

Jesus and the Book of Hebrews



Sabbath Afternoon

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM WHOM AND TO WHOM?

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

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

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

1. Heb. 1:1 _____
2. Heb. 1:5 _____
3. Heb. 5:6 _____
4. Heb. 7:1 _____
5. Heb. 9:1 _____
6. Heb. 10:1-4 _____

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

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

THE CONTENT OF THE EPISTLE.

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

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

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

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

Heb. 2:1-4 _____

Heb. 3:7-4:13 _____

Heb. 5:11-6:8 _____

Heb. 10:26-39 _____

Heb. 12:1-29 _____

Heb. 13:1-17 _____

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

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

THE BRIGHTNESS OF HIS GLORY.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE MULTIPURPOSED GOD.

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

Heb. 1:5-10 _____

Heb. 2:10, 17 _____

Heb. 3:1 _____

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

Heb. 6:20; 7:22 _____

Heb. 9:15; 10:10 _____

Heb. 12:2; 13:20 _____

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

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

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

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

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

“SO GREAT A HIGH PRIEST.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

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

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



A Different Spirit

Denis Rodrigues

She was alone in her home when she sensed a presence, a spirit. She knew the spirits who normally came, and this one was different.

Since childhood, Yolanda had been immersed in witchcraft. She smelled the burning incense used to call the spirits. She watched her parents hold midnight séances, tell the future, or burn candles to make one person love another or to make someone sick and die. As she grew older, her parents urged her to practice witchcraft.

When she was 18, she moved in with a man. But after five years of abuse, she left him and threw herself into her witchcraft and communicating with the devil. Several years later, after more failed relationships, she had an encounter that changed her life, an encounter with Jesus.

She was alone when she sensed a presence in the room. It was none of the spirits who normally came to her. This spirit was different—peaceful, powerful, and full of love. She sensed that it was Jesus, and she cried out to Him. With all her heart she wanted to surrender to Him.

Then the Spirit spoke to her. “Give up your witchcraft; give up your drinking and your adultery. Destroy your witchcraft books, dolls, and potions, and follow Me. Be a light to the people that you meet.” Suddenly she knew: she was no more Yolanda the witch; she was Yolanda, the child of God.

Yolanda obeyed God’s voice. But God had not told her which church to attend. She visited several churches, but none of them satisfied her.

One day a man knocked on her door and told her, “God sent me to give you a Bible study.” The night before she had asked God to show her which church to attend. She invited the man in, and they started studying the Bible. As God’s truths unfolded before her, she drank them in. When she entered the Adventist church the first time and experienced the love of the members, she knew she was home.

Yolanda’s life has changed completely. Today she is a Bible worker; she has led 66 people to the feet of Jesus, some are her former witchcraft clients. Her neighbors know that a different Spirit guides her life now. That Spirit is the Spirit of God.



Yolanda Zúniga (left). Denis Rodrigues is a district pastor in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

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