HEBREWS
A Letter to the Early Followers of Christ

• **Beliefs and needs of the early Christians**	• **God's fulfilled covenant with us through Christ**
• **Basic Christianity and how to grow in faith**	• **Great Old Testament men and women of faith**
• **The need to leave behind old religious traditions**	• **Entering into God's promised rest for all people**

THIS BOOK was written in the early days of Christianity. It encourages both Jewish and Gentile believers to discard all useless traditions. It helps us to grow in our faith. It helps us to be holy. It encourages us to witness to others how the Lord Jesus Christ is at work in our lives. It helps us to discipline ourselves like runners in a race. It confirms that helping others also helps us to grow in faith. It gives many examples of ordinary men and women who had great faith in the Lord God Almighty. It encourages our faith in Jesus to grow today.

MANNA PUBLICATIONS publish small Bible teaching commentaries written by the late Fred Morris to use on your own or to study in a group. Fred and his wife Lorna, originally from Australia, travelled round the world teaching and preaching before retiring to the USA. Their low-cost books are easy to read, understand and translate into other languages. The books explain basic New and Old Testament teaching of God's word and the new life found in Christ plus additional notes for Bible students, teachers and pastors.

THESE BOOKS will help you to come closer to Almighty God. He is worshipped by millions of Jews and Christians worldwide. These books will also help you to receive salvation and eternal life through God's Son, Jesus the Christ who is Israel's Messiah. They will help you to talk about your faith in God and to pray to Him. They will help to guide you from going the wrong way in life. They will help you to live a life that is pleasing to God through the love and power of His Holy Spirit. This was promised to all who believe Jesus is the Son of God, who suffered death for our sins before returning back to Heaven. These are important teachings for these last days before His return.

WE PRAY that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you trust in God, read the Bible and use these commentaries. Think about what Jesus taught and suffered 2000 years ago for our eternal salvation and what He is calling you to say and do today to prepare the way for His return.

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"The secret of God's Kingdom has been given to you" (Mark 4:11)

HEBREWS

A Letter to the Early Followers of Christ

A Bible Teaching Commentary for personal or group study

Written by Fred Morris

HEBREWS

Chapters 1 to 13

To the Reader or Leader

These commentaries help to explain the Bible in a way that is easy to read and understand. They are also easy to translate. You can use Fred's books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. Each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible.

Bible reading: Where you see this heading, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible verses first before reading this book.

Talk about this: Where you see this, there are questions to prayerfully answer yourself or to discuss in a group study. They also help the reader to remember the Bible verses.

Think about this: Where you see this, the questions require more time for personal meditation.

Additional text boxes: Where you see these, the information gives extra teaching about life at the time the Bible passage was written and helps to apply the teaching for today.

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encouraged to help others in their faith. They are also encouraged to obey and to support their church leaders.

We are all warned not to look back to our old life of sin. We are warned to throw off old habits and religious traditions. We are encouraged to build our new faith in Jesus Christ. He enables us to go forward into a deeper faith with Almighty God. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are encouraged to look forward to a future life with Father God and His Son now and for eternity. Therefore, we must be holy and witness to others how Jesus is at work in our lives today.

A chief desire of the writer of Hebrews is that we should become great men and women of faith. He gives many examples of Old Testament believers and encourages his readers to share their faith and love with other believers. In this way, Jewish and Gentile believers can grow in faith, love and unity whatever their background, through Christ's salvation and His Spirit working within us.

HEBREWS: A Letter to the Early Followers of Christ

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews was written in the early days of the church of Jesus Christ, probably AD50 to AD60. It is a useful guide for all believers today. We do not know who wrote it.

The first readers were mainly Jewish believers in Jesus who were often called Hebrews. Some of the believers wanted to bring old religious traditions into their new faith in Jesus (known as Yeshua in the Hebrew language). Therefore, this book was a warning for them. It is now a warning for all Jewish and Gentile believers today. It warns us to leave behind any man-made traditions that stop or hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. It warns us to trust in Jesus Christ alone, Israel's promised Messiah, for our salvation and growth in the Christian faith.

The book of Hebrews explains that Jesus fulfilled everything that the Jewish high priests did with their sacrifices of animal blood. In addition, His death was the final blood sacrifice for forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the Son of God and is without sin. Therefore, the blood of Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sins and the sins of others. Jesus is the eternal salvation plan of the LORD God Almighty for Jews and for non-Jews (Gentiles). He is our Great High Priest for ever!

This book warns us to fully understand these things. The writer repeats his understanding of these truths from God again and again. He knew how believers can become weak in their faith or understanding. He warned his readers to continue to follow Jesus who is the fulfilment of the Old Testament laws. He did not want them to go back to their old ways. He wanted their faith to be strong. He encourages the Jewish followers of Christ to endure and not return to the traditions of the old Jewish covenants. They must uphold the Law of God given to Moses but believe that their Messiah, Jesus Christ, is now the fulfilment of that Law. He is higher than the high priest Melchizedek, higher than the prophets, higher than the angels. Jesus is now God's fulfilment of His covenant for His people and the Saviour of the world to all who believe.

God's covenant with Noah down the centuries and renewed with Abraham and Moses and other people of faith, has now been fulfilled in Christ for all who believe!

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 1

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT BELIEFS ABOUT JESUS

In the very first words of Hebrews, the writer points us to the Lord God Almighty of Jews and Gentiles who is Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus the Christ or Messiah. In the past, God used His Old Testament prophets to bring

His message of salvation to people and nations (1:1). "But in these last days, God has spoken to us through His Son" (1:2).

The writer of Hebrews then shares with us many things about Jesus that we believe today:

- Jesus was with God His Father before the world began. The Lord God Almighty created everything through Him (1:2).
- Jesus is exactly like God. He shares the wonderful bright light of the glory of His Father. He has the power to control the Universe (1:3).
- Jesus came down to Earth in the way God planned, to be born as a human being without sin and to save us from sin. He now sits at the right hand of His Father (1:3).
- Jesus is greater than the angels of God (1:4).

The writer of Hebrews also quotes many times (1:5-13) from the book of Psalms. The Psalms were written many hundreds of years before Jesus was born on Earth as a baby boy. They prophesied about Jesus. What they said many years ago came true.

- Jesus is the Messiah and Saviour. He was promised by God through the Old Testament writers (Psalm 2:7).
- Jesus is the first and only Son of God. Jesus is over all things. The angels worship and serve Him (Psalm 104:4).
- God Himself says that Jesus is God. The throne of Jesus will last for ever and ever. His kingdom will be ruled by what is right (righteousness). He loves what is right and hates evil (Psalm 45:6-7).
- Jesus created the Universe, through His Father God and the Holy Spirit. "The heavens are the work of Your hands. They will pass away (perish). But You remain the same for ever… Your years will never end" (Psalm 102:25-27).
- Jesus sits at the right-hand side of His Father. God will put the enemies of Jesus under the control of Jesus (Psalm 110:1).

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF GOD IN JESUS

"Everyone who believes in Him (Jesus) can live with God for ever. God loved the world so much that He gave us His one and only Son. Whoever believes in Him will not die (perish) but will have eternal life" (John 3:15-16).

