacked the resolve to press on (2:1). The sins of unbelief and disobedience were gradually taking possession of them (3:18-4:1). They needed to rekindle the former diligent spirit (4:11), discarding their present mood of indifference (6:11-12) and regaining their confidence (10:35, 39). Endurance in living the Christian life is always a priority (Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Luke 9:57-62; 2 Thess. 1:4). The illustration of the Christian life as a race emphasises that it is an active life, not simply a set of beliefs and ritual. It stresses the idea of progress (1 Pet. 3:18). Perseverance was what marked out the Old Testament examples in chapter 11. Whatever pathway of faith the Lord has marked out for a person, they are to persevere in it and go on patiently to the end with no thought of giving up.

Verse 2

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,

The readers are now exhorted to focus upon the goal of the race, Jesus Christ. He is the reward or prize to be gained at the end of the race. Therefore the eyes of the believer are to be firmly fixed upon the Lord Jesus Christ with no thought of looking at others or at anything else.

the author

This is the first reason why the Christian should concentrate his gaze on the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the pioneer of our faith and therefore the author or originator. He prayed that people might come to faith in him (John 17:20, 21). He sustains believers in their faith (Luke 22:31, 32). It is he who has begun this good work and who will complete it (Phil. 1:6). Jesus Christ is with his people at every stage, from start to finish.

and perfecter of our faith,

The second reason for having the eyes firmly fixed on Jesus is that he as the perfect man is the supreme example of faith. His entire life was characterised by trust in God (2:13) and complete dependence upon the Father (10:5-10). He expressed trust in God in prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12 9:28-29; John 17). In suffering and death he continued to trust in God and was quite unwavering to the very end (Luke 23:46; 1 Pet. 2:23).

who for the joy set before him

While there may be many fellow believers in the race of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ ran alone in order to secure the prize of everlasting

life and eternal glory for his people. His was a solitary struggle, yet there was joy for Jesus. This joy was the completion of his work of salvation of a great multitude and his entry into glory. Christ imparts this joy to his followers (John 15:1; 17:13).

endured the cross, scorning its shame,

Therefore he endured the cross. The only way in which the plan of redemption and the glory of God could be fully realised was through the cross. So the Lord Jesus Christ disregarded the shame in the way that society viewed the cross. Christ was fully committed to the injustice of his trial, the pain and agony of crucifixion, and abandonment by the Father, knowing that he would rise again from the dead (Mark 8:31; 9:12, 13; 10:33-34; Luke 9:22, 44; 17:25; 18:31-33).

and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The cross is the path to joy and triumph. Following the shame of the cross the Lord Jesus Christ sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ is a recurring theme throughout the book (1:3; 2:9; 4:14; 5:5, 8-9; 6:19, 20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:12, 24, 28; 10:12, 13:20). Every believer who shares in his sufferings also shares in the glory of Christ's exaltation (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 2:6; 2 Co. 3:1-4; 2 Tim. 2:12).

Verse 3

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

The readers needed to understand that they were in danger of falling out of the race of the Christian life. The pressure of hostility, from fellow Jews especially, was being allowed to cause them to falter and to give up the struggle. Hence, they are exhorted to consider the anger and hatred of the world towards the Lord Jesus Christ. This reached its climax at the cross, the venom intensified by cruel mocking. It constituted an enormous assault by the powers of darkness against the eternal Son of God (Acts 2:22, 23; 3:13-15; 4:27). If the Lord Jesus Christ endured such opposition for the sake of his people, then the Hebrew Christians should be fully prepared to follow him along this same pathway of suffering with the same patient and persevering spirit, shunning the temptation to compromise or to fall into attitudes of apathy and indifference.

Verse 4

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

The author reminds his readers that their suffering had not resulted in death as it did with the Lord Jesus Christ and many of their ancestors. Although it had been an intense fight, including imprisonment for some and loss of property for others, so far no-one had lost his life in the conflict. As they had been willing to suffer for the sake of Christ then, so they must be ready to show the same loyalty to the very end. So long as they looked to Christ and the eternal glory, they would maintain their struggle against sin and all that opposed the Lord, no matter what the cost.



2. The value of discipline (12:5-11)

Verses 5 and 6

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

At this point the author of the letter takes up another aspect of the present experience of his readers. This also serves to counter their discouragement. These believers may have been thinking that their present difficulties were the result of God's having abandoned them and that he was unconcerned about their plight. They may have simply forgotten or were in danger of forgetting that they were the sons of God and that God continues to be their Father in heaven.

***“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,
And do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
6 because the Lord disciplines those whom he loves,
and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”***

The writer points to the encouragement of Proverbs 3:11-12. This scripture brings together sonship and discipline. A part of the experience of sonship involves discipline. God ordains and uses suffering as a means of disciplining or training his children. Therefore believers, rather than despising and being discouraged by such forms of discipline, should be quick to appreciate the truth that it is because God loves his children that he disciplines them. Discipline is all part of the training that the Father exercises to shape the character of his sons. Present suffering is not an indication that God is neglecting his people but rather assures his people of his love and concern.

Verse 7

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

Believers are encouraged to persevere through such times of affliction. A true son of God should expect to be disciplined, for all sons in the flesh are disciplined by their earthly fathers. If, on the other hand, a son does not experience such training from a caring father then it would indicate something else.

Verse 8

If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

If sonship and discipline are inseparable then lack of discipline points to the fact of not being a true son of God but like one who is not born within a marriage. Those who reject God's discipline and training demonstrate that they are not sons of God.

Verse 9

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it.

The principle of a father's disciplining his children is given further emphasis as an antidote to becoming disheartened in living the Christian life under the constant pressure of a hostile world. In the natural realm human fathers discipline their children and the children respect their fathers for it.

How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

If a child shows such respect to an earthly father, how much more should a Christian believer submit to his spiritual Father and live? In acknowledging the Father in heaven the believer should be in subjection to him. He is the living God in whom we live and move and have our being and to whom we are all accountable.

Verse 10

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best;

Further, our earthly fathers disciplined us during our childhood which was for a comparatively short period of time. They exercised their authority according to human fallibility, inconsistently, sometimes acting capriciously, or in anger.

but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

By contrast every facet of discipline exercised by our heavenly Father is according to his infinite wisdom and with perfect concern and care, without any trace of harshness or favouritism. He knows what is exactly necessary for each one of his children, with the overall goal of our being made holy as he is holy (Ps. 119:67, 71; 2 Co. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:1; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). Without holiness no-one will see God (12:14).

Verse 11

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.

This verse provides a most apt summary. From a negative perspective the period of discipline is a painful experience without any apparent indication of joy.

Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Believers know that they can anticipate indescribable glory once the period of discipline is over (Rom. 8:18; 2 Co. 4:17). Discipline is a part of the pilgrimage of faith to prepare believers for the glories of the eternal city of God. This discipline will reap a rich harvest. As the apostle Paul neared the end of his personal struggle and fight he looked forward to receiving *the crown of righteousness* (2 Tim. 4:6-8). James also writes of patient endurance in times of trial being rewarded with *the crown of life* (James 1:12). The apostle Peter encourages his readers to remain clearly focused upon Christ though their faith was being sorely tried in a variety of ways (1 Pet. 1:6-8). Righteousness and peace are the characteristics of the everlasting kingdom of Christ. The perfect discipline of the heavenly Father produces righteousness in the lives of his children and this will be completed when they see Christ and are made like him (1 John 3:2).



3. Encouragement to persevere in the struggle (12:12-13)

Verse 12

Therefore,

The writer of the letter has presented the case regarding the value of discipline in the experience of the believer. Now follows the application to encourage the believers to resist the temptation not to

give up before reaching the desired goal, the promised inheritance. The transition from argument to application is made by the word “Therefore”.

strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees!

The believer is urged to press on, especially when conscious of fatigue and the loss of enthusiasm due to the pressures of living the Christian life in a hostile environment. Since there can be no faltering on the race track (see verse 1) for then the prize will be lost, therefore believers are encouraged to strengthen their hands and knees. When the arms want to drop from weariness and the knees begin to wobble then the runner must be all the more determined to continue on. In the race of faith believers must realise the need to persevere in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances no matter how fierce the battle.

