



Bible Study

Hebrews

Hebrews 1

The letter of Hebrews is written to Christians who are scattered in various places and there is a very clear message to those who are familiar with Jewish practices and customs, to see how Christ is the ultimate sacrifice for sin. There is a lot of debate about who God used to write this letter and there is certainly an argument to say that the apostle Paul is the author. However, the most important thing is that it is God's word to His people!

God Speaks

In the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophets and through His law but the ultimate message of God is seen in the arrival upon earth of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son. Jesus is described as God, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit created the world. Everything points to Christ and to his glory!

Jesus, the Glory of God

In the Lord Jesus, we have a perfect picture of God, His glory, His character and His power. Jesus is the one who deals with man's greatest problem, which is sin. The power of sin is destroyed as the Lord Jesus overcomes sin, the devil and death. Having completed the work of salvation, Jesus sits at the right hand of God. He sits because the work is finished. Nothing else needs to be done to overcome sin. Jesus has triumphed!

Jesus and Angels

The writer honours angels and they most certainly play a significant role in the purposes of God. Angels worship God. Angels serve God and they assist us - the saints - in order that we should fulfil God's plans for our lives. They are exceptional beings and have exceptional powers. However, Jesus is far above the angels. His name is above every name. His relationship to Father God is a unique relationship. This intimacy and seamless working together means that, as Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (*John 14:9*)

The Throne of God

God is Sovereign and Almighty. His rule is never interrupted and He is totally righteous. His Kingdom is a kingdom of purity, where sin has no place. God, who rules from His throne is an eternal God. Long before the earth was made, God was making His plans and achieving His purposes. A key part of those plans was that Jesus would come to this earth, live a sinless life, offer himself upon the cross, take the punishment for sin, defeat the devil, satisfy the wrath of God, rise from the dead and return to heaven to sit at God's right hand

as a triumphant, glorious Saviour. One day, all of his enemies will bow at his feet and acknowledge that he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings!

Points to Consider:

1. It is so good to think of Jesus as being the final word. How should we present the Gospel in the light of this truth?
2. We must be unashamed in declaring that Jesus is God and the exact representation of His nature. Do we preach that?
3. What do you see the role of angels to be and how is Jesus different to the angels?
4. Consider the throne of God. What is unique about it? Reflect that one day you and I will see that throne and worship the One who is Jesus, the Lamb of God!
5. Salvation is on God's heart. How much is it on our hearts to convey this great salvation to a lost world?

Hebrews 2

This chapter makes significant comments regarding the necessity to embrace and guard the salvation that is offered to us in Christ. This salvation is all about Jesus Christ - who he is and what he has done for us. The ultimate blessing of salvation is that Jesus has destroyed Satan and death. We cannot ask for more than to receive the benefits that Jesus offers through his sacrifice on our behalf!

Give Careful Attention

It is easy to refuse the incredible offer of salvation that God offers and to ignore the inevitable judgement that happens when we fail to receive that salvation. The writer wants us to have no doubts about the severity of our situation, if we fail to accept the escape from sin's consequences that Christ offers us.

This Salvation

The salvation that God offers, was prophesied by the Old Testament prophets and was made clear in the life and teachings of Jesus. The authenticity of Jesus was underlined by the miracles, signs and wonders that accompanied his teaching. When we look at the ministry of Jesus, his major focus was to teach the word of God. However, out of compassion, Jesus so often followed times of teaching with extraordinary ministry to the sick and the demonised.

The Position of Jesus

Jesus is truly man and truly God. When we look at Jesus, we perceive his humanity and we see someone in a body of flesh, with the same limitations that we have in the flesh. Jesus grew tired. He got thirsty and hungry. The most powerful thing that Jesus did in becoming man was that he was willing to taste death! The Father allowed this to happen because, for Jesus to be our Saviour, he needed to be tested just as we are.

Although Jesus is God, he is able to fully identify with us in our humanity, and by suffering and dying for us, he creates the ability to have a relationship with us as brothers.

Jesus Conquers Death

Satan has brought death into the world, which is the worst possible curse upon humankind. The power of death causes fear and bondage. Without Christ, there is no escape. To bring us freedom from the slavery of death, Jesus was willing to die. His sacrifice means that our sins can be atoned for, the punishment that we deserve has been taken and the devil's power is totally broken! We rejoice that we have a Saviour who really understands us and is able to help us overcome sin and its awful consequences.

Points to Consider:

1. Are we truly aware of the absolute necessity to receive and guard the salvation that God has made available for us?
2. Do we present the Gospel in a way that is provocative and challenging but also sensitive and effective?
3. Do we focus on sharing the word of God and then be grateful for any signs that follow or are we too focused upon miracles, whilst neglecting the priority of teaching the word of God?
4. Jesus has the unique position of being truly man but also truly God. Do we present this clearly?
5. Consider the way that Jesus has destroyed the power of death. How real is that truth in your life?
6. Are we enjoying fellowship with Jesus, the one who understands us more than anyone else?

