

Study 15: Review

This lesson is a wrap-up and review of the studies, and will (*hopefully*) consolidate some of the things that we have learned along the way.

Lesson 1: Introduction

Authorship – Who wrote the letter?

There is no other book of the New Testament with an authorship so widely questioned. The evidence *for* Paul is stronger than the evidence *for* anyone else. However the evidence *against* Paul precludes him from being the writer.

- We know that the writer was a man. – Grammatical use of the masculine in 11:32
 - We know that he knew (or was known by) those he was writing to. – Specific greetings sent in 13:18-25
 - We know that he was not an apostle. – Writing in the third person about the apostles in 2:3
- Some other leading possibilities are Barnabas and Apollos.

Recipients – Who was the letter written to?

- We do not know where the Jewish Christians were, but a specific group was in mind rather than a general letter. – Greetings and instructions in 13:23.
- They were not “Jews”, but Jewish Christians – ie the letter was not written to convert Jews to Christianity, but to exhort those Jews who had already become Christians. The exhortations to faithfulness throughout the book support this.

Purpose – Why was the letter written?

The Jewish Christians were likely to be drawn back by the Judaizers, forsake Christianity, and go back to the Jewish religion. Throughout the letter, the supremacy of Christ is extolled.

Not only is their doctrinal (teaching) material given to support the claims and position of Jesus, but there are whole chapters given to the practical implications and applications of this into the lives of the readers.

Content – What are the major themes?

The two outstanding themes through the book are:

- Jesus is the Messiah
- There has been a change of Covenant

In support of the position of Jesus as the Messiah, he is presented in a number of ways, and forms an outline of the book.

Date – When was the letter written?

The Greek present tense is used when speaking of the Temple, so the letter must have been written before AD 68. But how much before AD 68 we do not know.

Lesson 2: Jesus Better than Angels

How is Jesus introduced?

Jesus is presented with 7 attributes – conveying the idea of completeness or perfection.

1. The one who is appointed heir of all things
2. The one by whom God made the worlds
3. The radiance of God’s Glory
4. The exact representation of God’s being,
5. The one who sustains all things,
6. The one who provided purification for sins,
7. The one sat down at God’s right hand.

The book commences with God, and the giving of the Jewish Covenant when He spoke to the forefathers. Immediately, the writer moves to the fact that God has spoken again – this time to us – and through Jesus Christ his Son.

In what ways is Jesus better than Angels?

Jesus is superior to Angels in God’s order of creation: God– Angels – Man – Animals. This clearly announces Jesus as God, and highlights His Deity.

Things that are said about Jesus in the Jewish Covenant are never said about Angels. Again, 7 passages are quoted – indicating completeness.

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1. Ps 2:7 | You are my Son... |
| 2. 2 Sam 7:14 | Father... He will be my Son |
| 3. Duet 32:43 | Let the Angels worship Him |
| 4. Ps 104:4 | Angels as servants, |
| 5. Ps 45:6-7 | Son is a King, is eternal, and rules with righteousness |
| 6. Ps 102:25-27 | Son is the creator, who remains unchanged for ever, |
| 7. Ps 110:1 | Son is invited to sit at God’s right hand. |

How is Jesus’ Deity shown?

Many of the things that are said by the writer here to refer to Jesus, refer to Jehovah in the passages that are quoted.

Lesson 3: Jesus Better than Angels (2)

The argument so far

- God has spoken
- He has spoken to us
- He did it through Jesus
- In Jesus we see the exact representation of God
- Jesus is perfection and completeness in God’s representation to us
- He is greater than the Angels
- He is complete and perfect compared to the angels

This being the case (“*therefore*”) we should be diligent to listen....

How was God’s message delivered to us?

God has spoken to us through Jesus, and how He did it is:

- *It was first spoken by the Lord.* (The beginning of the gospel - the first 4 books of the New Testament).
- *Those who heard him passed it on to us.*. (The apostles and prophets wrote it down for us).
- *It was confirmed to us.* (The evidence is clear and evidence that we can be assured of).
- *God, bearing them witness with signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit...* This is **exactly** what Jesus said would happen in Mk 16:20

How is Jesus again compared to angels?