Verse 13

“Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

The second part of the exhortation is a quotation of Proverbs 4:26. Believers must not waver, but pursue a straight course like athletes in a race. Within the imagery of the race track it suggests keeping to the running lane. Any sudden deviation to one side or the other will result in a weakened state. The flagging knees require healing and this will only be gained through perseverance. These believers have already been exhorted to hold fast without wavering (10:23). They must not be like the professing people of God in Elijah’s day who faltered between two opinions (1 Kings 18:21) or the “would-be followers” of the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 9:57-62.

4. The danger of following the example of Esau (12:14-17)

Verse 14

Make every effort to live in peace with all men

This warning begins with a charge to live peaceably and to pursue holiness. The New Testament writers did not hesitate to remind believers of the need to live in harmony with others (Rom. 12:18). As God is the God of peace (13:20) and the Lord Jesus Christ is the King of peace (7:2) and the Lord Jesus Christ has made peace by the blood of his cross (Col 1:20), so the people of God should be people of peace (Matt. 5:9; Mark 9:50).

and to be holy;

The second part of the charge is to pursue holiness. This is the opposite of the false holiness of the Pharisees, a mere external holiness. True holiness involves inner purity that flows into the outer life. Holiness is not an option and has always been required of those whom God redeems (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; Matt. 5:48; 2 Co. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). It is through union with Christ that a person is made holy (1 Co. 1:30). A holy life is one that is separated and different from the style of life that is pursued in this fallen world. A true and pure holy life is pleasing to God.

without holiness no-one will see the Lord.

A person cannot lead a life that is holy and please himself. A holy life comes only when a person is in close communion with Christ. If a person's life is of the style and standard that this world sets, it will be alien to Christ. A life that is not lived for Christ (holy – separated from this world) will not bring that person near to him. Such a person will not see the Lord.

Verse 15

See to it that no-one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Diligence must be exercised in the pursuit of peace and holiness and nothing can be taken for granted. Mutual concern should exist among the fellowship of believers to ensure that no fellow contestant falls out of the race. In general this part of the local congregation had so lapsed that apostasy was a very real danger (3:12; 4:1; 6:4-6; 10:26-31) and would require yet another warning (12:25-29). Carelessness and indifference in living the Christian life can quickly become epidemic and poison the entire fellowship. The lesson is that one poisonous weed can infect the whole crop. So the spirit of one unbelieving and rebellious individual can have a disastrous affect upon the fellowship of genuine believers. One person overcome by discouragement (who abandons the race) must be dealt with firmly and graciously before others are tempted to drop out.

Verse 16

See that no-one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.

Just as the readers were encouraged to follow the example of those who obtained a good report through faith, so they are warned not to

HEBREWS 12:16-17

follow the example of unbelief. Esau is one who despised the promised inheritance. The Scriptures do not contain any reference to Esau as being sexually immoral, but, the term is probably being used in reference to his taking two foreign wives, women who were most distinctly from outside of the covenant family. These relationships were a constant source of concern to Esau's parents, Isaac and Rebekah, and something which they knew must not happen to their other son, Jacob (Gen. 26:34-35; 27:46). It is quite possible that some members of the congregation addressed in Hebrews had fallen into the sin of fornication. In the permissive society which existed at the time of the New Testament, sexual immorality was always a temptation for believers and is quite inconsistent with the pursuit of holiness (1 Co. 5:9-12; 6:9-11, 13, 16-20; Eph. 5:3, 5; Col. 3:5-6; 1 Thess. 4:3-7).

Verse 17

Afterwards, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

Esau demonstrated his unbelief by his attitude towards his birthright. Instead of regarding his being the firstborn as a blessing and privilege he treated it in a most off-handed manner. It was of no more value than a single meal, showing his carnality and contempt for the promises of God (Gen. 25:29-34). Once the blessing of the firstborn had been sold in such a trivial manner, Esau mistakenly imagined that he could regain what had been irretrievably lost. In the providence of God this blessing had been invoked by Isaac upon Jacob. This could not be rescinded and this Isaac appeared to have understood as being according to the sovereign will of God. Esau tried to change his father's mind but he was rejected as the firstborn. Esau's repentance was not of godly sorrow or genuine repentance but of anger and frustration. He only grieved because he thought in terms of what had been lost naturally. The readers were in the same mortal danger of forfeiting the inheritance of the firstborn in Christ (12:23), and of disqualifying themselves from salvation (2:1-3). It is impossible to restore again to repentance those who rebel against the light of God's Word and the blessing of the gospel (6:4-6).



Summary

The author has set out many examples in the previous chapter as a means to urge his readers to persevere in the pilgrimage of faith. He begins this new chapter with an illustration of an athletics race. This is to emphasise activity, progress and total commitment.

There are a great number of those in the past, described as a cloud, whose faith witnesses to God's faithfulness. Over and above all those mentioned there is finally the pattern set by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the supreme example of perseverance in and through the most intense suffering. Therefore the Christian believer is to set his gaze firmly on Jesus Christ. The readers of the book would be able to identify with the suffering of the Old Testament believers and also appreciate the affliction experienced by the Lord Jesus Christ. However, there is a further way in which suffering in the life of the believer may be understood - discipline. This is not in the form of punishment as from the hand of an angry God, but as from the Father in heaven who in his love and compassion deals perfectly with his children with their very best interests at heart. This discipline has to be applied to daily living, a life that is separated from this world's standards and instead follow godly values. Esau is a warning to those who are set on a worldly religious life; if you have tasted of God's goodness and turned from it, there is no way back.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: The Christian life as a race

Introduction

The idea of a race suggests vigorous action with progress towards a goal. The action is the continuous struggle against sin and for the spread of the gospel. The goal is to be like Christ and to reach the destination of ultimate glory.

1. It begins with Jesus Christ

We first come to faith in Christ alone for salvation. This begins a life of faith in the strength of Christ.

2. It continues with Christ

This will mean suffering, taking up the cross (Matt. 16:24; John 15:19). Believers will be encouraged by those who have gone before. The believer will be strengthened by others who are in the race. But most important of all is that the believer must keep his eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. If you are not a Christian you are not, as yet, in this race because you have not trusted in Christ. You will not benefit from the next point at all!

3. It ends with Christ

Christ enables us to persevere and he is the prize at the end. The end is eternal glory (Rom. 5:2; 8:18). Part of this glory is the eternal presence of the Lord. He will protect, refresh and console for ever.

Conclusion

The apostle Paul wrote about the Christian race to the Galatian believers (Gal. 5:7). There are many obstacles and, using an athletics illustration, he says that someone was holding them back or someone was cutting in to interrupt the race. All believers will have these interruptions and they must not be put off by them, but have their eyes firmly focused upon Jesus and the ultimate prize.



Focus Point:

Discipline

Discipline implies instruction and correction, the training that improves, moulds, strengthens and perfects character. It is the moral education obtained by the enforcement of obedience through supervision and control. Usually the concept is translated chastening, chastisement or instruction.

The discipline of the believer on the part of the heavenly Father is frequently illustrated by the correction of the human father. We have seen this in our present study (12:5-11). The Old Testament teaches that chastisement by God is not to be despised (Job 5:17; Ps. 6:1; 38:1). The value of discipline by a human father is stressed in Proverbs 19:18.

The New Testament continues this teaching and relates it to the context of the suffering endured by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian is reminded to value the discipline of God the Father as a sure evidence of sonship and God's love. The end result of discipline is our ultimate good, though for the moment it may be grievous. It may often cause pain, sorrow and loss. Through such experiences the Christian comes to appreciate and be assured of God's comfort. The whole purpose of discipline is the correction, the obedience, the faith and faithfulness of God's child. The outcome is happiness, blessedness and assurance of the love of God.

Source used: Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (*Paternoster*)



Over to you

A vital part of Christian ministry is to keep hearts and minds focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. Where has your emphasis been directed? On people's failures, successes, service for the Lord? Do you need to correct your ministry? If so, how?

How do you handle the sufferings of your people? Do you distinguish between the unconverted suffering for their sin and the believer being corrected and prepared for glory? In what spirit (attitude) should you speak to people?