Hebrews 3

This chapter begins by comparing Jesus and Moses. It then enters into strong warnings regarding unbelief and resisting God's will. There are strong statements, exhorting people to avoid hardness of heart and getting into the place of the Israelites of old, which resulted in 40 years of living and dying in the wilderness, instead of entering the Promised Land!

Heavenly Calling

We have been given a high calling. Our task is not confined to the things of this earth but we are preparing for an eternal sphere, where we will be with Christ forever. Our lives are to be wholly focused on our Lord Jesus Christ!

Moses

The ministry of Moses after his call, was faithful. After a difficult start, he obeyed God. He went to Pharaoh for the release of God's people from slavery. He led the people out of Egypt and took them through the Red Sea. He passed on to them, the 10 commandments, which gave a structure to help them honour God and care for each other and he built a tabernacle according to God's instruction. This was faithful work. God's people were often rebellious and resistant to his leadership but he persevered. His work, however, could not achieve what Jesus achieved. Therefore, we honour and respect people like Moses but we build in a way which is committed to Jesus, our Lord and our God.

Jesus

Jesus is described as the apostle and high priest. Apostle means one who is sent and Jesus was sent by the Father to achieve salvation for all mankind who will believe in him. He is our high priest. He stands in the gap for us. He intercedes for us and he sacrificed himself for us when he died on the cross. In his life, ministry, teaching and death, Jesus built the foundation for bringing us to God and, today, the Holy Spirit is continuing to build the Church, which is the body of Christ. Jesus was faithful to the Father and totally obedient to the Father's will and, so, is worthy of all praise, worship and honour from us!

Unbelief

Hard hearts, rebellious hearts and cold hearts, will bring great judgement upon people who show no respect for God's heart and God's ways. To be the object of God's anger and wrath, is a terrible place to occupy! The position of the people of God in the wilderness was not unique to them, because it is still possible for God's people to be deceived and to lose sight of the glorious salvation that Jesus has delivered for us. The writer to the Hebrews urges us

to watch our hearts and to encourage one another to keep walking in the truth of God - and not to fall into unbelief and rejection of God. For the people in Moses' time, their rejection and unbelief meant that they did not enter the Promised Land. We need to be very wise not to test God, because we so easily fall into sin if we harbour resentment and bitterness against Him.

Points to Consider:

1. What is our heavenly calling and where should our focus be as believers?
2. How do we benefit from the apostolic and priestly ministry of Jesus?
3. Do we understand the very real risk of being deceived by sin, which could lead to a hardening of our hearts?
4. How can we avoid falling into unbelief and turning away from God?
5. Jesus and Moses were faithful to God. Are our lives a living testimony of such faithfulness?

Hebrews 4

The writer has been encouraging God's people to have soft hearts regarding His ways and His works. An important part of the Law of God was that, on the Sabbath day, the people had a change and enjoyed rest. The issue of resting in God remains a challenge, which this chapter begins to address. The second main theme is to illustrate the power of God's word and the third is to consider the priestly role of Jesus and its enormous benefit for us!

Sabbath Rest

It is a wonderful thing that we are able to completely rest in the finished work of Christ. It is so easy to become legalistic and to fail to receive the grace of God freely offered to us as sinners. When we attempt by our own efforts to please God or to do His work, we will fail and will not have peace. Peace and rest come by fully trusting that God has done everything for our Salvation. The rest that God took Himself, having created the world, is a great illustration to us that, when the task was done, God took rest. God opened up the way for His people to possess the land that He had promised them but they needed to find the balance between working hard to do His will, while always finding their rest in His character and goodness.

The Word of God

Verses 12-13 give one of the most powerful descriptions of God's word. God's word is living - it is not just history and God is still speaking today. God's word is not passive but is very active, working in the lives of those who will listen. God's word is like a sword. It is sharp and is able to cut through external and superficial parts of us and is able to strike at the very core of our being. God's word has the ability to bring to light anything that is hidden. It is intrusive and thorough. God's word is able to examine our motives and deepest inner feelings. Nothing is hidden from God. Everything is an open book to be read by Him and we are accountable to Him for our lives.

Jesus, Our Great High Priest

Jesus came in the flesh. He lived a sinless life and, having died on the cross, he returned to heaven to sit triumphantly at the right hand of God. Jesus is God the Son. He is our High Priest. He represents us. He has taken our sins upon himself but, of course, he personally was without sin. Jesus identifies with us in our humanity. He understands our weaknesses and he knows all about temptation but, in the flesh, he faced all of these things and overcame them!

The Throne of Grace

We are encouraged to come with boldness and confidence to Jesus, who wants to show mercy and extend grace to us in our needy condition. If we come with repentant hearts, he will meet our needs!