- The world to come will be in subjection to Jesus, but never to any of the Angels.
- He became a man (lower than the Angels), but in His triumph over death was crowned with Glory and honour – **the promised Messiah**

How could Jesus have been the Messiah? - He was put to death!

The idea of sacrifice and justification is brought out, and Jesus demonstrating his power over Satan. Even death could not hold Him!

Lesson 4: Jesus Better than Moses

The argument so far:

- God has spoken to us through Jesus
- In Jesus we see the exact representation, perfection and completeness of God
- He is greater than the Angels
- The Old Testament prophets foresaw that He was greater than the Angels
- He took on obedience when He became a man
- In faithfulness as a man, He is able to be a merciful intercessor for us

This being the case (“*therefore*”) we should Consider Him....

How is Jesus likened to Moses?

Moses’ greatness is accepted, and the writer does nothing to belittle it. Jesus is presented as being greater than him.

- Moses is described as being faithful in all his house (God’s house = God’s affairs).
- Jesus faithfulness is put right up there beside that of Moses. “He was faithful to he who appointed him...- just like Moses”.
- Moses is described as no more than a part of “the house”, but Jesus is described as the “architect of the house” (or builder of the house).
- But God (and Jesus) did not just build the Lord’s house – and His people through Moses – but He built **EVERYTHING!**
- Moses’ role was more like that of a faithful servant in the house. But alas, he was just a servant.
- Jesus is described as a Son. He is the one who will inherit everything (as God’s *ONLY* Son, *ALL* the inheritance will be his).
- Moses could *NEVER* claim this!

Now, **WE** are the household of God, and **WE** are the ones who are God’s inheritance.

A call to faithfulness

The condition is our faithfulness. “*if* we hold fast... (*if*) we rejoice in hope to the end”.

God’s promises are sure, but they *are conditional upon our obedience*. The writer will illustrate Faith and Works in that great chapter on faith – chapter 11.

Therefore:

- Exhort one another daily. Encourage one another. Have daily fellowship with one another - *habitual* fellowship.
- There is a sense of *urgency* in doing this: **TODAY!** The time is short. You have today. You might not have tomorrow. “Do it now!”
- A strong admonition to “hang in there”.

What stopped the fathers in the wilderness from entering into their rest?

Their unbelief was demonstrated by their disobedience to God, by nearly all who came out of Egypt. God was patient, but they continued to rebel. Finally, He took away their promise of rest – but only to those who stood against Him.

There still remains a rest for the people of God (4:1, 9), and we will receive it if we remain faithful.

The rest that the writer has in mind is not the Sabbath, but the rest at the end of our journey, the *permanent* rest that we will have with God in heaven.

“Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience.” (NKJV)

Moses was not able to deliver the children of Israel into the Promised Land. God took him up to Mt Nebo where he saw over the land, but he himself was prevented from entering in.

But, through Jesus, He is the one who delivers us, and again demonstrates His superiority to Moses in accomplishing what Moses was not able to do. (Jesus greater than Moses!)

Lesson 5: Jesus our great High Priest

Why is Jesus positioned as our great High Priest (4:14)?

Jesus is great because of His exalted position in the heavens (“God’s right hand man”). He is not stand-offish, but is sympathetic with our weaknesses, because He has been through all of the things that we have been through without succumbing to the temptations resulting in sin.

Therefore, “...*we may approach boldly...*” to God is in contrast with the Jewish people’s approach – they would not even say His name – but Jesus is “our man in heaven”.

It is through our approach to Jesus that we obtain mercy, in direct contrast to the mercy seat, which sat on top of the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple. At the Day of Atonement the High Priest sought mercy for the sins of himself and for the people. Jesus throne is the true mercy seat, and one to which we all have free access “*with boldness*” or “*confidence*”.

What qualifications were required of the High Priest (5:1-4)?

- He represented man to God, and was taken from amongst the people, so as to be in a position to make intercession to God on their behalf.
- He offered *gifts and sacrifices* to God on the people’s behalf – particularly the *sin offering* on the Day of Atonement.
- He observed the ritual requirements of the position and the sacrifice, but was also particularly compassionate towards the people who are sinning and going away from God. As a man he was also inflicted with the same weaknesses.
- He offered sacrifices for himself, and also for the sins of the people. (Lev 16:6)
- He was appointed by God,.