NOT BACK TO SINAI

BUT ON TO GRACE



Hebrews 12:18-29

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Figurative language in the Bible
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

These verses provide us with a glorious climax to the whole argument of the book of Hebrews. The readers who are tempted, because of persecution, to return to their Old Testament traditions, are shown most clearly the tremendous contrast between that tradition and the amazing privileges and prospects that belong to believers in Christ. The old tradition is described in terms of Mount Sinai and the new in terms of Mount Zion. This is followed by the writer's final appeal to his readers.

What these verses mean



1. Mount Sinai (12:18-21)

Verse 18

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched

The background to these verses reflects the record of what happened in Exodus 19:10-25; Deuteronomy 4:11-12 and 5:1-26. Sinai is not actually mentioned by name but is clearly implied. It was where the

HEBREWS 12:18-21

law was given by the Lord to Moses. The law was not given to show the people then, or at any other time, the kind of life they are able to live, but rather to expose human sin and helplessness (Rom.3:19-25). The writer makes a contrast between the experience of the Israelites at Mount Sinai and the experience of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ at Mount Zion. Several points are made about what the Israelites saw, felt and heard on the occasion of the giving of the law. The mountain was not to be touched by man or beast (Ex. 19:12-13).

and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm;

These were signs which God clearly displayed so that the people would show reverence to the law and acknowledge its authority.

Verse 19

to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them,

The overall scene was one which struck terror into the hearts of the entire company of Israelites (Ex. 20:18). The sound of God's voice was so awesome in itself that the people reacted with intensified fear, begging that the Word should not be spoken to them any more (Ex. 19:19; 20:19; Deut. 5:25-27). As God descended upon the mountain it shook at his presence and power.

Verse 20

because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned."

The people must have been petrified with fear and must have wondered if God would not destroy them all, for the command had been issued that any person or animal that so much as dared set foot on this hallowed ground was to be punished by stoning and arrow respectively, that is, from a distance. No one was to desecrate this ground under any circumstances (Ex. 19:12-13).

Verse 21

The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

An exception was made in the case of Moses. He was commanded by God to approach the top of the mountain (Ex. 19:14, 17-20) and then later Aaron was commanded to come also (Ex. 19:24). But the sense of God's presence and holiness was so great that Moses also expressed his fear. There are no exceptions; even a man of God, such as Moses, was terrified and trembled.¹ (see page 287 for footnote)

The meaning here is plain. If any of the readers decide to defect from Christ, they will put themselves back under the regime of the law with no means of escape from the awesome consequences. Is that really what they wanted? Let them look again at the tremendous privileges and blessings upon which they would be turning their backs.

2. Mount Zion (12:22-24)

Verse 22

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.

The author is confident that those he is writing to are genuine believers, even though they are perilously close to apostatising. His readers have come to the mountain which they have ascended and where they have been fully welcomed into the whole company of worshipping angels and believers in the presence of the living God. *Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God* are all ways of describing the church of Christ. It is made up of the total number of all the redeemed in every age. Mount Zion was the city of David (2 Sam. 5:7), and was the place God chose to dwell among his people (Ps. 9:11; 74:2). It was a place of beauty, strength and security (Ps. 48), made so, not only because of its natural setting, but because God was there. So Mount Zion foreshadowed the New Testament church in which Christ reigns (Ps. 2:6; Isa. 28:16; Matt. 16:18; 18:10) and from which the Word of God is sounded out (Is. 2:3). In Revelation 21:1-2, the church is seen to be the “Holy City” and the “New Jerusalem”. This is the city to which Abraham and the Old Testament believers looked forward (11:10, 16). It is the spiritual and heavenly realm into which all believers are brought by grace.

¹ There is no word of Moses expressing his personal fear at the time of the giving of the law. It is true that the entire congregation in the camp trembled on that morning when God descended on Sinai (Ex. 19:16). When Moses was confronted by God at the burning bush he was afraid (Ex. 3:6) and Stephen’s inspired speech mentions that Moses trembled at that time (Acts 7:32). It would be natural to understand that Moses also feared and trembled at Sinai.

You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,

While the angels are not part of the church since they had no need of redemption, they are in constant attendance on believers (1:14), and share with them in extolling the glory of God and the wonders of his grace (Rev. 5:11-12). This will be seen in its fullness when all things in earth and heaven are restored from the dire effects of the fall. The whole universe will rejoice (Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:20-22; Eph.1:10).

Verse 23

to the church of the firstborn,

The “firstborn” means a highly privileged people as co-heirs with Christ of heaven’s glory (see Rom. 8:17 and comment on page 17 of Book 1). This is the church which Christ loves and for which he died. This body consists of believers of both Old and New Testament periods. Israel in the flesh was the firstborn of God (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9) but under the new covenant believers in the Lord Jesus Christ become the firstfruits of the new creation (James 1:18).

whose names are written in heaven.

These members of the church of the firstborn have their names registered in heaven. Moses understood the significance of the heavenly register that is kept by God alone (Ex. 32:32-33). This book is also mentioned in Psalm 69:28 and Daniel 12:1. The names of those written in this book are recorded permanently and include the names of believers of all ages from the beginning of time to the end. In the New Testament the book is known as the book of life (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19). Since the names of all those who are part of the body are written in heaven (Luke 10:20), nothing can remove them. This is another way of expressing the truth found in Ephesians 2:8.

You have come to God, the judge of all men,

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ come to God to whom all are accountable, for he alone is the true and living God, the Creator of all (Ps. 104:24-25; John 1:2; Acts 17:24, 30-31; Rev. 4:11). All must give an account to him (Matt. 16:27; 25:31-32; John 5:22, 27-30; Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Co. 5:10; Rev. 6:15-17; 20:11-15). He is the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25) and there is no one who will be able to escape the final summons to appear before him. It is true that believers will come before God for his judgment, but they will do so

through the Lord Jesus Christ and his perfect sacrifice for sin. Believers can approach God joyfully and confidently because they know they come to the throne of grace and not a throne of judgment. Believers will be judged on their work (Rom. 14:12; 1 Co. 3:10-15; Rev. 20:11-15) and this may well be an unpleasant experience, but there will be an assured welcome and no fear of rejection.

to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,

At Mount Zion believers come to a great company of the redeemed already in glory (Rev. 7:9-17) awaiting the day of resurrection. Under the terms of the old covenant there was no perfection (9:9-10), but in Christ under the “better covenant” there is perfection (2:10; 5:9; 7:28; 9:11). Christ makes his people perfect and is the perfecter of their faith. Those who die in Christ await the day of resurrection when their spirits will be clothed with a glorified body (Phil. 1:21, 23; 1 Co. 15:52-54; 2 Co. 5:1-8). They go immediately into God’s presence (Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23). Though physically separated from those on earth, this is but temporary. The church on earth and the church in heaven are one.

Verse 24

to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The writer is still describing those who are of Mount Zion. They are secured by the blood of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has already been referred to as the mediator of this covenant, (9:15), which is the *better covenant* (8:6). The new covenant is fulfilled in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Co. 11:25). The reference to the blood of Abel is intended to stress the virtue and value of Christ’s blood for the forgiveness of our sins (Eph.1:7) and our reconciliation to God (Col. 1:20). Whereas the blood of Abel cried out for vengeance (Gen. 4:10), the blood of Christ ensures our peace with God (Eph. 2:13).



3. The final appeal (12:25-29)

Verse 25

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks.

This is the very argument with which the writer began (1:1-2:4). It surfaced again in 10:28-29. The argument has even greater force than at the beginning, because since then the superiority of Christ over the law and all Old Testament provisions has been displayed in

great detail. To ignore or turn away from the revelation of the gospel declared by the Lord Jesus Christ is to act in a way that is no different from the conduct of the unbelieving and disobedient Israelites.

If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

The Israelites were motivated by sin, had hardened and rebellious hearts and thus brought themselves under the severe condemnation of God. They did not want to hear the voice of God because they knew that God was fearfully present and were afraid that they would die. There were many other times when Israel showed the same unbelieving and rebellious spirit. They did not escape for they died in the wilderness being refused entry into Canaan, the promised inheritance. At Sinai God spoke audibly and clearly through Moses. It is all the more true concerning those who refuse to listen to the voice from heaven. God has spoken fully and for a final time through his Son (John 1:17-18; Heb. 1:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:16-21; 1 John 1:1-3). If the Hebrew readers refuse to listen to his call to salvation (come from heaven through Jesus) there is no escape from eternal condemnation (John 5:24-29).