Points to Consider:

1. How seriously do we take the need to rest and, particularly, avoid struggling and putting pressure on ourselves, instead of trusting in God's grace?
2. Are we people of faith and obedience or is there still much unbelief that needs to be dispelled?
3. Are we responding to the promptings of the powerful word of God or are we ignoring what God is saying to us?
4. Are we handling well the powerful tool of God's word, which is like a sword in our hands?
5. Are we approaching God's throne with confidence and are we discovering the grace that He wants to give us?

Hebrews 5

The writer continues the theme of revealing to us, the significance and uniqueness of Christ as our High Priest. The role of a priest is considered in this chapter along with the significance of Jesus learning obedience in preparation for the cross. Jesus' connection with the priestly order of Melchizedek is explained to those who read the letter and there is much emphasis on the need for believers to mature and develop.

The Role of the Priest

A priest was appointed on behalf of the people. He interceded for the people. He offered gifts and sacrifices on their behalf. He was able to support and strengthen people in their worship of God, understanding the challenges that they faced in life. However, because he was also a man and a sinner, he did not just serve on behalf of others but he also needed to offer sacrifices on behalf of himself. This role went right back to the time of Moses and the Levites who assisted the priests in their duties but the most significant thing was that the role of the earthly priest was a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do for us. Clearly, Jesus did not need to offer any sacrifices for himself but he is able to offer, on our behalf, a salvation that no-one else can bring. He is our great High Priest and we now need no other.

Melchizedek

This king of righteousness and priest of God is recorded in the book of Genesis as someone who appeared to Abraham. Although the priestly system had not been introduced, in Melchizedek we see a glimpse of Christ. First of all, he appears for a short time and then is gone. There is no record of his birth or death. He is clearly powerful and, unusually, combines the office of priest and king. Later, God's people would discover many different roles and ministries but it was for Christ and Christ alone to demonstrate that he fulfils all of the ministries. He is a prophet, priest, king, apostle, evangelist, pastor and a teacher. Melchizedek offered bread and wine. Jesus took bread and wine and introduced what we now call the communion. Jesus' death and sacrifice, the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood, make our salvation possible.

The Obedient Son

This passage gives us a powerful insight into Jesus under trial, facing great tribulations and tests but coming through them all triumphant, to be able to save us. The Garden of Gethsemane was a place of tremendous agony and suffering for our Lord. Loud cries and tears were shed, as Jesus contemplated the enormous cost of being our sin-bearer. Even so, Jesus never gave in to potential fears and trials but submitted to the will of his Father. This process was incredibly real. There was nothing superficial about it. We cannot describe the

agony that Jesus went through but we can experience the fantastic blessing that comes out of his obedience!

Maturity

As we think about what Jesus did for us, we need to grow up in our faith and trust in him. Having established our foundation upon basic but wonderful truth, we are to grow in wisdom, discerning clearly what is good and what is evil, as servants of God and ministers of the Gospel.

Points to Consider:

1. In what ways are we to be like the priests in our role of serving others in the body of Christ?
2. How do we respond to the priestly role of Christ and how much are we benefitting from his unique position of being without sin?
3. Melchizedek was the beginning of a new order. Are we moving forward in our relationship with Christ or are we stuck in legalism?
4. Consider the agonies of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. How much do we appreciate the reality of the challenge that he faced and how has that helped us in our battle to overcome temptation?
5. Maturity means wisdom, discernment and endurance. How much are these qualities seen in our lives and how can we encourage others to develop these qualities as well?

Hebrews 6

This chapter is a very challenging portion of God's word. This is because, although foundational issues are discussed, the matter of being saved and lost is also touched upon. God's unchanging nature and the security that we have in Christ are also covered.

Maturity

The foundational issues need to be clearly laid but then we need to build our lives upon our new position in Christ. We have left behind the notion that we can achieve anything in ourselves to please God and our confidence and trust are not in the flesh but in God alone.

Foundational Issues

Repentance from Dead Works – As unbelievers, we were convinced that our best efforts could achieve God's favour and acceptance. As believers we understand that no works done by our flesh can offer merit before God. It is Christ alone who saves us and his shed blood is our only hope. Our repentance was a change of attitude towards God. True repentance means that I accept God's verdict about my spiritual condition and do not argue with Him. I am truly sorry for the rebellion and wrong in my heart and I want to live God's way.

Faith towards God – A key element in my life now is trust in God and, in particular, His provision of a Saviour in Jesus. I do not see God but I believe in Him and His promises and my life now leans totally on Him and not on myself or others.

Baptism – We are supremely confident that our acceptance before God is because of what Christ has done - not anything that we do. Our obedience in baptism is a wonderful picture of Christ's death and resurrection and of our own death to our old lives, to live our new lives in Christ!