From the beginning of time, all things have been prepared for Jesus to come into the world. Each plan of God for sacrificed blood led to His final plan of salvation through Jesus alone (Romans 5:6-8). He sent His Son to take the punishment for the sins of the world. The blood of Jesus was offered as a final sacrifice to save us from the power of sin, death and Satan (1 John 4:9-10). Jesus was and is the Lamb of God. "Through His blood our sins have been forgiven and we have been set free" (Ephesians 1:7). "Salvation belongs to the Lamb of God" (Revelation 7:10).

to Him. We can do it only with the help of Jesus. Give Him glory forever and ever. Amen" (13:21).

The writer makes one final request. "I beg you to accept my word. It tells you to be faithful" (13:22). This is His chief desire.

The writer then ends with good news that "Timothy has been set free". He also sends good wishes from the believers in Italy (13:23-24). He adds his own wish for the grace of God to be with all his readers (13:25).

Talk about this:

1. Why is it so important for us to love one another (13:1)?
2. How can we best help those who suffer (13:3)?
3. Why is thinking about sex outside of marriage wrong (13:4)?
4. Why does the writer of Hebrews quote words from Deuteronomy and Psalms (13:5-6)?
5. Why must his readers leave old covenant traditions behind (13:9)?
6. What sacrifices should we offer today (13:15-17)?
7. Are you seeking God to do more and more good things that are pleasing to Him (13:21; 2 Corinthians 9:8)?

Think about this: Are you willing to live a holy life (13:1-6)? Are you willing to suffer to help others to live holy lives (13:12-13)? Are you willing to sacrifice your life in serving and witnessing to others (13:15-16)? Are you willing to support your church leaders (13:17)?

CONCLUSIONS

The book of Hebrews was written mainly to Jewish followers of Jesus. They needed much encouragement. They were tempted to go back to their religious traditions. Sometimes they let traditions rule over the Word of God in the Old Testament, which is the foundation of our faith and strength. However, the writer mentions the failings of the old covenant Law to do good and to change the lives of believers. Christ fulfilled in Jews and Gentiles God's covenant requirements for believers in Him. Through taking the punishment on the cross for our sins Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the old covenant. He enables us to experience fellowship with God Almighty through His Spirit at work within us under the new covenant.

The Jews who did not follow Jesus persecuted the early believers. Other Christians who were not Jews sometimes judged them. Some believers were tempted to give up their faith (3:12; 10:26). Many had not grown strong in their faith (5:12-14). Others had become lazy or weary (6:12; 12:3). Some believers had stopped meeting together (10:25). The writer has a clear understanding of Old and New Testament teaching. He uses them to encourage his readers to grow strong in faith and to live holy lives. His readers are also

People watch us to see how little or how much we trust God and His salvation in Jesus. Do they see His holiness at work in our lives? Do they see Jesus in us?

Are we, too, willing to follow Jesus, live a holy life and suffer shame (Hebrews 13:13)? Are we even willing to die for Him?

A few years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. In this world we do not have cities that last forever (13:14). Instead, we look forward to a heavenly city. It is a Kingdom that cannot be destroyed.

Under the new covenant of God, let us never stop our own personal offerings to God (13:15-16). These are the offerings that God desires:

- We offer to God our praises through Jesus our Saviour.
- With our lips we say that we believe in Him.
- We offer ourselves to be obedient to His will.
- We offer what we have and share it with others.

God is pleased with these offerings.

Also, we must offer ourselves to support our church leaders who truly live their faith in Jesus. "Put yourselves under their authority. They keep watch over you. They know that they are responsible to God for everything they do. Support them so that their work will be a joy. If you make their work a heavy load, it will not do you any good" (13:17). Therefore, encourage and support your leaders and do not weaken their ministry.

A REQUEST FOR PRAYERS

The writer of Hebrews then asks his readers to offer prayers for himself and his co-workers. They all wanted to do what was right. He says, "We long to live as we should in every way" (13:18).

We too should pray for our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ:

- Pray for the church leaders, teachers and preachers.
- Pray for those in distress and with personal needs.
- Pray for those who are persecuted for their faith.
- Pray for those who are seeking eternal salvation.

Pray to the Father in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit (Jude 20). A life of prayer requires discipline but results in personal holiness.

FINAL WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Finally, the writer reminds us, "Our Lord Jesus is the Great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20; John 10:11). His Father God brought Him back from death. He did it through the blood of the everlasting covenant.

The writer then prays for his readers. "May God supply you with everything good. Then you can do what He wants. May He do in us [all] what is pleasing

People were able to see and touch the Son of God (1 John 1:1). He was the Lamb of God that was sacrificed (John 1:29). Now, Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). No-one comes to the Lord God Almighty, except through His Son, Jesus the Christ. Jesus opened a new and living way for sinful mankind to come back to God (Hebrews 10:19-20).

There is no need of anything more. The writer of Hebrews makes this clear to us. Jesus finished the work that God gave Him to do (John 17:4; 19:30). He came to Earth to die for our sins. He obeyed His Father and God raised Him from death to be our Saviour.

The laws that God gave to Moses required the repeated sacrifice of blood from innocent animals to forgive sin. This commandment was fully satisfied by the death of Jesus on the cross. The sacrifice of His innocent blood was the final sacrifice for all time. His resurrection from death fulfilled the salvation plan of God. This also opened the way for the amazing ministry of God's love through His Holy Spirit and His angels after the ascension of Jesus back to Heaven.

Angels welcome Jesus back to Heaven to prepare for their ministry on Earth with those who have accepted God's plan of salvation (Hebrews 1:14)

At the end of the first chapter, the writer of Hebrews explains the purpose of the angels of God. "All angels are spirits who serve. God sends them to serve those who will receive His salvation" (Hebrews 1:14).

Talk about this:

1. From the beginning, God had one final plan for salvation. What was that?
2. What did God tell us about His Son years before He was born on earth (1:2-13)?
3. What does God tell us about His angels (1:4, 7, 14)?

Think about this: Christians believe that Jesus is God. Jesus came to earth as the Son of God 2000 years ago. He was born to Mary in the form of a human being. He was both Son of God and Son of Man without sin. He became the perfect and final blood sacrifice for the sins and sinners of this world. Do you believe and trust in this amazing salvation plan of God? How do you show it?

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 2

A WARNING TO TAKE SALVATION SERIOUSLY

The writer of Hebrews warns us to follow carefully the great salvation plan of God. We all must study the truth from God given to us in the Bible. "Then we will not drift away from it" (2:1).

We read in the Old Testament that God's people were told to obey the message of God. Every time people broke the Law, they received the punishment that they deserved (2:2).

The writer of Hebrews asks, "Then how will we escape punishment if we do not pay attention to God's great salvation?" (2:3). His salvation plan used the punishment and death of Christ to pay for our sins. The sacrifice of His own Son on the cross paid for our punishment and forgiveness and freedom and a new start to life. This is for all people who choose to obey God and follow Jesus. This is the Good News of God in Jesus. The apostle Paul called this "the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4).

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself announced this salvation plan. Many heard it and received salvation through believing. Those who heard the Good News and believed it, passed on to us this message of salvation from God (2:3). We are now saved by faith in Jesus alone (Galatians 3:24-26).