How does Jesus meet these requirements)?

- He was appointed by God.
- He is able to sympathise with those he represents, because of His sufferings.
- Even though He was the very Son of God, He was not exempted from learning obedience, through suffering.

How long is Jesus’ Priesthood to last?

“...a Priest ***forever*** after the order of Mechizedek...” that is better than the OT priesthood, because it is like the priesthood of Melchizedek. Under Moses, the priests were replaced, but Jesus is contrasted as *a permanent priesthood*. None of the OT priests (even Aaron) could claim this!

Lesson 6: Going on to Perfection

Were these christians in the faith, and where should they have been?

They were not new to the faith “*by this time you ought to be teachers...*” Whilst they “*should have been*” teachers, they had not picked up the responsibility, or had not grown to the point where “*they could be teachers*”. They had not even reached a good grasp of the first principles of christianity, and needed to learn them again! They should have been getting their teeth into meaty parts of the faith. They should be mature.

Maturity in the faith only comes by having their senses exercised “*by reason of use*”, having studied God’s word, chewed it over, tested it, talked about it with others, and well understanding the first principles, so that they do not need to go back and re-learn the basics again.

But their ears were “dull of hearing” and they had closed their minds towards growing and leaving behind the Jewish system and heritage. They had a problem in “letting go” of the Jewish system, and accepting that it was fulfilled in Christ.

They needed to leave behind the elementary principles, and go on to perfection (completeness) - they would first have to have a good grasp of the elementary principles – but they needed to be taught them again.

What are the elementary principles (ABC’s) of christianity?

- Repentance from dead works
- Faith towards God
- Baptisms
- The laying on of hands
- Resurrection from the dead
- Eternal Judgement

Every one of these have an origin in the Jewish religion, but they take on an entirely new meaning in the context of the gospel. The writer draws together two distinct things – their familiarity with some of the practices of the Jewish religion – and the fact that had not grasped their significance when they were “carried over” into the gospel and given a new meaning and fulfilment.

How is Abraham presented as an example?

Abraham is repeatedly presented as the father image throughout the Old and New Testament scriptures, as the father of all who have faith. If our faith is like Abraham’s, then we will be blessed by God like he was (Gal 3:9). God’s promises to Abraham were absolute, and assured. God assured Abraham of the promises under oath

HEB 6:13 ...since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,

But Abraham did not receive the promises straight away, and had to be patient before inheriting them. This was only because the time of their fulfilment had not occurred.

The application is that our life is long, and we grow weary. Sometimes we just want to give up, and sometimes some of us actually do. We need to remember the assurance of God’s promises – just like those he made to Abraham so long ago, – and they will not (and cannot) be forgotten. Do not grow weary!

Lesson 7: The Priesthood of Melchizedek

The Old Testament only touches on Melchizedek, and the Hebrew writer tells us more than we learn anywhere else –he is presented as a type and forerunner of Christ.

In what ways is the Messiah likened to Melchizedek?

- He was “king of righteousness” and also “king of Salem” (Jerusalem – “king of peace”).
- He was greater than Abraham (since Abraham received a blessing from him, and paid him tithes – more on this later).
- He has a perpetual priesthood (he came from nowhere, and disappeared just as quickly). He did not have to establish his genealogy, nor his lineage.
- He was priest of the most high God – and King and Priest at the same time.

This introduces some stark realities for the Jews, who dismissed Jesus as any form of priest because he came from the wrong tribe (7:14). Jesus is likened not to the Levitical priesthood, but to Melchisedek’s priesthood.

Why is he greater than Abraham?

The first reason is that the lower “class” pays tithes to the higher.

- The people pay tithes to the priests under the Levitical priesthood,
- The priests under the Levitical priesthood were not greater than Levi,
- Levi was not greater than his great-grandfather Abraham, and in a sense paid him tithes (7:9)
- Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek.

The second reason, is that of the blessings. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and Abraham received the blessings from him.

Can perfection come from the Levitical priesthood?

If perfection comes by the Levitical priesthood, then it would remain a continual priesthood.