Verse 26

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."

When the law was given at Sinai there was a tremendous upheaval (Ex. 19:18). That will be nothing compared to the upheaval that will take place when Christ returns. Then the whole created universe will be involved (Matt. 24:29; 2 Pet. 3:10-13). The writer is quoting from Haggai 2:6, which speaks of events about to take place then. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the writer tells us that they foreshadowed the events of the end of time. There is a coming day when the whole universe will shake at the presence of God. Just as Israel was filled with fear when Sinai shook at the awesome presence of the living God, so it is a terrifying prospect to know what lies in the future for all who do not know God through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 27

The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

The whole process will be one of sifting and cleansing. The things that are spiritual and eternal will be left intact. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matt. 24:35). The violent upheaval of the universe will mark the eradication of everything that is of man and marred by sin. Dramatic changes will occur in the entire universe which will result in the total renewal of all things (Rom. 8:21-22). God has purposed to cleanse the work of his hands in this way, as the world has been defiled by man having been made subject to corruption and death by Adam’s sin. Everything that is hostile to God will be removed and the new heavens and new earth will be filled with righteousness alone (2 Pet. 3:13). Only that which is of God will endure. What is of the old covenant is obsolete and has already been annulled and has no place in the new heavens and new earth. What is of the new covenant is everlasting and will endure for ever. The readers of Hebrews must understand that, should they return to the old ways, they will be abandoning the unshakable realities of the gospel and that which abides eternally. They will be left with nothing but condemnation.

Verse 28

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

The kingdom of heaven, the eternal city, whose builder and maker is God, is quite immovable and will emerge from the fires of judgment perfectly glorious. Nothing will be allowed to ever defile the kingdom (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:27; 22:15). God’s people will dwell in the city in unbroken fellowship with God and service of him (Rev. 22:3-5). The writer shows pastoral hopefulness that his readers are true believers and that by grace they belong to the kingdom of Christ (John 18:36). In having such a glorious hope the people of God are exhorted to acknowledge God in humble and thankful worship. Such service or worship should be the natural response to God’s grace and the many blessings given through Christ (1 Pet. 2:5, 9, 10). It is only through Christ that God can be worshipped acceptably. That God should deal with such unworthy sinners should motivate

HEBREWS 12:29 and Summary

believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to pour out their hearts and lives in humble gratitude and devotion, in the spirit of reverence and godly fear. This was the very spirit which was absent at Sinai as Israel lacked respect for God and only feared for themselves.

Verse 29

for our God is a consuming fire.

The final reminder is that while the eternal God is full of grace he is nevertheless not to be trifled with. The God of Sinai, against whom Israel rebelled, ever remains the same in his infinite perfections. Just as he manifested himself at Sinai as a “consuming fire”, the God who judged unbelief and disobedience under the old covenant, so he will judge unbelief and disobedience under the new covenant. Forsaking the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will result in the same fearful consequences of fiery judgment. This is a final solemn warning. All our dealings with God must be real and honest. This is the note on which the argument and teaching of the book of Hebrews ends.



Summary

The long argument of the book has come to an end. Chapter 12 can be summarised as a final call to perseverance with Christ and the gospel. The readers are to see themselves as in a race straining for a goal.

In the course of that race they will suffer, but they must know that their suffering is part of the loving care and discipline in God's plan for them as their heavenly Father. For his final plea not to go back the writer contrasts the two mountains of Sinai and Zion. It is the comparison of two religions, Judaism and Christianity. God ordained them both, but one (the old - Sinai) was preparatory; the other (the new - Zion) concluded what the old had only begun. Sinai was impressive but forbidding; people and animals had to keep their distance. Mount Zion was different for it was Christ who receives his people. Whereas his blood provided the perfect sacrifice for sin, the shed blood of the old system could not. Abel's blood cried out for vengeance, Christ's blood satisfied that vengeance. The chapter concludes with the importance of

Summary continued on page 293

Summary continued from page 292

taking a long-term view of things. The easy way out from persecution was to pull out and revert to the old ways. That way would not withstand the shaking and upheaval of the last day, when God will undo and remake the earth and heaven too. Lives have to be built on something more permanent and the only things that will survive are those things belonging to the kingdom of Christ. When a person grasps this truth they will worship God with reverence and awe. Without Christ they will be consumed by his fire.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: The terrible consequence of ignoring the voice from heaven (12:25-29)

Introduction

The writer issues the final warning to the careless and indifferent and to all who are in danger of failing to persevere in the Christian faith. At Sinai the unbelieving and rebellious Israelites did not want to hear the voice of God. In their unbelief they were filled with terror and feared for their lives. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ approach God with confidence in reverential and joyful worship.

1. God has spoken

- (a) God has spoken a final time through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (b) The Word declared by the Lord Jesus Christ completes the revelation of God's Word to the world.
- (c) This Word is to be heeded, believed and obeyed.
- (d) To ignore this Word is to act in the same manner as the Israelites at Sinai.
- (e) The action of the Israelites was indicative of unbelief and rebellion.

2. Condemnation is the consequence of failing to heed the Word of God.

- (a) The unbelieving Israelites died in the wilderness and did not enter the promised inheritance.
- (b) Just as there was no escape from condemnation for the

Israelites so there will be no escape for those who reject the Word spoken from heaven through Christ.

(c) There will be a day of judgment.

(i) Just as Sinai shook at the presence of God, so the entire universe will shake on the day of judgment (Hag. 2:6).

(ii) God will completely purge the universe of all effects and traces of sin.

(iii) Only what is of God will remain - the things of the new and everlasting covenant.

3. The kingdom of God will not be shaken in the day of judgment

(a) The kingdom of God is possessed by all believers. This is the heavenly country, the eternal city of God. In this kingdom God is approached with confidence, served and worshipped joyfully.

(b) Under the rule of God he is served and worshipped acceptably.

(c) Under the rule of God he is served and worshipped with reverence and godly fear.

4. All things unacceptable to God will be consumed by the fire of his person.

Conclusion:

There is only one way to approach God and find acceptance with him. He is to be approached with confidence through the Lord Jesus Christ by his once-for-all sacrifice for sin. This is according to the terms of the new covenant. To turn away from the message of the gospel is to incur the judgment of God, eternal condemnation. All who trust in Christ alone for salvation are citizens of his kingdom and can anticipate the day of judgment with confidence, knowing that his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and is not subject to judgment.



Focus Point:

Figurative language in the Bible

The Bible has been written to teach us God's thoughts. God's thoughts are too wonderful for us human beings to fully understand. So in the Bible God speaks to us in ordinary, everyday human words, to make his truth clear to us. We could say that in the Bible God has to draw pictures in words to help us see more clearly the

spiritual truths of his thoughts. For example, the Bible says that God is the *Shepherd of his people*. This does not mean that God is a real shepherd who looks after real sheep. Instead, this picture in words of a shepherd shows us something of what he is like. It describes his nature. He is a God who cares for his people, watches over them and leads them. There is a special name for this way of using words: we call these pictures in words “figurative language”.

The Bible writers were inspired to use figurative language for three reasons:

1. Many of the things God intends us to know can only be explained to us in such picture language. We can only understand what heaven is like because the Bible describes heaven in terms of the precious and lasting things which we know about in this world. That which we have no experience of (i.e. heaven) is illustrated by word pictures from that which we do have experience of (i.e. this world). When the Lord Jesus taught people about the kingdom of heaven, he used parables based on everyday events and the ordinary people listened to him gladly. They could see what Jesus meant because he used earthly picture language, not a divine language the people could not understand (see Matthew 13:35).
2. Sometimes, though, the meaning of figurative language is not clear to us straight away. So this picture language requires us to think hard about what a passage means. As we think out the meaning of the figurative language our attitudes and opinions may be changed by that knowledge and we will mature as Christians (Prov. 1:1-7; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 5:12-14).
3. So figurative language may hide the truth as well as make it clear; it hides the truth from the careless or the proud and makes it clear to God’s people who seek to know the mind of God. For example, God’s way of salvation is for humble seekers. Proud, self-righteous people are not ready to learn about being saved. We need to understand that we deserve hell and that only our receiving God’s free grace can save us (Mark 10:15). To see the meaning of the figurative language in the Bible, we must be born again by the Holy Spirit and made willing by him to learn (Is. 6:9-10; Matt. 11:25-26; 13:10-17; John 3:3; Acts 28:23-27; 1 Co. 3:9-15).