God confirmed His salvation plan through Jesus by various miracles. "He… gave witness through the gifts of His Holy Spirit. He gave them as it pleased Him" (Hebrews 2:4). God gives to believers these spiritual gifts to bring honour to His name and not to bring glory to men and women.

When we preach the Good News of Jesus, we should therefore expect signs and wonders from God. We should also remember that in the Last Days there will be false signs and wonders from the enemy (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11; 2 Timothy 4:3-4).

WHAT JESUS DID FOR THE FAMILY OF BELIEVERS

Long ago, God sent His angels to minister on Earth (Hebrews 1:14). We believe that God still uses angels today. Angels, however, will not control the Kingdom of God that is to come when Jesus returns (2:5). "Everything is under His control" (2:8).

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 13

ADVICE FOR HOLY LIVING

In this final chapter of Hebrews there are many more words of advice for holy living:

- Verse 1. Love the family of God. "Love each other as brothers and sisters."
- Verse 2. Welcome strangers. "Some people have welcomed angels without knowing it."
- Verse 3. Do not forget the believers in prison. "Remember those who are badly treated."
- Verse 4. Live holy and pure lives. "All of you should honour marriage…" God will judge those who commit adultery. He will judge everyone who seeks sex outside of marriage, we must remain holy in our thoughts and desires.
- Verse 5. "Do not be controlled by love for money. Be happy with what you have." Remember God promised, "I will never leave you." (Deuteronomy 31:6).
- Verse 6. Do not let fear destroy your peace. Say "I will not be afraid" (Psalm 118:6, 7).
- Verse 7. "Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Copy their faith." But be wary when leaders fail to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- Verse 8. All around us things change. But Jesus never changes. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." Jesus has power to heal people and to give back life. Reach out to Him in faith for all your needs. He has promised to answer (Mark 5:34).

Our holiness is through the grace of God. He makes us strong to live holy lives. Our holiness is not through eating holy food. Our holiness is not through worshipping in holy places. "Do not be carried away [deceived] by all kinds of strange teachings or traditions" (Hebrews 13:9-10).

OFFERINGS TO GOD FOR TODAY

Jesus offered His body to die on a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem. Crucifixion was the most shameful and painful kind of punishment. "He suffered to make the people holy by sacrificing His own blood" (13:12).

We are made holy because Jesus sacrificed Himself for us. This is through the grace of God for all who believe in His salvation plan. Jesus is our Saviour. "You were slain. And with Your blood You purchased for God people from every tribe and language and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

- We are able to approach the Lord God Almighty.
- We join with those who have been made perfect in Jesus.

Yes, we are the church of believers whose names are written in Heaven. We are a spiritual community. God knows all those whose names are written in His Book of Life. This is because we come through Jesus to God. He is the judge of all people and our Great High Priest. He talks to His Father God for us (12:24).

DO NOT LET ANYTHING SPOIL YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Hebrew believers had left that old system of laws and priests. Jesus is the One who brings us to all the glories of His heavenly city. His sprinkled blood promises more than any other blood sacrificed since the time of Cain and Abel. Therefore, do not say no to God. Do not turn away from the One who speaks to us from Heaven (12:25). And do not reject or refuse to listen to God. He speaks to all of us through His written words of truth. He also speaks to us through the Good News of His Son. He is the Word of God (John 1:1-4). He calls us to live a holy life. No unholy person will see God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). His voice is a loving voice. But we will learn to fear God if we try live in sin or try to run away from Him. We cannot escape (Psalm 139:7-12; Hebrews 12:25).

Many things in this world will be shaken and taken from us. But the Kingdom of God will remain (12:27). "We receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. So let us be thankful. Then we can worship God in a way that pleases Him… Worship Him with deep respect and wonder" (12:28).

Is there anything in you that is not ready for fellowship with God in Heaven? Let the sacrifice of His Son on the cross destroy what is wrong in your life. The temptations and trials that come to all of us show us things that should be destroyed in our lives. These things include envy, bitterness, greed, selfishness, pride, deceit. Confess these sins and give them up. Let the holy fire of God destroy the things that hold you back in the great Christian race of life (12:29).

Talk about this:

1. What stops us from finishing in the race we run for God (12:1)?
2. Who should we think about as our example (12:3)?
3. Why are troubles and trials important in life (12:5-11)?
4. What happens when we do not accept the discipline of God (12:8)?
5. Why do we need to make a clear pathway ahead of us in life (12:12-13)?
6. What important guidelines are given for church communities (12:15-17)?
7. What blessings does belief in Jesus provide for us (12:23-24)?

Think about this: Thank God for the huge 'cloud' of faithful men and women. How is God training you through the troubles of life? How does He show His love for you in good and bad times?

The writer of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 8:4-6 which looked forward to the coming of Jesus as Saviour. Jesus was made "a little lower than the angels" for the thirty-three years of His life as a man (Hebrews 2:7, 9). The Father sent His Son to be born as a human being. Jesus gave up His majesty and glory in Heaven. He came down without sin to suffer and to die for us who have sinned (1 Peter 3:18).

Then God raised Jesus from death. Now, everything is under His control through His promised Holy Spirit (Hebrews 2:8). Jesus is seated at the side of His Father in Heaven. And God sends the angels to serve those who follow Him (1:14). We have the Holy Spirit within us and God's angels around us!

The writer of Hebrews also warns, "We do not now see everything under His control" (2:8). Satan causes much trouble because he keeps trying to rule, but he fails. He longs to be in control of everything. He also tempts Christians to control other believers.

"We see Jesus … given a crown of glory and honour… He suffered death. By the grace of God, He tasted death for everyone. That is why he was given His crown" (2:9).

Jesus was born to suffer and die for our sins. This was the amazing plan of God from the beginning. He acted in exactly the right way. He now brings His family of believers to share in His glory. Jesus was the perfect One to do this through His sacrifice (2:10).

Jesus is holy. He makes us holy through faith in His sacrifice. He will never be ashamed of us if we remain holy and faithful to Him. In truth, he makes believers holy so they "belong to the same family. Therefore, Jesus is not ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters" (2:11). Therefore, Jesus offers us all a place in the family of God. This was promised by God long ago in the Old Testament (2:12-13; Psalm 22:22; Isaiah 8:18).

Hebrews 2:8. Who is in control?

- Jesus has all power and authority.
- He is seated at the right hand of the Lord God Almighty, His Father.
- Everything is under His control.
- We still see Satan and his evil spirits at work in the world around us.
- We also see sin in our own lives, which we must confess to receive forgiveness.
- God allows Satan to continue to do evil. We are tested as Jesus was tested.
- When Jesus comes again, Satan will be bound up.

WE ARE PART OF THE FAMILY OF GOD

Jesus became a human being like us in order to die for us. "By doing that, He could destroy the one who rules over the kingdom of death who is the devil" (2:14).

Jesus overcame sin and death for us. He also set us free from the fear of death (2:15). Jesus robbed Satan of the power he uses to enslave us. Jesus has brought us from death to life (Romans 6:13). We are the children of God. Therefore, we have His power working in us when we are born again. We must no longer yield to the temptations of Satan.

Jesus came as the promised Messiah to help the family of Abraham (Hebrews 2:16). And He helps all those who share the faith of Abraham in our Lord God Almighty. He blesses all who obey Him as Abraham did (Genesis 12:1-4). If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are children of God. We receive what God promised Abraham (Galatians 3:29). God promised that the family of Abraham would be a blessing throughout the whole world for all who believe.