- Melchizedek was better than Abraham (and therefore Levi & his priesthood),
- Jesus is a priest after Melchizedek,
- Therefore the Levitical priesthood was temporary,
- Therefore Jesus is the Messiah.

How could the priesthood be changed?

There must have also been a change of the law! Every Jew would recognise this, that the Law and the priesthood go hand-in-hand.

Therefore, IF JESUS IS THE MESSIAH (as the writer is arguing), then the only way that it could possibly happen was for the Law to change – because Jesus came from the wrong tribe (7:14), and Moses said ***nothing*** about priests coming from Judah.

It is even more clear when we consider that another priest has arisen who is like Melchizedek. The picture has now crystallised. The prophecy of David must be remembered: Ps 110:4 “You are a priest forever, after Mechisedek” This was recognised as a Messianic prophecy. It now starts to *drive home* the arguments of the writer. But the question still remains to be proven by the writer, as to whether Jesus was the one!

Why would the Law need to be changed?

The Mosaical law made nothing perfect. It was only transient. It “*was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ*”. Without the Messiah, there was no hope under the law. No-one was able to keep it perfectly, and consequently everyone has found themselves condemned by it. Only with the perfect Messiah does it all make sense! The sacrifices under the law had to be made over and over again. They could not bring perfection.

- ***The priesthood of Christ is better because of an oath.***

The Levitical priesthood was established by God, and “it was just done”. God said to set it up and do it, and so it was. However, the priesthood of Christ has been established by an oath of God: 7:21 “**The Lord has sworn and will not repent:** `You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

- ***The priesthood of Christ is better because of its permanence.***

In the Old Testament, there were many many priests, and High Priests – eventually they grew old and died, and were replaced by others! But Jesus High Priesthood is an unchangeable priesthood – a permanent one – “...*you are a priest forever*...” He is now in a position to guarantee (save to the uttermost) the salvation of those who come to God through Him!

- ***The priesthood of Christ is better because of Jesus’ character.***

Jesus in fact, was the perfect High Priest. He had endured all of the temptations that could be thrown at Him, “*and yet without sin*”. His demonstrated character of being holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners led to His exalted position of being “*higher than the angels*” (as we have noticed in a previous study). Jesus did not have to make the continual sacrifices. He made only one sacrifice, and that was sufficient for all time.

Lesson 8: The New Covenant

What is the main point that the writer wants us to understand?

Jesus is the High Priest. Note that it is not that Jesus *will be* the High Priest, but that He *now is* the High Priest – “**We have such a High Priest...**”. A great deal of the characteristics of Jesus as the High Priest after the order (type) of Melchisedek, who was both King and Priest at the same time. The Old Testament predicted that this would be the way.

Jesus was going to *sit and rule on His throne* (reigning as King), and (at the same time) He will be Priest on His throne (ie He will be a Priest **AND** King at the same time). **Where** Jesus fulfilled the role of High Priest is “...seated at the right hand of God in the heavens,”

As a Priest, then Jesus has something to offer

One of the specific duties of the High Priest was to offer sacrifices to God – specifically at the Day of Atonement, where the High Priest would enter the Holiest Place in the Temple. As a High Priest, Jesus also offered sacrifices, of course offering himself as the ultimate and perfect sacrifice for sins.

There has been a change of Covenant

This is one of the core issues in the Hebrew letter. The two major issues are:

- 1 Jesus is the Messiah
- 2 The Covenant has changed.

It was always God’s intention that there should be a change of Covenant. It was for such a reason that Jesus was foreshadowed as the High Priest after Melchisedek, and not after Aaron.

It would have been very easy for Jesus to have been in the position to become High Priest in the Levitical Priesthood – but that would not have resulted in the *permanent* priesthood that He now occupies.

But the Mosaical Covenant was not perfect. If it were perfect, then there would be no need for it to change. But the problem was that the sacrifices under the Old Covenant could *never* take away sin. They had to be repeated year after year *for the same sins*, until the *perfect sacrifice* was made that took the sins away forever.

It should be no surprise that there was a need for a perfect sacrifice, and a change of Covenant. The Old Testament foreshadowed both. Jeremiah (31:31-34) prophesied that the time was coming that a New Covenant would be made – and the New Covenant would be different from the Old.