There are different kinds of figurative language in the Bible. The examples we have in our present Hebrews study, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, are known as symbols. A symbol is a common object which has come to have a certain recognised meaning. A rainbow is a symbol of God's love and faithfulness. A horn is a symbol of strength or power.²

The two symbols used in our passage are to emphasise two clear distinctions between an older way which is superseded by a newer one. Zion is a symbol for God's dwelling place. It is a historical name for Jerusalem, probably for the name of a hill on which the original citadel stood. Zion under the old covenant represented Israel (the people of God). Under the new covenant it is still God living among his people, but it refers to the church. The church is made up of people who have come to trust in Jesus Christ and their faith has come from God as a gift. The giving of this gift to undeserving people is by the grace of God. Sinai is associated with the giving of the law. Rather than being a means of comfort and rescue, Sinai exposes human sin and helplessness. It represents something terrifying, which was demonstrated by the prohibition of any human being or animal touching the mountain.



Over to you

How do you finish off your sermons? If it were the last sermon that a person would hear, would you have been faithful to God and to them? Will they have heard a clear gospel message?

Do you preach in the spirit of Mount Sinai or Mount Zion? Do you need to revise how you preach? If so, in what way?

How are your services conducted? With what attitude do your people come to church? Do they look on God with awe and reverence? Should this affect the way the service is held?

² The above notes have been taken from the introduction to *A Dictionary of Bible Symbols* (Grace Publications).

LOVE, TRUST AND

FAITHFULNESS



Hebrews 13:1-14

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Christian contentment
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The writer has completed his case for his persecuted readers not to turn back to their former Old Testament religion, but to go on with Jesus Christ, no matter what the cost. Now as he draws the book to a close he seems to be aware that in time of distress the basic elements of the Christian life are very often neglected or forgotten. So he reminds his readers of some of these things here, such as attitudes of love to others, simple trust in the Lord and loyal identification with Christ crucified. He does not directly relate this to the law of God, but he may well have had the seventh and eighth commandments in mind as he wrote (Ex. 20:14, 17).

What these verses mean



1. Aspects of love (13:1-4)

Verse 1

Keep on loving each other as brothers.

It is significant that when Jesus was about to leave the disciples, knowing that they would be persecuted for their faith, he tells them

HEBREWS 13:1-3

not to forget to love one another (John 13:33-35). In times of stress, the need of self-preservation can lead to loss of interest in others and their needs. Perhaps this had already begun to happen, giving rise to the exhortation in 10:14-25.

Verse 2

Do not forget to entertain strangers,

Hospitality is an important part of Christian witness and service (Rom. 12:13). It should be a natural expression of love for fellow believers. In times of persecution some believers might be driven from their homes. Also travelling preachers would probably find innkeepers to be hostile to them. Hospitality should be shown readily and without partiality (Matt. 25:34-40; 1 Pet. 4:9-10; Rom. 12:13). The elders of the local church are to set an example in this (1 Tim. 3:2; 3 John 5-6). Philemon and his wife, Apphia, are commended for their hospitable spirit shown to fellow believers in Colossae (Philm. 4-7). Such hospitality might well be a blessing, not only to those needing it, but also to those giving it.

for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

Here the writer probably alludes to the occasion when Abraham received three strangers (Gen. 18:1-8, 16). They were angelic beings, unrecognised initially by Abraham. Two of the angels then went to Sodom where they were received by Lot (Gen. 19:1-3). Manoah and his wife, the parents of Samson, did not hesitate to extend hospitality to the angel messenger sent by the Lord (Judg. 13:15). The writer is not suggesting that his fellow believers practise hospitality in the hope of entertaining angelic beings but pointing out that there may be messengers from God among the visitors who pass through their community, and that these are to be received hospitably (Matt. 10:34; Mark 9:41). At the same time believers are to be wise and discerning and should not feel obliged to take in all and sundry, especially those who are opportunistic and impostors.

Verse 3

Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners,

The exhortation concerning hospitality serves as a reminder regarding those members of the local fellowship who had been imprisoned and abused for the faith. The readers had already suffered greatly and visited fellow believers who were in prison because of their faith. They had not hesitated to identify with them,

including the writer himself (Heb. 10:32-34). Such action is especially noted by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 25:36). Onesiphorus was especially diligent in this way in caring for Paul when he was imprisoned in Rome and was commended for it (2 Tim. 1:16-18).

and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.

The readers are also reminded that since they still live in the body they should not imagine themselves to be immune to hardship and suffering. They must not neglect this ministry, nor must it be a mere formality. They must feel the pain of others as members of the body of Christ (1 Co. 12:26).

Verse 4

Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure,

The exhortation concerning attitudes towards marriage may have been directed against those who considered marriage as defiling, claiming celibacy as a superior spiritual state (1 Tim. 4:3). More likely it was written against the prevailing conditions in society where marriage was treated lightly and unfaithfulness was common. Whichever the case, marriage has been instituted by God and therefore must be regarded as a relationship of the highest order (Gen. 1:22-24). This relationship is a type of that which exists between Christ and the church, breathing love and holiness (Eph. 5:22-25; 2 Co. 11:2). This marriage is of an eternal nature and will be celebrated forever (Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2). The purity of marriage must ever be maintained and never be defiled by the promiscuity and unfaithfulness which are rife in a permissive society. Society in New Testament times was filled with immorality and sexual perversions of all kinds.

for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

The readers are warned of the way in which God will deal with those who pervert what he has ordained as good and holy. Sexual immorality includes fornication, whether it be homosexual or heterosexual. Adultery refers to unfaithfulness in marriage. God will deal severely with all who pursue a course of activity outside the limits which he has placed upon his highest creature (Rom. 1:26-28; 2:5, 8-9; 1 Co. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:19, 21; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Though believers are delivered from the condemnation of the law through faith in Christ, they are not delivered from an

obligation to keep its requirements. God's will for his people is a clearly revealed life of purity (1 Co. 6:17-18; Eph. 5:3-4; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3-7).

2. Trust in God (13:5-7)

Verse 5

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

It has been observed by many commentators that a close connection exists between immorality and covetousness, both of which are forbidden by the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:14, 17). The prohibition is repeated in the New Testament (1 Co. 5:11; 6:9, 10; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5). It would appear that the desire for wealth and sexual indulgence go hand in hand. Paul urged Timothy to provide teaching which promoted holiness. This included warning those who were obsessed with the idea of becoming rich which only results in deepest sorrow and is truly detrimental to the spiritual life (1 Tim. 6:6-8). The believer is to be content for this is the pathway to spiritual riches. Contentment can be found in having the barest necessities in life. This is the very opposite to the spirit of greed which is never satisfied. Paul bore testimony that because he had Christ he had everything (2 Co. 6:10) and had learned to be content in whatever circumstances the Lord placed him (Phil. 4:11-13). The Lord Jesus Christ warned his followers against the spirit of covetousness (Luke 12:15) and counselled them to be concerned about treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21). The best antidote to covetousness is being concerned to please God as a first priority (Matt. 6:24; Luke 12:21). In the hour of material need God has promised to provide for his people (Phil. 4:19). This is a perpetual reality.

***“Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you.”***

It may have been the case with the readers of Hebrews that because of the hostile environment in which they lived they feared for their lives and possessions. They may have been anxious and doubted that God would care for them. Therefore the author assures them of God's presence and of his promise that he will always remain with his people, never abandoning them for a moment. This is a promise

given to many of God's servants as they faced difficulties, pressure and uncertainty, e.g. Jacob (Gen. 28:15); Israel (Deut. 31:6, 8); Joshua (Josh. 1:5); Solomon (1 Chr. 28:20); Jeremiah (Jer. 1:18, 19). This was also a promise repeated to Paul and one through which he found great comfort and fresh courage (Acts 18:10).

Verse 6

So we say with confidence,

Such an attitude is possible for those who trust completely in the Lord to supply their needs.

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

What can man do to me?”