Laying on of Hands – We are aware that the laying on of hands can be an appropriate way of passing on blessing, particularly when appointing people to undertake tasks in ministry. There is an impartation as one blesses another. This ministry is often exercised in healing but there needs to be caution because, where people are involved in the demonic, it is usually unwise to touch them. The laying on of hands can be so valuable that scripture warns that we need to exercise caution, to avoid setting someone aside for ministry who is not yet ready for such a task.

The Resurrection of the Dead – The Bible teaches that all will be raised from the dead (believers and unbelievers). This is something that Jesus will do when he returns in all his glory. For the Christian, this resurrection will result in a new body, equipping us to live forever in God's presence, enjoying and serving Him. For the unbeliever, they will be raised - but only to face the wrath and judgement of God!

Eternal Judgement – Believers will be judged and rewards are available. Our goal as a believer, should be to hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Then we will enter the sphere of heaven and enjoy all that God has prepared for us. The unbeliever faces a judgement that knows no end. To be eternally separate from God, who is love and who is good, is a consequence too awful to contemplate. We can only urge unbelievers to repent and receive mercy from God, which is why Jesus came and suffered for us.

Rejecting Salvation

This is a complicated subject but this chapter suggests the possibility that those who have tasted the good things of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, may fall away, vehemently rejecting all notion of Christ, salvation and the goodness of God, and, ultimately, be separated from God forever. Such an outcome, though possible, seems very unlikely for someone who has truly come to Christ. However, Jesus said that not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the Kingdom of heaven. Perhaps there are some who have been very shallow, have given the appearance of a conversion but, deep in their hearts, have never truly repented and, as a result, they end up producing only thorns and thistles.

God’s Faithfulness

The writer has warned his readers but is confident that they have not fallen away from faith to warrant the wrath of God. He further encourages them that their faithful service towards God and towards His people will not be forgotten by God. God is faithful but we also must persevere. We must not become lazy or faithless but we must patiently trust in God, who is committed to us. God does not lie. Those who flee to Him for refuge will find Him an anchor for their soul, a steadfast hope taking us through this life and into eternity!

Points to Consider:

1. It is good to check the foundations of our faith (verses 1-2) and to ask the question, ‘Are they firmly laid in our lives?’
2. Are we careless in our Christian faith or are we diligent? There is no room for apathy!
3. Do we enjoy God’s faithfulness?
4. Are we receiving the assurance that God gives?
5. Are we trusting and discovering God to be a real anchor in our lives?

Hebrews 7

In this chapter, the discourse continues regarding Jesus as our great High Priest. An eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (*Psalm 110*).

Melchizedek

The presence of Melchizedek is regarded by some scholars as an early appearance of Christ, like the one who appeared in the fiery furnace (*Daniel 3*). However, even if Melchizedek is not Christ, it is clear that he is a picture of the Christ who was coming and who would have a superior priestly role to Aaron.

The Significance of His Name

His name means 'King of Righteousness' and 'King of Peace'. These titles are, of course, also descriptions of Jesus.

Status and Authority

He is priest and king. Later, the combination of priest and kingly role is forbidden but here, Melchizedek's joint role is appointed by God. Jesus is, likewise, appointed as both priest and king.

Uniqueness

We are not told of his background and genealogy but his appearance to bless Abraham is clearly very significant. Abraham gave a tenth of the plunder acquired in recent battle to Melchizedek. Later, God's people gave a tenth of what they had, so that the Levites could give their time fully to ministry.

Superiority

The Levitical priesthood, descended from Aaron, was ordained of God but the suggestion is that Melchizedek is of a higher order. Aaron's ministry was temporary and imperfect, whereas Jesus' ministry is permanent and perfect.

The need for a new High Priest

Reasons are given why a new priest after the order of Melchizedek was necessary, which also required a change of the law.

Aaron represented a priesthood that was dependent upon the law. However, the law demands perfection and sinful man is totally condemned by it. Therefore, Jesus fulfilled the law and, like Melchizedek, heralds an age of blessing, grace and mercy. Coming before the Aaronic priesthood, Melchizedek's appearance gives us a taste of where things are really heading when Christ comes. It's a little glimpse of the glorious revelation of Christ our Saviour!

The Greatness of Jesus

Aaron was a descendant of Abraham. Melchizedek had a mysterious arrival and departure. Jesus, however, is eternal God who became man at Bethlehem.

Jesus is the bringer of a new covenant. This sacred promise or oath from the Lord is powerful and is embodied in Christ, rather than in the law.

Jesus is the guarantor of the new covenant. It is totally secured because of who he is. He is indestructible and he lives forever. Priests come and go but Jesus' priesthood is eternal. He is able to save completely, all who come to God through him.