Notice the implications of a “New” Covenant. It implies that there was first an “Old” Covenant, and moreover it has replaced the “Old one” with a “New one”.

- It was different than the Old Covenant, which was very prescriptive in how the people were to obey God. Under the New Covenant, God wants us to worship Him with our hearts, as well as our lips!
- God’s laws are written in our hearts and minds.
- Our knowledge of God is complete. The Hebrews needed to teach their children and encourage their families to be faithful to God. But under the New Covenant, the people of God are those who know God. And if we don’t know God, then we are not part of His family.
- God is merciful to our sins, and our unrighteousness. The mercy that God shows to our unrighteousness is in sending Jesus to be the sacrifice that was to take away sins FOREVER. A perfect sacrifice.

Why does he say that the Old Covenant is ready to vanish away, when it was nailed to the cross years before?

It is true that the Old Covenant ended at the cross. But to the Jews, they continued in their practice of Temple worship as if nothing had changed. The church had been established just a few weeks after Jesus died, and the apostles were preaching that people should leave the Jewish

religion. This is not to be confused with their Jewish Nationality – they were not teaching that people should stop being Jews – but rather that the pattern of Jewish worship had ceased.

God allowed a period of transition – a period of time for the Jews (who wanted to be right with God) to become Christians before He forced the issue by ensuring that the Jewish religion would effectively cease. The major trigger was the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the destruction of the Temple. Not only was the place destroyed, but it was also burned – destroying the records. The Jews were no longer able to prove their tribal lineage. The location of the Temple has now been overtaken by the Moslems who have built a Mosque on the site, making it impossible to rebuild the Temple.

The Hebrew writer foresaw the time – not very far away – when Jerusalem was going to be destroyed, and the continuation of the Old Law would become a practical impossibility.

Lesson 9: Mid Study Review

Lesson 10: The Great Sacrifice

What were the sacrifices and ordinances under the Old Covenant?

The layout of the Tabernacle & Temple is described. Within the first part was:

- The Lampstand
- The Table – which had the Showbread

Within the second part:

- The Golden Altar of Incense
- The Ark of the Covenant – containing
 - The Golden Pot of Manna
 - Aaron's rod that budded
 - The tables of the Covenant
- On top of the Ark:
 - The mercy seat
 - The Cherubim

Within the bounds of the Tabernacle / Temple we have a constant reminder to the Jews of the primary elements of the Old Covenant – the very tables given to Moses – the very rod belonging to Aaron – the very ark of the Covenant – and very real Manna that kept the fathers alive in the wilderness.

Why was it only the High Priest that went into the Holy of Holies?

The Old Testament was a *foreshadow* of the New. God foresaw the sacrifice of Jesus, and instituted the Old Law so that mankind would understand the significance of Christ and His sacrifice. The reason that the High Priest went *alone*, was that he was the *lone* mediator between God and man. As our High Priest, Jesus not only fulfils this role, but accomplishes it in a much greater way than was done by the Levitical Priests, and yet there are extremely strong parallels as Jesus “mirrors” the characteristics of the High Priest. Actually it is the other way around, because God designed the Levitical Priesthood to be the image of Jesus' permanent priesthood.

Jesus	High Priest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He went alone • Into the Holy of Holies • It was a repeated journey • It required a blood sacrifice • Blood of bulls and goats • He needed to cleanse his own sins first, • Then a sacrifice for the people • Sacrifice offered by High Priest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus suffered alone • Into Heaven itself • It was a “once only” journey • Gave his own blood • Perfect lamb of God • No sins of His own to purge • Sacrifice for all people of all time • Jesus offered Himself as sacrifice

What are the implications of the “Testament” that the writer discusses?

The testament that he is making comparisons with is a man’s “*Last Will and Testament*”, which we just call a “*Will*” today. The implications for Jesus’ law, is that when He was alive He revealed His will through the gospels, and to the apostles. But the New Law did not come into effect until after Jesus died. Once He did die, then the New Will and Testament came into force, and the Old Will and Testament of God was abolished.

Why a blood sacrifice?