The quotation is Psalm 118:6. If God is standing by our side, no matter how weak and insignificant we may be and no matter how powerful and great the enemy, we are assured of the greatest help imaginable. Through the living God we will prevail against the enemy (Rom. 8:31, 37). Men may deprive us of our possessions and family and take our very life, but they cannot destroy us or deprive us of eternal life (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4-7).

Verse 7

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.

This exhortation is an encouragement to follow the example in Christian living set by the elders of the congregation. Reference is also made to the elders of the congregation in verses 17 and 24. In this instance the readers are called upon to remember or recall those who ministered the Word of God when they were first converted. Whether this is referring to the original messengers who carried the gospel to the community in the first place or those who were appointed as leaders once the congregation had been established, is not clear. Certainly they were the men who taught these believers the first principles of the Word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Their manner of life is to be recalled for the purpose of imitating their commitment and perseverance (1 Co. 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6). How much time had elapsed since those early days is not indicated, but now the readers are wavering and they are reminded of the godly example of their leaders who have now passed on to their eternal reward. These men had lived with unswerving allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ and had persevered in the pilgrimage of faith to

the very end. Just as the believers of the Old Testament era had died in faith, so these men had firmly held to the promises of God to the end of life in the very same way. Death had not diminished their hope in the coming glory and the resurrection unto life, and their place in the city of God.



3. Being true to Christ (13:8-14)

Verse 8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

The author has already reminded his readers of the promise that God will never leave his people at any time. He now applies this truth to the Lord Jesus Christ. The second person of the Godhead is unchanging and transcends time, so every believer, at all times and in all circumstances, may know his presence as a living reality and power. Christ ministered to the leaders of the local church helping them to endure to the very end in the pilgrimage of faith. In the same way he continues to minister to the present generation and will continue to do so on behalf of his people to the end of time. He will never abandon them or fail to uphold them. The readers of the book are offered every assurance that the Lord Jesus Christ will walk with them every step of the way throughout the entire pilgrimage of faith.

Verse 9

Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.

From time to time various churches of the New Testament era were troubled by false teaching regarding what could or should not be eaten by believers. In Corinth some thought it was wrong to eat meat which had been first offered to idols and then sold in the market place (1 Co. 8:1-13; 10:23-33). In Rome some believers thought that all Christians must abstain from certain foods and drinks (Rom. 14:14-23). In Colossae the believers were troubled by false teachers who wanted to impose a rigid system of asceticism as being necessary for salvation because all things material are inherently sinful (Col. 2:16-23). Paul, writing to Timothy, identifies similar teaching as being deceptive and indicative of departing from the historic New Testament faith (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Here the believers are warned about various and strange doctrines.

It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.

The warning may be a reference to various foods which were forbidden under the law or possibly to the participating in the eating of the Passover lamb. To eat or abstain from certain foods and drinks cannot possibly commend the individual to God. Food has been provided by God as a means of sustenance to the body and is to be gratefully received (1 Tim. 4:3). Food and drink do not determine one's place and citizenship in the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17). Food is of a material nature and cannot contaminate the spiritual state of the heart. The heart is contaminated by sin which originates from within the individual (Mark 7:18-23; Luke 6:45). It is by grace alone that the heart is strengthened and made firm. Access to the grace of God has been secured by the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:16-17), through his death (Heb. 2:9) and mediatorship (Heb. 4:16).

Verse 10

We have an altar

Believers must never allow themselves to be intimidated by those who stress the outward and ceremonial aspects of religion. They may claim to have a physical altar, as was the case with the Jews, but it was grossly inferior for it was of the earth. Believers do have an altar, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ upon which he gave himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin. Therefore, believers glory in this altar (1 Co. 1:18; Gal. 6:14).

from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

Under the old covenant the priests did not have any right to eat the sacrifices made on the Day of Atonement. Those who remain in the old ways of Judaism have no right to eat at the altar of the cross of Christ. They exclude themselves from this privilege through unbelief.

Verse 11

The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp.

Reference to the Day of Atonement continues. The blood of the sacrificed animal was carried into the innermost part of the tabernacle, but the body was disposed of outside the camp. It was consigned to exclusion from the community of God's people and

HEBREWS 13:11-13

therefore under God's curse (Lev. 16:27). The writer is making a contrast between what it means to believe in the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, which fulfilled the symbolism of the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, and those who continued in the old ways.

Verse 12

And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

The area enclosed by the city wall corresponded to the wilderness camp, being hallowed ground and the ground outside was unhallowed. Calvary was unhallowed ground but it was here that the Lord Jesus Christ died as that all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, shedding his blood to cleanse the sinner from the guilt of sin and delivering the sinner from the curse of eternal condemnation. The Lord Jesus Christ identified with the defilement of his people and bore their sins (Matt. 1:21; 3:15; 9:13; Luke 5:32; 2 Co. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). It is only by the blood shed on unhallowed ground that sinners are sanctified. It is by virtue of his own holiness that he is able to effectively sanctify what was previously unholy. He makes his people perfectly acceptable to God.

Verse 13

Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

What this means for the believer in practical terms is that Jesus' followers are called to fully identify with him and there is no place for compromise. They are to apply the principle of the cross to their everyday life. To go outside the camp means to be identified with the cross of shame where the Lord Jesus Christ was despised and rejected by the unbelieving. When believers do this they are bearing his disgrace. The believer is to fully identify with Christ in his suffering (Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:13-14). Stephen, the martyr, literally suffered outside the camp being prepared to lay down his life for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 7:58). The readers must make every effort to resist returning to the old ways. Going back inside the camp may appear to be attractive, offering ease and acceptance by the unbelieving. But it is an illusion created by the adversary which, if followed, will bring spiritual disaster.

Verse 14

For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

Logically it makes sense for the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ to separate themselves unto him. Their security is not found in any earthly system. However there is nothing indefinite or uncertain about where believers belong. By faith the believer looks with confidence to those things which are not yet seen but which are real and eternal (11:1, 3). This has already been described by the writer as *the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God* (11:10), the *homeland and better country* (11:14, 16). The Lord Jesus Christ not only suffered *outside the gate* but also ascended to glory from Mount Olivet, which was outside the city (Acts 1:9, 12). The earthly city and its citizenry had become defiled, unholy and unclean. The city believers are heading for is the opposite.



Summary

The final chapter of the book of Hebrews forms an appropriate conclusion to the overall teaching of the book. There are several practical exhortations involving personal and social relationships. Loving fellow brothers and sisters is vital whilst hospitality needs to be shown to strangers. They could be angels. There are those who need to be cared for who are suffering for their faith in prison. Sexual purity has to be maintained; greed and covetousness must be avoided. Be satisfied with what God has given. Other exhortations concern the adoration of the Lord Jesus Christ while some are directed to particular duties within the structure of the local fellowship, especially in the area of submission to the duly recognised leadership. It is important to maintain high Christian standards even when under the greatest possible pressure. This is only possible if there is total trust in the Lord and his enabling and keeping power.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: The total sufficiency of Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:8)

Introduction

This text contains within it the whole message of the book of Hebrews and therefore the whole gospel. We need to consider the name in the text. Names in the Bible are very significant and we need to give close attention to them. Then our text goes on to describe Jesus Christ as one who does not change. We live in a world of constant change. Older people living now do not recognise life today compared to when they were young. To have something or someone that remains static is very unusual and comforting. Why is the unchanging nature of Jesus Christ so important?

1. The gospel is totally sufficient for all our need because of who Jesus is

The name *Jesus* means “the Lord saves”. He is no less than God in human flesh.

The name *Christ* means “anointed”, set apart for God as:

- Prophet: God’s final word of truth (1:1)
- Priest: the only way to God through his death (John 14:6)
- King: the ruler over all things (John 17:2)

The implication of the above is that we can only be saved if we have believed the truth spoken by Jesus, trusted in Jesus as being the only way and submitted our lives totally to his rule as our King.

2. The gospel is totally sufficient for all our needs because Jesus is unchanging

As Prophet: Jesus’ teaching is appropriate and authoritative in every generation and culture. It is never outdated because human needs have not changed. Life around us may have changed with all kinds of technological advancements, but none of this has provided the solution by putting things right within the human heart, nor can it do so.

As Priest: Christ’s sacrifice was once for ever covering all the sins of all his people, past, present and future. Think of all the different religions where sacrifice and appeasement are constantly on-going, leaving the worshipper unsure and having

to try harder all the time. For the follower of Christ all has been settled with the holy Creator God. It is not about what I have to do but what Christ has done. It does not run out, it is for ever.