Jesus always lives to make intercession for us. He is beautiful, holy, pure and blameless. Other priests had their own sins to deal with but not Jesus. That is why he is able to create such a strong guarantee for us. The new covenant, the oath from God Himself, is enacted by our wonderful great High Priest, Jesus.

Jesus has limitless power and is able to intercede ceaselessly on our behalf. He is our mediator and stands in the gap our sin creates, to bring us to God. He prays constantly for us and we are always on his heart and mind.

Points to Consider:

1. These verses note different characters and the roles appointed to them by God. However what do you think is most important to God. Our service for Him or our title?
2. Jesus is our servant king. What makes Jesus' ministry great and how should we seek to be like him?
3. What is the role of a priest? What can we learn about our roles as priests for our God?
4. Why did Abraham respect Melchizedek? What can encourage people to respect us?
5. How does it affect us to know that Jesus always lives to make intercession for us?
6. Examine your prayer life. How much time do we spend seeking God for others and how much are we looking for our own needs to be met?

Hebrews 8

This chapter explains the great blessing we have, in a High Priest who is indeed different from other priests and who has the power to bring us a New Covenant.

The Old Covenant

It is worth reminding ourselves that the Old Covenant was an agreement between God and man, which was based upon the law of God. If men kept His law, then God would accept them but a failure to keep His law results in rejection and being separated from God. This presented us with a devastating situation, because we are incapable of reaching such perfection.

Our High Priest, Jesus

After completing his work of salvation, Jesus sat down in heaven and now dwells in the presence of God the Father. He has presented not sacrifices of grain or animals but his own blood, which he freely shed for us and he is not on earth trying to achieve salvation, he is in heaven, speaking continually on our behalf.

The temple and the tabernacle were built according to God's specifications, as a representation of where God's glory dwells - but they were earthly. Jesus is actually with God the Father, in heaven itself.

Jesus establishes the New Covenant on better promises. The law condemns us and shows up our failings but Jesus makes us righteous through his sacrifice for us.

The New Covenant

The joy of the New Covenant is that God, in Christ, came and did what we cannot do. Christ kept the law of God perfectly and now, if we repent of our sins and put our faith in Christ, we are accepted by God on the basis of our relationship with Christ, not on our keeping the law. Hallelujah! This is very different!

God always planned a New Covenant. The Old Covenant was necessary but temporary. The New Covenant is not external, with man reaching out to God, it is internal. God is changing us, to enable us to please Him.

His laws are placed in our minds and written on our hearts. Not on tablets of stone but ingrained into our very being. The work of Jesus in dying for us and the Holy Spirit indwelling us, radically changes things. Now, it's all about relationship. Knowing God personally and belonging to Him.

Knowing God is instinctive and personal, not because someone has told us but because we know it for ourselves, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Whoever we are and whatever our status; rich or poor, educated or uneducated, priest, leader or minister, does not affect our ability to know God for ourselves. It is a precious gift that God has given to each one of us.

The Old Covenant is no longer required. Our wonderful Lord Jesus has made a new way, through the offering of himself on the cross. He died, rose and ascended into heaven - all for us!

Points to Consider:

1. What is the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant?
2. What difference does it make for me to have Jesus in heaven rather than upon earth?
3. To what extent do I experience God's law living in my heart and mind, not only by reading His word but also through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit?
4. Am I enjoying New Covenant relationship with God or struggling to keep to the rules of an Old Covenant relationship?
5. Do I keep my heart in a good place to allow God to speak to me?
6. How much do I value my relationship with God?

Hebrews 9

This is a chapter which focuses upon the power of the blood of Christ to deal with our sin. In previous chapters, the writer has talked about the sacrifices required by the law of God but this chapter talks about the Tabernacle, explaining its symbolism as an earthly representation of the presence of God. There are some key verses at the end of the chapter, where the writer points out that we are destined to die and, after that, comes judgement. But the core message is that Christ was sacrificed once for all, to take away the sins that could not be atoned for under the Old Covenant. The blood of Christ is a perfect sacrifice, which requires no further offering.

The Tabernacle

The Holy Place was the outer room of the Tabernacle where there was a table, a lampstand and 12 loaves of consecrated bread, which were renewed with new loaves every Sabbath. The Old Covenant required that these loaves had to be continually present, as a symbolic representation of God's provision for His people.

The Most Holy Place was the inner room of the Tabernacle and here was found a golden altar of incense and the gold-covered Ark of the Covenant. In the ark was a gold jar of manna and Aaron's staff, together with the stone tablets of the covenant. The manna spoke of God's provision, Aaron's staff was a statement of God's authority and the stone tablets were, of course, the Ten Commandments. Under the Old Covenant, only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, as a symbolic representation of his exclusive access to God.

Under the New Covenant, Jesus has entered heaven itself, to appear for us in the presence of God and, through his sacrifice, we now all have access to God. God's provision for our salvation is assured because Jesus intercedes for us continually and he will appear a second time, to bring salvation for all those who are waiting for him!