God foresaw that the perfect sacrifice of Jesus would be accomplished by the shedding of His blood, and consequently required blood sacrifices under the Old Testament Law.

The sanctification of the Old Covenant was accomplished with blood and likewise the sanctification of the New Testament was accomplished with the blood of Jesus.

Blood is so intertwined throughout the Old Testament sacrifices, that it can be said (“*almost said*” NASB) that there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood.

When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, the two elements that He took were to remind us of His body, and His blood. God wants us to continually remember the blood sacrifice that was made by Jesus – not only in that we are washed clean of our sins by Jesus’ blood when we are baptised into Christ – but that we remember the sacrifice every week!

How does Jesus’ return show His perfection?

Jesus’ sacrifice was not a continual and repetitive sacrifice like those under the Old Covenant, but He was “*once offered*”. This does not mean that it happened “*once upon a time*”, but that it happened only *once* – not repeatedly like the Old sacrifices.

But Jesus is coming back again - “does this mean that He will come to offer sacrifices for sin again when He comes?”. The answer to that is plainly and emphatically ***NO!***

When He comes again, it will not have anything to do with making sacrifices for sins – since has already fully accomplished that already. The Second Coming will be to complete the work of God and bring salvation to those who are eagerly awaiting His return.

Lesson 11: Perfect Forgiveness

How does the writer describe the Law?

It is “...*but a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of those things.*” In the sacrifices, remembrance is made (of the same sins) every year. This is the case, because the blood of Bulls and Goats could never take away sins.

The writer again points to the fact that the things of the Old Covenant were only temporary and transient. They were only there “*to bring us to Christ*”, and not (as the Jews thought) the be-all and end-all of the things of God. God had foreseen the New Covenant and reflected that when He instituted the Old.

The Old Testament predicted a change of Covenant, and a series of quotes are presented to support the fact that Christ was the fulfilment of the promises.

The need for a sacrifice

Enter the perfect Son of God. A perfect life, and a perfect sacrifice.

But how to make men understand the weight of the sacrifice that was made? How could man possibly understand what it meant, and what it was going to cost?

Enter the Law, and the Old Testament sacrifices.

So, God predicted that the old sacrifices would end and pass away. The prophecy of Psalm 40 was one concerning Christ’s birth “... *when Christ entered into the world...*” (Heb 10:5).

Further, the perfect sacrifice of Christ (as predicted by the Psalmist) **meant that** the Old Covenant was going to be taken away, and the New Covenant established (10:9)

Notice the concluding (in this section) argument by the writer:

“*And by **that will**, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*” (10:10 NIV – emphasis mine – GO)

It was not through the former will that we were made holy (ie set apart – or called as God’s children to be His), but by the New Covenant.

What is the effect of the Old Covenant sacrifices, compared to the New Covenant?

The old sacrifices were offered over and over and over again. Yet could never take sins away. But Jesus after He had in just one time made a sacrifice, He sat down at God’s right hand (in the position of authority).

The sacrifice of Jesus is therefore concluded to be perfect, since it accomplished what had never, would never, and could never be accomplished by the sacrifices under the Law.

The Old Testament prophets predicted that this would be the case. “*Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more*”. But notice that “*Where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins*” God’s forgiveness is complete. It is utterly final. It does not need to be repeated. It is perfect. Only through Jesus do we have this perfect forgiveness.

If Jesus gives us perfect forgiveness, then can we keep on sinning?

The idea of perfect forgiveness encompasses the thought that we don’t need to offer sacrifices day after day and year after year. These sacrifices were for the same old sins again and again, but also for the new sins. So if Jesus made the perfect sacrifice, then He has already taken away the sins that I haven’t committed yet! And if that is the case, then why can’t I just keep on enjoying *the pleasures of sin*?

Why would we *want* to keep on sinning? Jesus was our sacrifice. If we deliberately keep on sinning after He has cleansed us, then what are we saying to Him and His sacrifice? We are saying that we don’t regard it as being anything of value! And if that is the case, then what sacrifice is there that can cleanse us????

The only thing that is left for us is the righteous judgement of God, and the punishment that we really do deserve, but we were redeemed from by Jesus blood.