It was necessary for Jesus to serve God as a man. He served God as our kind and faithful Great High Priest. He came from Heaven to Earth as a human baby to do this. In this way "He could pay for the sins of the people by dying for them" (Hebrews 2:17). He could do this because He was the only one who never sinned.

The writer of Hebrews also reminds us that while Jesus was on Earth, He was tempted and tested. Now He helps us to overcome our own temptations to sin (2:18). Jesus knows how to help others who are tempted by Satan.

Talk about this:

1. What happens to our faith if we do not listen and obey the message of God (2:1-3)?
2. What should we expect to happen when the Good News is preached (2:4)?
3. Why is there much trouble in the world today (2:8)?
4. What does Satan use to control us as his slaves (2:15)? Who sets us free?
5. Who is able to help us when we are tempted (2:18)?

Think about this: What signs and wonders should there be in our churches when the Good News is preached (2:4)? What are the signs of Satan trying to control us? Do you try to control other believers? Ask for love, understanding and compassion in ministry.

and hurt themselves. They will be strengthened by your example of preparing the way ahead. They will grow strong in their faith (12:12-13).

HOW TO BE HOLY IN ALL WE DO

The writer gives further encouragement and good advice. Good deeds and obedience to God are not enough to get us into Heaven. "Try your best to live at peace with everyone. Try to be holy. Without holiness no-one will see the Lord" (12:14). Long ago, God commanded His people to be holy.

We are not, however, saved by our good works, or even by trying to be holy (Ephesians 2:8-9). Believers are made holy and righteous through the gift of faith in God to forgive sins through Jesus. "Their faith makes them right with God" (Romans 4:5).

In Hebrews 12:14-17 we are given these clear warnings:

- Try your best to live in peace with everyone.
- Try to be holy. Without holiness, no-one will see the Lord.
- Make sure that no-one fails to receive the grace of God. Help other people to receive His love and mercy.
- Do not allow bitterness to grow in the fellowship of believers. It will cause trouble and ungodliness.
- Make sure no-one commits sexual sins. This can destroy marriages and divide families and churches.
- Do not allow ungodly decisions to be made in the church.

These things warn us to be holy. If we fail, we must confess our sin to God, say we are sorry to Him and receive His forgiveness. We must then keep going forward on our journey of faith in the salvation plan of God through Jesus our Saviour. We can then serve God as holy people. We can then enter fully into the ministry He has called us to do.

A SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY AND KINGDOM

The Old Testament Law spoke about punishment, and even death for sin. But the cross of Jesus gives your life and victory over sin. There is no need to be sad or fearful when you trust in God. You have not come to the mountain of God that cannot be touched (Exodus 19:12). You have not come to the fire of God, nor His darkness, nor His storm, nor His trumpet blast, nor His loud voice (12:18-19). Even Moses was afraid to go near to God at times (12:21).

Instead, through Jesus, we come to the city of the living God. It is the heavenly Jerusalem, where there are thousands of angels (12:22), those who believe in Jesus now join others who worship Him (12:23):

- We are the community or church of the people of God.
- We belong to a community where the only Son of God rules.
- We share in the blessings that belong to Jesus.
- Our names are written in Heaven.

The great Christian race of life (Hebrews 12:1-3)

- Remember that many other Christians have run and won. Their faith witnesses to us what we and God can do.
- Prepare for the race. Throw off everything in life that hinders you from winning the prize.
- Live holy lives. Confess your sins now, including those sins that hold tightly to you.
- Believe that God has a plan for you. Believe that the route is marked out ahead for us.
- Run in faith. Keep your eyes on Jesus and not on the other runners.
- Start and finish with Jesus. His Spirit runs with us. Your life of faith began with Jesus. He will be there with you at the end of the race.
- Do not look behind you. Forget the failures of the old life. Jesus will make you perfect if you remain faithful to the end.
- Do not be afraid of problems ahead of you. In the race of life, you will meet many tests of faith. They will make you stronger.
- Trust in Jesus. He loves you. He ran the race before you.
- Do not grow weary. Remember that Jesus suffered much to win the victory that you can receive.

GOD TRAINS US THROUGH SUFFERING

The writer of Hebrews continues to encourage believers who are suffering because of their faith. "You struggle [and fight] against sin. But you have not yet fought to the point of spilling your blood" or being martyred for your faith (12:4). You have not suffered as Jesus did.

The writer then quotes words of hope from Proverbs 3:11-12. "Think of God's training as important. Do not lose faith and hope when He corrects you. He trains those He loves" (Hebrews 12:5-6). God disciplines and corrects everyone He accepts as His child because He loves you. He loves us enough to wait until we trust Him and obey Him.

Therefore, learn from the hard times. God allows them to happen. He will use them to train you. He trains you as His children (12:7). If you refuse to be trained up in Him, then you are not truly His children (12:8).

God trains us better than our own parents. They did what they thought was best. God, however, wants us to share in His holiness (12:9-10).

All discipline and training seem painful. The training of God, however, produces holiness and also inner peace (12:11). Therefore, lift up your weary arms and make your weak knees strong! Clear a pathway ahead for yourself. Be a good example and encourage other Christians. Then they will not stumble

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 3

JESUS IS GREATER THAN MOSES

The writer continues to speak to his Hebrew brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. This is important for all believers today. He says that they are holy people. He says that they are the chosen people of God. He encourages all believers to keep thinking about Jesus. His message is for the Jews who believe that Jesus is their Messiah and Saviour. But his message is also for followers of Jesus who are not Jews. Jesus is our Chief Apostle. Jesus is our Great High Priest. Jesus is the One whom we believe (3:1).

Moses was faithful to God and was a servant to the people. Jesus was faithful to God who sent Him down to Earth as His Son (3:2). He did all that God asked Him to do. Therefore, Jesus is "worthy of greater honour than Moses" (3:3). God now builds everything through Jesus (3:4). But Moses served God faithfully. He even spoke of God's plan of salvation to come (3:5). Today, Jesus serves all the people of God. He is over the house of God. "We are His house if we continue to come boldly to God" (3:6).

WARNINGS AND ENCOURAGEMENT

We can therefore come boldly to the Lord God Almighty through faith in Jesus. We will prove the faithfulness of Jesus as we continue to seek God. We must hold on to our faith. We must hold on to the hope of our eternal salvation (3:6). We must not rebel against the salvation plan of God in Jesus. We must also leave behind religious traditions which are not part of the salvation plan of God.

The amazing history of Israel is a warning to all the people of God. In Hebrews 3:7-11, the writer quotes from Psalm 95. This Psalm reminds us of the sad time in the history of Israel when the people of God rebelled against Him on the way to the Promised Land. It warns everyone: "The Holy Spirit says, 'Listen to His voice today. If you hear it, do not be stubborn'" (3:7-8). God took them through the desert after leaving Egypt so that He could speak to them and teach them.