The Role of the Priests

The High Priest entered the inner room once a year, with the blood of an animal to offer sacrifices for himself and for God's people. Only sins committed out of ignorance could be dealt with and conscious sin remained uncleansed. This priestly ministry was a shadow and illustration of the coming Christ, who would be able to deal with all sin. The many offerings and ceremonial washings were undertaken to emphasise the seriousness of sin and to make it clear that our sins cannot be dealt with lightly or thoughtlessly.

The Blood of Christ

Christ is our great High Priest and he was able to enter heaven by offering his own blood to deal with our sin. To enter the Most Holy Place is now possible for all believers, because Christ has made a way for us. The blood of Jesus deals with our sin and cleanses even our conscience, so that we can now truly serve God without fear and guilt.

Christ, the Mediator of a New Covenant

Jesus has redeemed us from Satan's power and has put into force, a legacy for our benefit. Without Jesus shedding his blood, there could be no forgiveness of sin. But Jesus has entered heaven itself - a sanctuary far superior to anything made on earth - so that we can find acceptance and peace in God's presence. This sacrifice is once for all. We only have one life and we will only die once, after which we will face judgement. Christ was offered once for our sins and he has taken upon himself, the judgement we deserve!

Jesus' Return

Our wonderful High Priest not only came and suffered, he also rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and, one day, he will return. He will return to rescue those who have trusted him, so that we, having been forgiven and cleansed of our sins, will be taken into a sinless environment to live with him forever. Jesus will be glorified at this wonderful time!

Points to Consider:

1. In what way do we see a glimpse of heaven in the Old Testament Tabernacle?
2. What was the role of the priest in Old Testament times? How is our role different, as ministers of the gospel today?
3. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, so how can we learn from this chapter, ways in which we are able to approach God today?
4. To what degree do I live, realising that I only have one life and that I will be accountable to God for what I do with my life?
5. Am I living my life with a genuine expectation that Jesus will be coming back?

Hebrews 10

This chapter calls us to focus upon the once for all sacrifice of Jesus and its total sufficiency for us. We also find in these verses a very clear call to persevere with our faith and trust in God. There are strong warnings about deliberate sin but we are encouraged to remember how we have already stood firm and kept going, despite enormous difficulties and challenges.

The Inadequacy of the Law

The law set the values and standards that God requires of us and provided for sacrifices to be offered as a symbol of repentance and awareness that sin matters. However, this was never going to be the end solution. This is why Christ needed to come and shed his blood, so that there could be a final answer to the problem of our sin. Under the Old Covenant, endless sacrifices were necessary because we continue to sin but God planned for the greatest sacrifice of all, which was in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ Coming into the World

Christ's coming was, indeed, to provide a sacrifice but it would be by offering his own body on the cross. Verses 5-10 show us that the preoccupation of Jesus was to obey the will of God. Obedience from the heart is what really pleases God. Christ needed to come as a man to demonstrate that he, in a body of flesh, could overcome every temptation and conquer sin. It is through the obedience of Jesus that our disobedience can be overcome!

Christ, Our Great High Priest

Jesus sat down at the right hand of God, having offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He is waiting for that time of final judgement when at his feet, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess him as Lord. To the hearts of those who repent and believe in Christ, the Holy Spirit applies a total regeneration. This means that we are born again and that what God requires of us is actually written into our hearts and becomes part of our lives. When we receive Christ, a sacrifice for our sin is no longer required, because Jesus has already taken the punishment for us!

Drawing Near to God

We are able to directly enter the holy presence of God through the blood of Jesus and we are in a wonderful place compared to those in the Old Testament. Jesus has made a living way, so that we can enter the presence of God without fear, because our consciences are clear from guilt and we have a hope that will not be denied.

Encouraging One Another

We can draw near to God because of Christ's death and we must encourage others to do the same. Our life in Christ is not bound up in liturgy, rules and regulations but rather, we enjoy the freedom to live in his presence. This is why we need to meet together, to encourage one another as we serve the Lord and to be ready for the time when Jesus will return.

Awareness of Judgement

Having received Christ, we must be careful to live holy lives which are set apart to serve him. We see from the scriptures that God is a God of wrath and judgement. The Lord will judge his people. God loves us and knows our weaknesses but if we turn back and effectively ridicule the saving work of Christ, we are in a very dangerous place. Therefore, we must handle with care, the great salvation that Jesus has won for us!

Persevering, Despite Suffering

The writer to Hebrews commends those who have stood firm despite persecution, conflict and insults. He commends those whose treasure is in God rather than in their material possessions and he reminds believers that God will always keep His promises. He warns about those who shrink back and echoes the words of Jesus in Luke 9:62, where Jesus said, "No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Obviously, Jesus himself is our greatest inspiration. He did not give up, he did not look back and he went to the cross for us!