Even under the Old Covenant, wilfully despising the Law of Moses received the death penalty. Since the New Covenant is so much better than the Old one, how much greater will be the punishment for wilfully flaunting the perfect sacrifice of Jesus?

Lesson 12: Faith's Hall of Fame

Aa great hall of famous (and some not so famous) people who are later describes as “*a great cloud of witnesses*” is presented. This is prepare us for the exhortation to faithfulness without going back, as a large part of the rest of the book covers.

In the cases that are presented, what did faith result in?

Throughout this great chapter on faith, the writer brings time and again support for what James says, by way of example. Their *faith necessitated action*, or to put it another way, there is no faith that is held up as an example that was isolated from the actions that they did. To say that we have faith in God, and then do nothing about it, means that we didn't really believe in the first place. Paul makes this point in Rom 10:16 “...*the reason that they did not obey the gospel, is because they did not believe the gospel...*”

What do we notice about the lives and faith of these people in the Old Testament?

The obvious thing that the writer is pointing out is their strong faith commitment, and their *action* of obedience to that faith.

But when we take a closer look at these characters, we do not find any of them that are “perfect”. Even David, who is described as a man after God's own heart turned to deception, effectively murder, and adultery. And yet for all of his faults, he is held up as a great example of faith, and not only here but throughout the scriptures.

Sometimes we think that we have to be perfect, and live perfect lives in order to be right with God. Well, that was the way it was under the Old Covenant that the writer has been going to great lengths to tell us was a burden that we are no longer required to live under.

Our righteousness with God does not come from perfect lives, but from the perfect forgiveness that we have through Jesus blood, because of our faith and our obedience to that faith. ***AND THAT IS THE POINT THAT THE WRITER IS MAKING HERE!*** These great examples of faith, who lived imperfect lives just as we do, were regarded as great men of God when they demonstrated their unswerving faith by putting it into action. We are in exactly the same position as them, and God regards us as great men of faith on the same basis.

Despite the faithfulness of the fathers, they did not actually receive their reward in their own lifetime. Even the entry into the Promised Land did not come until after some of them were dead and their bones were carried in by their descendants.

The implications for us are that we need to remain faithful – just like the fathers – with the full assurance that God will deliver on His promises! In fact, the promises that are laid ahead for us are far greater than the promises that the fathers received – because for us the promise is that of eternal life in heaven. That promise is not for us alone, but is also for the fathers.

Lesson 13: Fix your Eyes on Jesus

What does the writer call the Hebrews (and us!) to do?

“...let us run with patience the race that is set before us...” We cannot just sit around on the side bench and watch the game. We have to be a part of it – we have to run. That is one of the major points that he has just made with the great cloud of witnesses – they were all people of action. But not only must we run, but we must have patience – endurance – we have to keep on keeping on. Once again, this was part of the great examples from Faith's hall of fame – consider Abraham – his faith was strong and sound, yet he did not receive the promises straight away.

But not just running the race, we need to “...look to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith...” Throughout the letter, the author has positioned Jesus as the great example, the great prophet, the great King, the great High Priest, and the great intercessor.

When we think that we are suffering, or have problems and trials, then just look at Jesus.

Why and how does God discipline us?

In our christian life, we get into a sheltered existence. We need to get out and find things that are beyond our current experience. The Hebrew writer goes much further than just having God deal with our circumstances occasionally. He says that it is a test whether we truly are the people of God. We might *look* like the people of God, we might *say* that we are His people, and we might even *do* many of the things that they do. **BUT**, if we are not growing in our relationship with Him, then we are not truly the sons of God, but are illegitimate children pretending to be sons.

So, just how does God discipline us?

We often think of discipline in terms of punishment and reward. We get rewarded for doing right, and punished for doing wrong. But that is not what is being taught here *at all*. Rather, it is the idea of God guiding us, and controlling events around our lives that allow us to grow, or stop us from doing things that we be to our detriment (particularly our spiritual detriment).

God controls events in our lives to bring about His good. He can take away some of our possessions to stop us getting too materialistic – but then we can reject the discipline and just go and replace them again anyway. He can cause us to have to move locations – and control the circumstances that lead to that – and test how we respond. He can put us into situation that we don’t want to be in, so that we can learn to deal with things (and people) that are beyond our comfort zone. We need to remember that God will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor 19:13).