The early believers in Jesus met together daily to worship God in the power of the Holy Spirit. They also continued to learn from the Old Testament. So should we all. Part of God's plan is to change the way we live and think through the reading of His word. We will then understand how Christ is the fulfilment of God's plans in the Old Testament Law and the prophets. We should live therefore, not for ourselves, but for God's long-term purpose at work in our lives. That includes all His people born to the three sons of Noah. As we do this, we honour God and others will see Jesus in us, whether we have descended from Shem, Ham or Japheth.

The writer of Hebrews goes on to say, "Brothers and sisters, make sure that none of you has a sinful heart. Do not let an unbelieving heart turn you away from the living God. But build one another up [in the faith] every day. Do it as long as there is still time. Then none of you will become stubborn … Hold firmly to the faith we had at first … hold to it to the end" (3:12-14).

The writer quotes again the words from Psalm 95. "Listen to the voice of God today. If you hear it, do not be stubborn" (3:15). God has many good things planned for us. But if we do not listen to God and read His word, it becomes more and more difficult to repent. We must not allow our hearts to become hard.

Hebrews 3:12-15. Words of warning and encouragement

The writer of Hebrews warned the Jewish believers in Jesus not to go back to their old ways. His words also warn all believers today:

- Brothers and sisters, make sure that none of you has a sinful heart.
- Do not let an unbelieving heart turn you away from the living God.
- Build each other up in the faith every day while there is time.
- Do not become stubborn. Do not become deceived.
- Hold firm to the faith in Jesus that you had at first. Hold it until the end.
- Listen to the voice of God. If you hear it, do not be stubborn.

These warnings are also great words of encouragement for us.

ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

Moses led the Israelites near to the border of the Promised Land. However, only their children crossed the River Jordan because they rebelled against God. God chose Israel as His very own people. He rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Their clothes did not wear out in the desert. God sent them fresh food. But they were not thankful. Many died in the desert. After 40 years, God told Joshua to lead their children into the Promised Land of Canaan (3:16-17).

The family of Jacob (Israel) failed to rejoice at the mighty works which God did to bring them out of Egypt. They did not trust His salvation plan for them. They marched through the desert and grumbled. No fresh water! No vegetables from Egypt! No cooking pots full of lamb and goat meat!

They rebelled against God and tested His patience. They proved that the more they grumbled, the harder their hearts became. They were stubborn. God wanted to show mercy. He spoke to them very clearly in the wilderness. He wants to speak to all of us if we are ready to stop and listen.

ENTERING INTO THE PROMISED REST OF GOD

Therefore, God did not allow a whole generation of His people to enter into the Promised Land of Canaan. No-one obeyed Him except Joshua and Caleb (3:18).

Talk about this:

1. How does the faith of these men and women encourage us to serve and obey God?
2. Why did God accept the offering of Abel and not the offering of Cain (11:4)?
3. How was the faith of women important to God (11:21, 31)?
4. How will Old and New Testament people of God meet together (11:39-40)?

Think about this: How does faith in God change what we do? How does faith help us to obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Pray for people of faith today to uphold the Word of God and the Good News of salvation in Christ.

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 12

KEEP LOOKING TO JESUS

The names of these faithful men and women of God surround us like a great cloud (12:1). They are true witnesses of faith in God. Their faith reminds us and encourages us not to let anything hinder our own faith in God.

Christians are like runners in a great race. The writer of Hebrews tells us to throw off everything that hinders us. Runners throw off heavy clothes that stop them from winning in a race. We must also throw off anything in our lives that stops us growing in faith. "Let us throw off any sin that holds on to us tightly" (12:1).

The 'huge cloud' of great men and women of faith around us encourage us not to look back. We must look ahead as we run the great race. "Let us keep on running the race [that God has] marked out for us. Let us keep looking to Jesus" (12:1-2). He began our journey of faith when we believed. This seed of faith will grow with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the author of our faith and will make our faith perfect at the end.

Jesus suffered gladly the shame of the cross for us. He was able to suffer there because of the joy He would receive afterwards, for He had come down to do the will of His Father (John 6:38). Then He sat down at the right hand of God His Father (12:2).

Jesus suffered much for sinners. He did this to win the victory for us over sin and over the shame of sin. Think about Him and follow His example. Do not allow your faith to weaken when evil people say and do wrong things to you. Then you will not get weary or discouraged (12:3).

that the walls of Jericho would fall down after they marched round the city for seven days (11:30; Joshua 6:1-21).
- By faith, **Rahab** the prostitute was not killed in Jericho with those who rejected God (11:31). Instead, by faith, she took all her family into her house and they were saved from death (Joshua 6:22-25). She lived in Israel and became an ancestor of Boaz and King David and also of Joseph who married Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matthew 1:5-16).

The faith of these people of God still speaks to us today through the pages of the Old Testament (see Hebrews 11:4). They lived by faith until they died. Many did not receive the things that God had promised. Instead, they looked forward to a "heavenly country" (11:16) and the future fulfilment of God's promises through their families and the families of other believers.

They did not understand the many parts of the plan of God. They trusted, however, that God would keep His promises. They lived and died in hope.

The writer of Hebrews wanted to tell of all the other faithful people of God. He did not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel or the prophets (11:32). Some of these faithful men and women of God defeated kings and ruled fairly. Some received the blessings in this world that God promised. Some escaped death by lions. Others escaped death by fire or by the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They were powerful in battles. Some were raised from death.

Many suffered but they refused to deny their faith. They chose instead to suffer and die and be raised up to a better life after death (11:33-35). Some were laughed at and some were beaten. Others were put in chains in prison. Some were stoned and some were sawn in two. They were poor. They were attacked. They were badly treated. Some lived in caves or holes in the ground (11:36-38).

VICTORY THROUGH FAITH IN GOD

The world did not deserve such great and faithful people of God. The world was not worthy of them (11:38). But to God, they were worthy people. "All these people were praised because they had faith" (11:39). No-one was worthy if they did not have faith in God.

The final result of all faith is victory. True faith stands firm in the trials of life. All these people had faith. Yet many did not receive in this world what God had promised. God planned something far better for those who suffered for their faith. They received something that this world cannot offer.

We will all be made perfect together with them (11:40). God promises something better for us all, especially those in poverty or under bad rulers. This hope is made possible today through faith in God and through the death and resurrection of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

That was because they did not believe God's promise (3:19; Exodus 3:8). These two sins of not believing or obeying began with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:6). Disbelief continued to rule in their descendants and so God sent the flood which destroyed all of their early descendants except for Noah and his wife and family. After Noah's Flood, people continued in their disobedience.

God, however, does not love us only when we obey Him. He loves us all the time. His love is always the same. His love is faithful. But if we do not stay close to Him, our love for Him will grow cold. If we do not trust Him, we will lose the blessings He offers. And if we fail to confess Jesus is Lord with our lips and believe Him in our hearts that He was raised from death, we will lose the rest that God has planned for us (Romans 10:9). We will not be able to enter our 'promised land' and enjoy His rest (Hebrews 3:18-19). Continue to believe in God and His Son our Saviour (3:1, 19). Be thankful that disobedience does NOT take salvation away from believers.

Talk about this:

1. Why is it so important to keep thinking about Jesus our Saviour (3:1, 19)?
2. What happens to our faith when we grumble and complain?
3. Why are these words of warning also words of encouragement (3:12-15)?
4. Why does the writer repeat the words from Psalm 95 (3:7-8, 15)?
5. What happened to the people who rebelled against God (3:17-18)?
6. Why did they not receive the promised rest of God in the Promised Land of Canaan (3:19)?