As King: Christ's reign is unaffected by changes among the nations and his kingdom is everlasting. Think of how many new states have been created over the past 100 years. How many name changes have taken place? Rulers of nations only last for a short time. Being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven means we have everlasting security. Just think of not living in fear of rebellion, uprising or the army's taking over.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is never out-of-date, out of touch with people's needs or given over to keeping up with the latest fads and fashions. He continues to fulfil what his name means – saving people. He is able to do that because of the truth he speaks, being the only way to God and ruling over all things. There is no danger of any of these things changing; Jesus Christ can be relied upon today as the apostles relied upon him. He can be relied upon tomorrow and every day after that no matter how much life changes upon this earth. Would you prefer to walk across shifting sands or upon a solid rock?



Focus Point: **Christian contentment**

Contentment is one of the marks of a true Christian. The Bible requires us to be contented (Heb. 13:5; 1 Tim. 6:8).

What is contentment?

It is a humble tranquillity of mind; a sense of quiet satisfaction with life. It is the opposite of fretfulness, impatience, feelings of bitterness or resentment.

What are the causes of discontentment?

Discontentment arises from self-centred thinking; its language is:

- I don't deserve what is happening to me
- I should have more notice taken of me
- I am being treated very unfairly
- I am not valued as I should be

What is the secret of contentment?

Contentment arises from trust in the love and wisdom of God and the perfection of his purpose for our lives. This applies to every kind of situation we may be in (Phil. 4:11-13). It does not matter whether we are rich or poor, well-treated or ill-treated, joyful or sad. This does not rob us of ambition to be the best we can be in our work. But it means our ambition will be for his glory and will not arise from self-centred pride.

For further reading on this subject there is a Grace Publications book called *Learning to be Happy*. A copy can be obtained by writing to Grace Baptist Mission at the address given on the front page of this study book.



Over to you

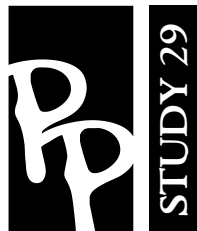
How do you approach a person who is under stress? The danger is that you could be too sympathetic because you could be condoning a poor standard of conduct. Or you could be making unreasonable demands upon them. What should you do? Encourage them to look to the Lord who is gracious in pardoning those who repent.

How well practised is showing love and hospitality in your congregation? Do you need to give attention to this in your own ministry?

How contented are your people? How contented are you as leaders in your church? Are you always pleading for money? Our passage tells us that we are not to love money but to be satisfied with what we have. Can you provide godly leadership in this area?

WORSHIP, DISCIPLINE AND

PRAYER FELLOWSHIP



Hebrews 13:15-25

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Church leadership
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The writer concludes his work with three more reminders of matters that are basic to the Christian life: spiritual worship, submission to leaders and the importance of the fellowship of prayer. Finally there are some closing personal notes.

What these verses mean



1. Spiritual sacrifices (13:15-16)

Verse 15

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—

The Lord Jesus Christ is the one Mediator through whom a person may approach God. Christ has redeemed his people through his own precious blood. There is no need now for animal or other material sacrifices. Sacrifices were introduced for celebrating the worship of God, so if the sacrifices of the old tabernacle were abolished, what sacrifices are Christians to make? The answer is that the Lord requires spiritual sacrifices and it is only through

HEBREWS 13:15-17

Christ that spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God (1 Pet. 2:5). Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are to offer the sacrifice of praise continually, worshipping God with their whole being (Rom. 12:1). Christians are not confined to worshipping at set times in a ceremonial way. Being thankful to God is not determined by the individual's circumstances (Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). The believer is to be in this frame of mind at all times.

the fruit of lips that confess his name.

The sacrifice of praise is expressed through prayer. Thankfulness to God for his goodness and mercy is best served when God hears the individual's appreciation and gratitude from their own lips. The believer's prayer life should be one dominated by exalting God's name and his attributes. God desires that the worshipper should offer sacrifice from the heart rather than simply engage in outward forms of sacrifice (Ps. 51:14-17).

Verse 16

And do not forget to do good and to share with others,

The sacrifice of praise is to be offered in conjunction with the sacrifice of love for others. The readers were contemplating returning to the outward and dead forms of Judaism. In their folly they would be following the pathway of Israel and Judah which was so severely condemned by God through the prophets, a pattern in which the needy had been forgotten and abused (Is. 1:11, 16-17; Mic. 6:7, 8). Those who have experienced great mercy are to show compassion to others in practical terms (Gal. 6:9-10; James 1:27; 1 John 3:16-17).

For with such sacrifices God is pleased.

This conduct brings pleasure to the heart of God and constitutes true worship for through it God is glorified.



2. Submission to leaders (13:17)

Verse 17

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.

In verse 7 the recipients of Hebrews were exhorted to recall and follow the godly example of the elders of the congregation who had already gone to be with the Lord. Now they are being called upon to submit to the present elders of the congregation. This does suggest that the congregation, or at least a part of it, was not showing

the respect that is due to the leaders of the local church. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Head of the church, who has gifted, called and appointed such men to serve the body for the benefit and building up of the congregation, and the edification of the individuals who form it (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). These men are to be shown respect (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Disrespect for the leadership in the local church will soon breed confusion and division in the congregation.

Church members are often prone to revere the memory of past leaders (13:7) while making life difficult for those with present responsibility.

They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.

A reason why such obedience and respect are to be shown is provided. Elders are not to act in an authoritarian manner but as shepherds who have been entrusted with the Lord's flock. They are to minister diligently to the church and serve the church in love. They must exercise their duties faithfully, carefully and compassionately (Ezek. 3:17; 1 Co. 14:8; 2 Co. 3:17; 4:1; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). In the end they must give an account to the Lord.

Obeys them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

On the day of reckoning everyone will give an account to the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the congregation's being submissive to the leadership and ministry of the elders, the elders will be able to present a positive report (2 Co. 1:14; 1 Thess. 2:19-20). Should the elders have to give an unfavourable report, it would certainly not be for the benefit of these wayward believers. The resentful and uncooperative church member will suffer the eternal consequences as he will have to answer to the Lord for his own attitude without being able to offer any excuses.



3. The fellowship of prayer (13:18-21)

Verse 18

Pray for us.

The writer, in making these requests to his readers, is implying that he really does think that they are genuine believers. This is despite the fact that their present conduct shows that they are close to

HEBREWS 13:18-20

apostatizing. The request is very brief. There is no suggestion as to who may have been the companion or companions of the author (implied by the word “us”).

We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honourably in every way.

The author is aware that he has had to write in a most searching manner but he had his duty to fulfil. He has endeavoured to conduct himself in a way worthy of his calling. All leaders need help and this is a good example of one leader’s asking believers to pray for him and his companion(s) in the way they conduct themselves. All leaders are exposed to false accusation and criticisms. They are not to be self-defensive but to live lives that are above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2).

Verse 19

I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

Now the writer requests his readers to pray that he will soon be able to visit them. We do not know where the writer was at the time of writing but he clearly desires to visit the recipients as soon as possible. The word “restored” indicates that he had ministered the Word of God to them on previous occasions and wishes to do the same again. Whether there were particular obstacles preventing him from making such a visit is not necessarily implied.

Verse 20

May the God of peace,

These next two verses form one of the most beautiful of all the New Testament benedictions. It is similar to some of Paul’s benedictions in which the God of peace is invoked (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16).

who through the blood

Peace flows from God through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:20), being secured through his shed blood (Col. 1:20). As Christ makes peace between God and sinners so God is pleased to impart peace to the hearts of all who know him. A Christian believer may commit his ways to God. In all circumstances of life whatever its trials and uncertainties, trusting him means we can experience peace within (Phil. 4:6-7; John 14:27). This peace is quite beyond human comprehension and can only be found through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus,

The foundation of this peace is the everlasting covenant which has been sealed with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The proof that peace has been made by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is his resurrection and exaltation (Phil. 2:8-10). His resurrection and exaltation is God's great demonstration to the world that Jesus Christ is his Son and the Saviour of the world, that sin is dealt with only through him (Acts 2:31-36; 17:30-31; Rom. 1:1-4; Phil. 2:8-11).

that great Shepherd of the sheep,

The Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life freely for his sheep (John 10:11-18). The description of Christ as the great Shepherd is in contrast to the Old Testament priests who were imperfect and mortal. The sheep are the followers of Jesus Christ, all who have trusted him for salvation. David, a former shepherd boy who became king, described the Lord as "my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1) and describes in detail all that the shepherd does for his sheep.