Points to Consider:

1. Although we can do nothing to earn God's favour, do we still seek our forgiveness by trying to add to what Christ has done?
2. We are permitted to enjoy the presence of God. Do we take time to draw near and have quality time with Him?
3. How much do we value coming together as God's people?
4. Are we ever careless by taking our salvation for granted and do we consider whether we have attitudes which are effectively trampling the Son of God under our feet?
5. Are we in danger of giving up on our Christian walk or are we resolved to persevere?

Hebrews 11

This is probably the most famous chapter in the book of Hebrews. It is a chapter which emphasises the need for faith and surrender to God. The sort of faith that God honours, is illustrated in this chapter by a very wide range of people.

What is Faith?

Faith in God is all about hearing God's word, obeying God's word and moving in the direction that God points you to move. Such trust in God enables confidence and steadfastness in the way in which we live our lives.

Creation

The writer tells us very clearly that the world was made by God. He formed it and put it together. When He spoke, things began to happen. We may not understand how God made the earth but our faith in God rests totally on the fact that He did it!

Pleasing God

The whole purpose of our life is to please God by being obedient to Him. Many people live to please themselves but this is not the way of the believer. It pleases God greatly when we hear His voice and obey His will. He graciously reveals Himself to us, as we move forward with Him. We do not understand all the implications and purposes of doing God's will but our desire to please Him is something that He will honour and bless.

Men and Women of Faith

The book of Hebrews lists a large number of people and records for us, ways in which their lives brought about the greater purposes of God. When we look through the list, we see ordinary men and women who because of their obedience to God, became significant in His purposes. For example:

Noah building the ark was a prophetic statement to the rebellious world in which he lived, reminding us that God is a God of love but also a God of judgement.

Abraham was sure that he would receive all the promises that God made to him and Hebrews gives us insight, which the Genesis record does not tell us. Abraham was a man of vision. He saw that God was going to build something very great in the future. He would not have used words like "the church" or "the Kingdom of God" but, remarkably, he knew in his spirit that something far more wonderful than the chaos and confusion of paganism was going to emerge. We also discover that he, amazingly, believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead. Therefore, he was able to offer Isaac, trusting God to work things out!

Moses, again, is seen in a powerful light in the Hebrews record. We discover that he was aware that he was a Hebrew and that God was his God. Although he had many difficulties, deep down he had a sense of God's salvation plan. The deliverance of the Hebrew people from Egypt was a powerful picture of Jesus, our Saviour and Deliverer!

Persecution and Hardship

Hebrews 11 makes it very clear that people of faith will be greatly tested. That when we walk God's path, it may involve suffering, persecution or even, death. However, God's eternal plan assures us that our ultimate destination will be glorious!

Points to Consider:

1. When we look at our lives, do they illustrate the definition of faith that Hebrews describes?
2. How important is the Word of God in your life? Are you responding to it by living and growing your faith in God?
3. How conscious are we of wanting to please God in our lives?
4. What do you consider to be the best examples of Abraham and Moses demonstrating their faith in God?
5. When we are being tested and going through trials, do we respond by trusting God or by rejecting God?

Hebrews 12

In the previous chapter, the importance of faith is being strongly underlined and illustrations of men and women of faith have been presented. Now the writer takes us into new imagery of a race.

The Stadium

Scripture often uses a picture of an athlete in a race and, here, we have the idea of a great crowd watching a race. We get the sense that these are not just spectators but these are saints who have run their race and are now in glory, watching with great attention those who are still running their race. You sense that they are urging the runners to do their best and to finish well. We are, in the fullness of time, to join that great crowd of witnesses and we most certainly need encouragement to finish our race well!

Running the Race

To run well, an athlete needs to be well-prepared and to be suitably dressed. Our race in life has many distractions and many situations which try to work against us being successful. Sin can trip us up and we need to avoid it. Temptations can be very strong but we need to overcome them. We need to run our own race and we must not try to run a race set out for someone else. We must discover and run the race that God has set for us. When we are running outside of God's will for us, our race will be very hard work. Discovering God's will and running confidently in what He has shown us, will help us to run well!

Looking to Jesus

As we run, we must picture Jesus ahead of us and put all our focus upon him. He is our supreme example. His race was so special. He had been set aside to deal with sin, the devil and death. He, with determination, did not look for an alternative race but persevered, despite the sacrifice, until the end. He sat down at God's right hand, knowing that he had done everything the Father had called him to do. The shame, the hostility, the anger and hatred that came upon him, did not stop him. As we run our race, though it may be difficult, we will never suffer like he did!