Think about this: Why is it important to keep thinking about Jesus (3:1)? Can you believe that you are a special person of God? What happens if we do not stay close to God (3:19)?

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 4

HOW TO RECEIVE GOD'S PROMISED REST

The writer of Hebrews confirms that "God's promise of enjoying His rest stands today. Be careful that none of you fails to receive it" (4:1). God has never taken back His promise of rest for His people. Through Jesus, God promises to provide for us now and in Heaven. All the promises of God are fulfilled in Him. And through following the call of Jesus we find that promised rest of God. As Christians, we are called to hear and to believe and to obey His words. Leave behind the old life of slavery to sin and receive God's promise of peace and eternal salvation.

The promises of God were given to the people of Israel in Egypt and in the desert. They heard the message of God. The truth they heard was, however, of no value to them. It was not received with faith (4:2). This angered God, but

he allowed their children to cross over the River Jordan into God's promised land of Canaan.

Psalm 95:11 tells us how God warned His people. "I said they will never enjoy the rest I planned for them" (Hebrews 4:3, 5). The love of God for them had not changed. Nor had His purpose changed for them (Exodus 19:6). Their problem was their cold hearts. Their lack of faith caused them to disobey God and not receive His promised rest on Earth or in Heaven.

God Himself took rest on the seventh day of creation (Hebrews 4:4; Genesis 2:2). He finished His work of creating the world. Many do enjoy His rest today. It is open to us all. Some people, however, receive the Good News of Jesus but then they do not obey God (Hebrews (3:18, 4:6). If you see any brother or sister commit a sin "that does not lead to death, you should pray for them and God will give them life." (1 John 5:16)

A weak faith could affect anyone. It leads to unbelief. Unbelief leads to sin and separation from God. It cuts us off from the mercy of God to save us from sin. Without faith, we lose for them the power to overcome sin and are no longer holy. Even when we know we have been forgiven, sin leads us into guilt and shame.

Today, those who believe the Good News of Jesus must go on in that faith to enjoy the promised rest of God. We must stop trusting in our own works. Rather, we must do the work God has called us to do.

After Moses died, Joshua led the people into the Promised Land of Canaan. However, they only had a temporary rest from trouble. The writer of Hebrews warns his readers a third time, using the words from Psalm 95. "Listen to His voice today. If you hear it, do not be stubborn." (Hebrews 4:7) 'Today' means 'now'. Therefore, we must believe and obey so that we will be better prepared to receive the promised rest of God through His plan of salvation in Jesus.

The people of Israel disobeyed God because they did not fully believe Him. After Moses died, Joshua was unable to give them the true rest of God (4:8). And it is available to us today, now! The writer compares it to the Sabbath rest (4:9). This was when God rested from His work (4:10). We should do the same. "So let us make every effort to enjoy His rest. Then no-one will fall into sin by following the example of those who do not obey God" (4:11).

JESUS IS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

The meaning and truth of the Word of God written in the Old Testament has not changed. This is because God does not change. His written words are not old, dead words. The words that God spoke are living and active. They are full of power and sharper than any sword or knife with two edges (4:12). His words from the whole of the Bible cut deep into us today.

The word of God opens up our soul, our spirit, our body, our thoughts and our plans. God knows everything that we say or think. "Nothing God created is

Abraham looked beyond the sacrifice of his son, to a resurrected Isaac. He believed that the Lord God Almighty could bring Isaac back from death (11:17-19). God stopped Abraham from killing Isaac and provided an animal sacrifice instead. God promised Abraham, "Your family will continue through Isaac" (Genesis 21:12). "All nations on earth will be blessed because of your children. All this will happen because you have obeyed Me" (Genesis 22:18).

- By faith, **Isaac** blessed his twin sons Jacob and Esau. He told them what God had planned for them (Hebrews 11:20). God later changed the name of Jacob to Israel (Genesis 35:9-10). Isaac had faith that God would fulfil every promise He had made to his father Abraham. He believed the promise would be fulfilled through the children of Jacob (Israel). This promise of God brought blessing to Jewish people and also to non-Jewish people.
- By faith, **Jacob** (Israel) blessed all his twelve sons because He believed the promise of God for them. He also blessed his two grandsons, the sons of Joseph, when he was dying (Hebrews 11:21). Jacob saw beyond the time that his family lived in Egypt, to a land where God would bless them all. He was old, but trusted in the promise of God for a special nation and land in Canaan for the people of Israel (Genesis 48). This was the same promise made to Abraham and Isaac.
- By faith, **Joseph** spoke about the escape of the people of Israel from Egypt. He even gave instructions where to place his bones in the promised land of Canaan (11:22; Genesis 50:24-25).
- By faith, **Jochebed** hid her baby Moses from the king's men in Egypt (11:23). After three months, she put him in a basket and floated it on the River Nile. She did this in faith, trusting God would protect him and the people of Israel (Exodus 2:1-10).
- By faith, **Moses** refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Hebrews 11:24). By faith, he chose to suffer with the people of Israel rather than live a rich but sinful life (11:25-26). By faith, Moses left Egypt, trusting in the invisible God (11:27). By faith, Moses returned and kept the first Passover. By faith, he told the people of Israel to sprinkle the blood of a lamb above their doorways. By faith he believed that they would not be destroyed by God's angel of death (11:28). By faith, he believed that God would save the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (11:29; Exodus 12:21-28).
- By faith, the **Israelites** escaped from Egypt across the Red Sea (11:29; Exodus 14:26-31). By faith, their children 40 years later became the nation of Israel in the Promised Land of Canaan.
- By faith, **Joshua** and the people of Israel believed that the Promised Land of Canaan was for them to occupy. By faith, Joshua believed God

What is faith? Faith is being sure of what we hope for, but cannot see (Hebrews 11:1). It is not easy to believe in things we cannot see or feel. True faith reaches out to God. True faith believes He exists. And true faith rewards those who search for Him. The faith that God wants is that we trust Him for our life and for our future – eternally.

So it is by faith that we believe God created the universe from things that cannot be seen (11:3). This is the foundation of our faith. The universe has an amazing Design and Creator (Romans 1:20). We must have faith to believe what God says in the Bible is true. There is no evidence here for other ideas about how the world or mankind were created.

By faith, we please God through believing He exists. By faith we can then come close to Him. By faith we hear and believe the Good News of salvation in Jesus. By faith we can then choose to believe in Jesus. "Without faith it is not possible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). By faith we receive His salvation and the hope of eternal life with our Lord God Almighty.

THE GREAT MEN AND WOMEN WHO LIVED BY FAITH

The writer of Hebrews then tells us about some of the believers in God from the Old Testament. These men and women lived by faith and died in hope. By faith, these people believed the things God promised.