And most importantly, we need to learn not to rebel against God’s discipline, but learn to grow by it, and become “...*perfect and complete lacking in nothing.*” (Js 1:2-4)

What should our reaction be to God’s discipline?

We don’t enjoy discipline. It can be tiring, and unpleasant. It is after all taking us out of our comfort zone – it makes us uncomfortable. We feel weary. We don’t want to go there. Sometimes we just walk away – but that doesn’t make us grow – we are still in our comfort zone.

When we grow tired in the battle of sin in our lives, and in growing in God’s grace, then we need help from others to fight the battles. Christians can’t survive in the world alone. We need our brethren to help us. It’s like a hot coal trying to survive outside of the fire – it soon grows cold.

We need to see the discipline of God for what it is. When we face the challenges that take us out of our comfort zone, we should embrace them with joy. This is an opportunity for us to grow in our christian lives.

How is christian living contrasted with Jewish life?

We can be in such a relationship with Jesus that He knows and feels everything that we are going through. Rather than the terrifying Mt Siniai, we have come to the city of God – the heavenly Jerusalem. Jesus has gone there *to prepare a place for us*. This is where our *spiritual family* is. This is *home*. And the people who share our home are *our brethren* – our brothers and sisters.

Because of all these things, what should we do?

The writer is pointing us back time and again to Jesus:

- Look unto Jesus (vs 2)
- Consider Him (vs3)
- (Jesus has “been there” (vs 3- 5))
- We have come to God through Jesus (vs18-22)
- Jesus the perfect mediator (vs 24)

- Do not refuse Jesus (vs 25)
- Jesus will come again to bring us home (vs 26-27)

If we refuse Jesus, and do not obey what He says, then where are we? We are worse than those under Moses who despised his law. If we do that, then how can there be any escape from the righteous judgement of God – righteous because it is exactly what we deserve. Jesus will come again. His promise is sure and secure.

Lesson 14: Continue in the Faith

We have been placed in the exalted position because of Christ. This is not an academic exercise. We need to grasp the practical implications of what it means. We cannot belong to Christ and just go about living a life as if He didn't matter, and He did nothing.

How do we share and sacrifice in our lives?

The early christians were prepared to give up the things that they had and share them with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They had to *give up* their possessions. It was a sacrifice, to give away the things that they had worked for. But importantly, they recognised that the things of this world are temporal, and our possessions can prevent us from being in a proper relationship with God. It will do us absolutely no good in eternity if we have made and kept millions of dollars worth of possessions, but neglected to conform our life to Jesus.

And it is exactly this point that the writer is making. Look at what Jesus did. Look at His sacrifice. He had everything. Everything in the world rightly belongs to Him. He gave up all of the riches of heaven so that He might come here to give the gift of eternal life to us. **THAT** is what sacrifice is all about.

What is the altar referred to in verse 10?

Under the Law of Moses, the bodies of the animals that were sacrificed in the Tabernacle and the Temple were taken out side of the camp or the city, and they were buried there (Lev 16). Quite specifically, this referred to the Day of Atonement, and it was at Christ's death that He made the atonement of man to God.

The Day of Atonement was only a foreshadow of the reconciliation that Jesus was to make between man and God. This was the most awesome holy day in the Jewish calendar and is still practised by Jews today (Yom Kippur). *Kippur* comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to cover", as *atonement* also means "to cover". In fulfilling this, Jesus was killed and buried outside of the city at the place called Golgotha (Jn 19:17).

Because of this, what should we do?

The writer is continuing to weave in the doctrine into practical applications. "**Therefore** let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." (13:13 NKJV)

We need to recognise that this life is transient (vs 14), but we are seeking a permanent place with God in heaven. As the old gospel song says "*This world is not my home, I'm just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue...*" We need to keep our lives in perspective, and not get caught up in the worldly things that will distract us away from God.

This is a clear message to the Hebrew christians who could so easily be caught back into the Jewish religion from which Christ had set them free. **EXACTLY** the same message is for us, having been made free from sin by the blood of Jesus, we can so easily slip back.