Verse 21

equip you with everything good for doing his will,

God's purpose in this covenant relationship is to fulfil his will in his redeemed people. What had been marred by sin through unbelief and disobedience is now restored and brought into harmony with the purpose of God. It is through the power of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that saved sinners are recreated (2 Co. 5:17) and are made eternally new. Such people who were once lost have been refashioned by God to do good works (Eph. 2:10; Titus 3:5-6 and 2:14).

and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

It is only by God's working mightily within his people that believers become pleasing to him. This work God accomplished through his Son for he is the sole mediator of the everlasting covenant. The result of this work, which brings pleasure to God, is that sinners are brought into fellowship with him and the perfect image of God is restored in them. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to do the will of God (Heb. 10:7, 9). This was his all-consuming desire throughout his earthly life (John 8:29). To be conformed to his image is to live in harmony with the will of God. This is the goal of God's redemptive work under the terms of the new and everlasting

covenant (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:25-27). This work will be completed at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we give all glory to God, for ever and ever. Amen.

4. Postscript (13:22-25)

Verse 22

Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.

This part of the book may have been added by the author in his own handwriting. He appeals to his readers to accept his writing to them as an exhortation. The readers are addressed warmly throughout the book as being fellow believers (3:1, 12; 6:9; 10:19). Much more could have been written (9:5), but the whole is for their benefit.

Verse 23

I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released.

This suggests that Timothy was known to the members of the congregation and that he had been imprisoned at some point. This would have been for the sake of the gospel.

If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.

Now he has been released. The author hopes that, if Timothy is able to reach him in the near future, then they will be able to visit together.

Verse 24

Greet all your leaders and all God's people.

Finally the book concludes with personal greetings. By complying with this request the readers will be following the exhortation of verse 17, giving recognition to those who occupy the position of leadership in the congregation. Greetings also are to be conveyed to all the members of the congregation.

Those from Italy send you their greetings.

Greetings are communicated by the writer on behalf of others in Italy, who are known to the local church. This could mean that the book was written from somewhere in Italy. More likely it means that there were believers from Italy now residing in the same area where the writer was presently located. Nothing more can be said with any certainty on this point.

Verse 25

Grace be with you all.

A brief benediction closes the book. The book tells its readers that grace is mediated by the Lord Jesus Christ alone (Heb. 2:9); that grace flows to believers from the throne of God (Heb. 4:16); and that it is grace alone which strengthens the heart (13:9). In this way believers are enabled to persevere to the very end of the pilgrimage of faith. Through cleaving to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith there is access to unlimited and inexhaustible grace and to knowing God as Father. To return to the old ways is to revert to law and condemnation (John 1:17).



Summary

In closing the author of Hebrews gives some further practical exhortations. These are reminders of matters connected with everyday Christian life. The first concerns the believer's spiritual walk with God. This is daily and continuous. In the Old Testament regular sacrifices were made with the bringing of animals and creatures as substitute sin offerings. Christ has fulfilled that now and what God requires is spiritual sacrifice. This is led by the praise and worship of God through prayer, showing the thankfulness and appreciation of the believer of God's mercy and grace. That same spirit is then reflected in caring for the needs of others. A further exhortation is still in the realms of care. The believers must place themselves under the discipline of godly elders, who will care for them as a shepherd for his sheep. In return the sheep are to pray for their leaders, for they too need help in their lives and work. The book closes with a benediction reminding the believer of the peace he has in God. This peace comes about because of the shed blood of Christ that is part of the eternal agreement made in heaven. Blood alone would not suffice to give assurance, so the Father showed his acceptance by raising his Son from the dead. The believer is now repaired and prepared to work for God. He can only serve the Lord, and do his will by God's Spirit being within him. The final address to his readers as brothers shows the writer's love for them and that he wants only the best for them.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: The everlasting covenant of the God of peace (13:20-21)

Introduction

The writer is about to bring his book to a close. But in the tradition of the New Testament he invokes God's blessing upon his readers. This blessing or benediction is expressed in the message of the gospel in the spirit of the new covenant. The Lord Jesus Christ has made a once-for-all sacrifice for sin. This secures the redemption and transformation of his people. This is the goal of the new covenant - the realisation of God's will fulfilled in his people.

1. The blessing of the God of peace

- a. This is an invocation in the name of the God of peace.
- b. Peace flows to the people of God through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Christ makes peace between God and sinners through the blood of his cross.
 - Through faith in Christ peace can be experienced by all believers in all circumstances of life.

2. The foundation of peace is the everlasting covenant

- a. Peace is experienced because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. By his death and resurrection death has been conquered. Death was not the final act as was the case with all the old covenant sacrifices. This inner and satisfying peace was therefore not fully established until Christ came.
- b. As the Shepherd the Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life for his sheep.
- c. This covenant is everlasting for it will never be superseded by another, remaining new everlastingly.
- d. Therefore through this covenant God makes eternal peace.

3. The goal of the everlasting covenant

- a. Under the terms of the new covenant God purposed to make his people holy, transforming them within and enabling them to be obedient.
- b. Through the everlasting covenant the people of God are renewed according to the power of the resurrection of Christ.

- c. Through union with Christ the people of God are restored in righteousness and holiness to do the will of God.
- d. God's purpose is to have a people who will fully please him as did the Lord Jesus Christ.
- e. This work of God in his people will be perfected when Christ returns to this world in power and glory.

Conclusion:

This benediction is a revelation of God's will and purpose for every believer according to the new covenant. The work of saving people from sin and the kingdom of darkness is only accomplished through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a work wholly of God's showing mercy to undeserving sinners and it is a work that will be thoroughly completed. Therefore all glory is given to God for the salvation that he provides in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.



Focus Point: **Church leadership**

It is doubtful if we can glean from the New Testament a precise pattern for local church leadership. Indeed, it is possible that there was some flexibility between churches. What follows is a framework based on those elements in the early church that seem basic.

1. The independence of the local church

Each local church is independent of authority outside of itself. It is responsible for its own administration under the lordship of Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20). This independence does not exclude fellowship between churches for consultation (Acts 15) and mutual encouragement (2 Co. 8-9).

2. Each church is led by elders

Elders were appointed as soon as possible after the churches were founded (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5). There seems to have been more than one elder in each church. Deacons took over some of the practical matters involved in church life (Acts 6:1-7; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

3. Elders are equipped for their work by the Holy Spirit

(a) Their responsibilities

Eldership means leadership ensuring that everything is done in an orderly way (1 Co. 14:40)

Oversight elders are called overseers (Acts 20:28). This means they exercise discipline.

Pastoring elders are called pastors or shepherds (Acts 20:29; Eph. 1:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). This includes feeding the flock of God's people with teaching from the Word of God and caring for them.

It is not to be assumed that all elders will have all these abilities, but they will be found within a plural eldership.

(b) Their qualities

They must bear the marks that all Christians share, but bear them to a greater degree. Their qualities are set out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-3.

(c) How they lead

Exactly how decisions are made will vary as the New Testament does not give us much detail. Two basic principles should be observed.

- (i) The elders are appointed to lead on the basis of Scripture. This is clear in Acts 15. Decisions should not be according to a majority vote, but on a general recognition of what is right.
- (ii) The whole church should be involved. This is also clear from Acts 15. Taken on its own Hebrews 13:17 could lead to a dictatorship. But this text should be read in the light of Matthew 20:25-28, 1 Corinthians 3:5 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. Wise leadership is achieved by self-giving sacrifice and patient persuasion.



Over to you

If you are currently a church leader how much do you lead and feed your people rather than seeking to discipline and dictate?

Do your people pray for you? Do you ask them to do so with requests for specific matters? What would you ask them to pray for you today?

How much are your people encouraged to pray? Do you give them any opportunity to pray in a public meeting? Do you have meetings to concentrate on prayer? How else can we offer praise with the fruit of our lips?

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