- By faith, **Abel** offered God a better sacrifice than Cain (11:4). Abel sacrificed a perfect and innocent animal and brought what God asked for. But Cain disobeyed God. He rejected this chosen plan of God to save mankind from sin. He rejected the sacrifice of innocent blood (Genesis 4:5).
- By faith, **Enoch** pleased God and was taken up to Heaven without dying (Heb. 11:5). No-one can please God without faith. Enoch lived a life of faith. He received the reward of God of eternal life before the time of Christ (Genesis 5:24).
- By faith, **Noah** built an ark to save his family (Hebrews 11:7). Noah believed God's words of warning and obeyed His command. Noah's ark took him and his sons many years to build. God used the faith of Noah to save creatures and mankind from total destruction. After the flood, by faith, Noah sacrificed the blood of animals and birds in a burnt offering to God. This was pleasing to God at that time (Genesis 8:21).
- By faith, **Abraham** obeyed God. He left his comfortable city life and lived by faith. He trusted in God by living in tents in the land of Canaan. This was the land God chose for the future family of Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-10). He believed God could give him and his wife a child in their old age (11:11-12). By faith, Abraham was willing to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. It was the custom of the surrounding tribes at that time to sacrifice their first-born child to the gods. But the faith of

hidden from Him. His eyes see everything. He will hold us responsible for everything we do" (4:13).

The writer of Hebrews then reminds his readers that Jesus is our Great High Priest. He is the Son of God and is now in Heaven. "So let us hold firmly to what we say we believe" (4:14).

The Hebrew believers who read these words faced many trials. They suffered much. The writer told them that they must not grow weary or weak in faith. Nor must their suffering hinder their service for God. They now had a Great High Priest, Jesus, who also suffered for them. He understood their suffering and would help them.

Jesus was tested and tempted but He never sinned. He knows, however, what it feels like to be tempted when we are weak or hurting (4:15; Matthew 26:39).

These Hebrew believers needed help. The writer pointed them to the grace of God in Christ. Through Jesus, we are all able to come to the LORD God Almighty. "So let us come boldly to the throne of grace. Then we will receive mercy. We will find grace to help us when we need it." (4:16) God asks us to come to Him with confidence. He shows us His loving and saving grace. His mercy helps us in times of need, "for all sin and fall short of God's glory." (Romans 3:23)

Jesus is now seated at God's right hand to intercede for us. He has experienced persecution and suffering on Earth. He knows our needs and our temptations. He died for us. So come boldly to God in prayer through Christ our Saviour. Come to Him as a believer, not as a beggar. Then you will receive the mercy of God. "For by grace you have been saved, through faith." (Ephesians 2:8) Then you will be free to enjoy His 'Sabbath rest' through Christ.

Talk about this:

1. What promise did God make for all the people of God (4:1, 9)?
2. What hindered this promise long ago (4:2)?
3. What must we do to live in the promised rest of God today (4:6-7)?
4. How can we be at rest while working hard for the Kingdom of God (4:10-11)?
5. Why does the writer value the Word of God (4:12)? What does he fear (4:13)?
6. How can all believers enter into the presence of God (4:14-16)?

Think about this: What does the promised rest of God mean to you? Do you truly believe and value the Good News from God (4:2)? Do you anger God and hinder the promised rest in your life (4:3)?

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 5

THE WORK OF THE HIGH PRIEST OF ISRAEL

In the past, every high priest offered worship gifts and blood sacrifices for sin (5:1). He acted for everyone in all things to do with God. Under the Law of Moses, the high priest entered the holy presence of God in the tabernacle once a year. There, he offered sacrifices for the sins of the people. God accepted the blood of innocent animals as payment for the sins of the nation.

In this way, high priests helped believers to get right with God. The high priest gently helped those who strayed away from God by mistake (5:2). The high priest was not perfect. He, too, was weak through sin. He, too, made mistakes. This is why the high priest of Israel had to offer sacrifices for his own sins (5:3).

No one took the honour of high priest himself. He was chosen and appointed by God (5:4).

THE FINAL WORK OF JESUS, OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

At the right time God chose His own Son as our Great High Priest. Jesus did not take the glory of becoming a high priest for Himself (5:5). He is our perfect High Priest without sin. He is our Great High Priest because He is the Son of God. The writer of Hebrews quoted from the Old Testament, "You are My Son … I am your Father." (Psalm 2:7) So like Melchizedek, Jesus would live as a priest forever but also plead and pray (intercede) for us in Heaven (Hebrews 5:6; 7:25).

The high priest offered up sacrifices for the sins of himself and the people. But Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to pay for our sins. He suffered with "loud cries and tears". (Hebrews 5:7) He prayed for strength to do the will of His Father (Luke 22:42-44). God heard Jesus (Hebrews 5:7) but it was necessary for Him to suffer and die for our sins.

By suffering, Jesus demonstrated what it truly means to obey His Father God (Hebrews 5:8). We, too, can learn through suffering and when obeying His call.

Jesus obeyed God and died for the sins of everyone in the world. When this was finished, God raised Him up from death on the third day (Acts 10:40). God raised Him from so death that all who believe in Him will also have everlasting life (John 3:16). Through Jesus alone comes eternal salvation. He saves all who confess Him as Lord (Hebrews 10:9). He is accepted in Heaven as the last high priest. He is the Great High Priest for Jewish and non-Jewish believers. Today, He still performs the work of a high priest and does this seated at God's right hand. He pleads for us (7:25; 1 John 2:1). He is Christ our Messiah and Saviour. The Jewish believers understood this was "just like Melchizedek" who lived at the time of Abraham (5:10).

property taken from them. They accepted these things with joy. How? They knew God had promised them much more in the future (10:33-34).

You may have suffered persecution for your faith. But do not give up! "So do not throw away your bold faith" (10:35). Keep faithful in order to do the will of God (10:36). God will reward you (Romans 8:28).

The writer of Hebrews reminds his readers of the words of the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk. He urged the people not to fear. He told them to live by faith (Hebrews 10:38; Habakkuk 2:3). Why should I fear?

We too must not be among those who go back to our old ways. "We are people who believe and are saved" (Hebrews 10:39). We are among those who have a great hope. We are like the great faithful men and women of God who are described in the next chapter of the book of Hebrews. They were neither weak in faith nor disobedient towards God.

Today, many people think they can disobey God and nothing bad will happen to them. Do not be fooled. Yes, God's grace and mercy is freely given through Jesus if we obey. But the Day of Judgment will certainly come for believers and non-believers (10:30).

Talk about this:

1. Why was it right for Jewish believers to stop animal sacrifices (10:1-3)?
2. What is the one sacrifice that pleases God (10:9-10)?
3. How are true believers made perfect in the sight of God (10:14)?
4. What does it mean to hold on to our faith (10:23)?
5. What should we do to help each other to stay true to God (10:24-25)?

Think about this: What happens to our own faith when we help others to grow in their faith? How can I please God by serving others? Why should we trust only God? Thank God that His Spirit establishes His word in our hearts and minds but also removes from His mind the sins of our past! We are being made holy through Christ. May we too forgive and forget, showing acts of kindness and encouragement.

Bible Reading: Hebrews Chapter 11

FAITH AND HOPE IN THINGS WE CANNOT SEE

Chapter 11 of Hebrews reminds us of people of great faith. The writer gives us a list of faithful Old Testament men and women. They looked forward to a reward they could not actually see. All these people waited for God to fulfil His promises to them. Their faith looked forward in hope.

When He lived on planet Earth, Jesus spoke of that great day when He will come again and all the promises of God will be fulfilled. He asked, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find people on Earth who have faith?" (Luke 18:8).