Discipline

As we run the race that God has prescribed for us, we must be open to God's discipline to keep us on track. God's loving correction and rebuke are never designed to destroy us but, rather, to make us the best that we can be. God's discipline is, in fact, a privilege because He only disciplines those who are His children. When we are children of God we will, of course, want to enjoy all of His blessings but we must also accept His correction. Scripture

acknowledges that this is not easy but, when we respond well, fruit is produced and God brings stability into our lives.

Running with Others

As we run our race, we want to be aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as others in the world around us. We desire peace, not conflict and we look for patience rather than intolerance. When others hurt us, we must guard our hearts to avoid any bitterness that might grow within us. We must focus on pleasing God, without compromise, and we must hold dear, the faith in Christ that has been placed within us!

The Presence of God

In verses 18-29, the writer reflects upon the time of Moses on the mountain, experiencing the majesty and glory of God. We are aware that the presence of God can sometimes be a very fearful thing. We rejoice in His love but we are also aware of His greatness and holiness. Around the throne of God are the angels, the archangels and the saints who are there because of the shed blood of Jesus. In the midst of all this, there is a tremendous awareness of Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed for us. God has given us membership of His kingdom; a kingdom that can never be shaken. But, before Jesus comes again, there will be a great shaking among the nations. We are safe when we rest on Christ, our foundation, because he is our security and hope. The fire of God is overwhelming but we need not fear, as we bow to Jesus our Saviour!

Points to Consider:

1. To what degree is it helpful to be aware of heaven whilst living on this earth?
2. How alert are we to those sins that can entangle us and what practical ways can help us to keep our focus upon Jesus?
3. In what way do you consider that God is correcting you at this time? Is there any bitterness in your life that has still not been dealt with?
4. The righteous fire of God's wrath is overwhelming. How do we hold an awareness of that, without losing the sense of His great love and compassion toward us?
5. Are we careful to worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe?

Hebrews 13

The book of Hebrews has covered many complicated issues and, in many ways, it is like a commentary on the book of Leviticus. The concluding chapter is very practical, as the writer encourages believers to walk with God in this world.

Exhortations

1. Keep loving one another as brothers and sisters

There is always a temptation to be selfish but, as believers, we must keep reaching out to our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

2. Hospitality

Early Christians were very hospitable to strangers but, in times of persecution and pressure, it was understandable that they could grow cautious. However, to extend and open our homes to those who need care can even open a door to an angelic visitor!

Prisoners for Christ

Prison ministry is extremely important and those who are persecuted must not be forgotten.

Marriage

Christian marriage has always been under threat but, whatever our culture and our social environment, the values of Christian marriage must be strongly upheld. There is never any excuse for adultery or immorality and the church should set an example of purity in marriage.

Attitude to Money

Christians are exhorted to avoid being dominated by money. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (*1 Timothy 6:10*). As Christians, we need to be content with what we have, being confident that God will never leave us or forsake us. The Lord is our helper and he will provide for us, whatever men may do to us.

A Word about Leaders

Leaders are to be honoured and respected. They are the ones who bring God's word to us and good leaders live according to their message, as well as preaching it. To follow that example is very important.

The Lord Jesus Christ

The writer emphasizes again, the uniqueness of the sacrifice of Christ. He presents Christ as our rock, the one on whom we can build with total confidence. This is because Jesus does not change. The Jesus we read about in scripture, the Jesus we experience today and the Jesus we will know for eternity, are the same Jesus. Our confidence is based entirely upon what he did for us on the cross. We must not be distracted by rituals but, rather, focus upon Jesus, who was taken outside the city of Jerusalem and crucified for us. We are all called to come to Jesus and, as we trust him, our sins are forgiven and he will take us into eternity to enjoy him forever! We worship Jesus and we can demonstrate our love for him by the way that we care for other members of the body of Christ.

Another Word about Leaders

We need to trust those who have responsibility to care for us and we must recognise that our leaders will be answerable to God for their leadership and the way that they care for the body of Christ. They need our support and encouragement, because this will strengthen them to serve Christ and to serve us, with minimal stress and much joy!

Closing Comments

Verses 20 and 21 are wonderful words of benediction, with an emphasis on the God of peace who through the blood of the risen Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, is the One who is also able to equip us to do the work of God. Scholars do not know who wrote this letter but this last chapter is very similar to the way in which Paul writes. The writer's desire to be with the believers, the reference to Timothy and the greetings, do seem to be like others from Paul. Without doubt, Paul always pointed people to Christ and this letter clearly ends by pointing people to Christ!

Points to Consider:

1. Consider the exhortations. How can we apply them to our lives and our churches?
2. There are several references to leaders. Do we treat those who lead us with proper respect and how could we respond better to those in authority over us in the church?
3. How do we benefit practically from what Jesus has done for us on the cross?
4. We need to pray the words of verses 20 and 21 for one another. Which of the phrases in these verses are particularly significant for you?
5. Are we rejoicing in God's wonderful grace towards us?