- Grow together in reading and understanding the Word of God (both Old and New Testaments).
- Spend time with others in prayer.
- Meet together to worship God.
- Share the bread and the wine together to remember Christ's sacrifice.
- Serve God together, seeking Him for the work He has for each believer to do.

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Meeting together in worship and sharing communion

Note that God does not do any of these things for us. Christians meet together in large or small groups all over the world. It does not matter how large or small your group is. You should encourage and increase the faith of others. In this way, you will honour God and receive His blessing for yourself. This will help to fulfil His purpose for you in life.

A WARNING NOT TO LOSE FAITH

Walk by faith every day. Pray believing that God hears and answers prayer. Trust the Holy Spirit to tell you of any sin that stops you from coming closer to God.

What if we deliberately keep sinning even when we know the truth (10:26)? Then we fail to hate the sin in our lives. Sin always harms us in some way and often it harms others. Sin always separates us from God. If you try not to sin but fail, try again, and again. God understands you and provides His Spirit to guide and strengthen you.

If we disobey God, we refuse His offer to forgive our sins through Jesus. "All we can do is to wait in fear for God to judge" (10:27).

Those who rejected the Law of Moses died through the testimony of two or three witnesses (10:28). Think how much more terrible the punishment will be for those who reject the Son of God or offend the Holy Spirit (10:29). "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31).

Instead, remember the time when you received the truth and light of God (10:32). It was this truth that set you free (John 8:32). The writer reminds his readers that they stood firm in their faith in times of trouble. Some were laughed at. Some were persecuted. Some were put in prison. Some had their

A WARNING TO GROW UP

The writer then suddenly stops to give a warning to all his readers and listeners. He says that there are many more things to tell them but they are slow to understand (5:11). Christians often need help and encouragement to understand the words from God. Those who do not grow in understanding go backwards in their faith.

The writer found it difficult at times to teach the Hebrew believers. We can sense the love and sadness in the heart of the writer. He says that they are slow to learn. "By now you should be teachers. But in fact, you need someone to teach you all over again. You still need the simple truths of God's word. You still need milk, not solid food" (5:12). This is why the believers are warned to be careful not to fall away from their faith.

Paul wrote similar words to the church in Corinth. He said, "You are not growing like Christ wants you to. You are still like babies. The words I spoke to you were like milk, not like solid food. You were not ready for solid food. And you still are not ready for it" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

We learn simple but important truths at the time we are saved. We must, however, grow in faith and knowledge of God. Believers must feed their minds with the truth from God. The writer of Hebrews says, "Anyone who lives on milk is still a baby" (Hebrews 5:13).

They could not stay as spiritual babies. These Jewish believers in Jesus had not grown up. They were not strong in their faith. Some did not want to learn about living the right way. They were asked to agree to eat 'solid food' in the same way as those who are grown up (5:14).

What is solid food for Christians?

The Holy Spirit encourages and enables:

- Faith in God and in Jesus as our Christ (Messiah) and Saviour.
- Personal repentance of sin and old habits or traditions.
- Public baptism and testimony of our faith.
- Seeking spiritual gifts.
- Daily discipline in holiness.
- Prayer and Bible reading.
- Belief in our salvation through the blood of Jesus and our everlasting life.
- Helping others to repent and to grow in faith.
- Sharing the love of Christ through patience and suffering.
- Learning the difference between good and evil.

These Hebrew believers were like infants who did not know the difference between right and wrong. They did not understand the teachings on the righteousness of God. They needed to grow up. But some behaved like people who did not want to learn more. They were content with their understanding. Some were also lazy and some found other 'interesting things' to do.

DISCIPLINE IN READING, PRAYING AND SERVING

The Christians at that time who fed only on milk did not discipline themselves to study and apply the words of God in their Old Testament writings. Nor did they study the writings of Paul and other New Testament apostles who had met Jesus personally. If we are not eager to please God, we will not grow in knowledge and faith. Jeremiah the prophet said these words from God. "Call out to Me… Pray to Me. And I will listen to you. When you look for Me with all your heart, you will find Me" (Jeremiah 29:12-13).

God cannot help us to grow up without us doing our part. We need training to tell the difference between good and evil. And we need to ask for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to understand the important teachings of Jesus based on the word of God. Every day we need to pray and to study the truth from God in the whole of the Bible. We need also to gain the experience of serving and helping others in love to know more of the truth from God and His righteousness.

Talk about this:

1. Why did Israel need a high priest before the time of Jesus (5:1-2)? Why did Jesus become both a priest and a sacrifice?
2. What did Jesus offer up to God? Why (5:8-9)?
3. Why did the writer of Hebrews tell his readers that they were spiritual babies (5:12-13)?
4. What must we do to train ourselves to become mature Christians (5:14)?

Think about this: How can our sufferings be useful to God (5:8)? Are we difficult to learn at times (5:11-12)? How can we grow in faith (5:14)?

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 6

DO NOT NEGLECT THE TEACHINGS OF GOD

The writer of Hebrews invites all believers to learn more teachings of the Christian faith. He says, "Let us grow up as believers" (6:1).

The writer then describes some of the basic teachings about Jesus. These wonderful teachings changed lives. "They taught us that we need to turn away from doing things that lead to death" (6:1-2):

shut them out. When Jesus died, however, that curtain was torn open from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). His death destroyed this barrier that separated people from the presence of God. It opened the way for all believers to meet God and know Him personally and to see His glory.

Now, because Jesus is our perfect Great High Priest, all believers can come freely into the presence of God. We can come into the presence of God without fear. "So let us come near to God with an honest and true heart. Let us come near with a faith that is sure and strong" free from sin and guilt (Hebrews 10:22).

God has made us clean and holy by the blood of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we can have fellowship with Him. This was the plan of God from the beginning. It is a plan of love, grace and mercy.

How can we be so bold? It is not because we are good enough. It is not because we have done the best we can to give according to the Old Testament covenant. We are sinful and unable to save ourselves. But we come boldly into the presence of God by the blood of Jesus that takes away our sin. We are washed clean from both sin and guilt (10:22). We then receive the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Believe it!

The purpose of God is for us to be holy (Ephesians 1:4). This happens through Jesus alone. There is no other way to come close to God as holy people who are set free from sin through the blood of the Lamb (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:8).

A WARNING TO GROW IN FAITH

The writer of Hebrews then warns us to "hold firmly to the hope we claim to have" (10:23). We can trust in the promise of God for salvation through Jesus. "God, the One who promised, is faithful" (10:23). However, if we do not come close to God often, we will begin to lose our faith in God. Soon we might stop serving the Lord, or even stop meeting together with other believers.

The writer therefore encourages us to serve others (10:24-25). Think about this. To grow in faith in God, Christians need to encourage and support other believers in their faith. This means that we ourselves grow in faith as we help others to grow in faith. Therefore:

- Care for others with godly love.
- Encourage others to do good deeds.
- Do not give up meeting together.
- Encourage others with words of hope.
- Act in faith more and more to fulfil the promises of God.
- Live waiting for the return of Jesus.

This also means that we should:

His Heavenly Father to do what God wanted (John 6:38, 15:10; Hebrews 10:9-10).

WE ARE MADE HOLY THROUGH JESUS

When we sin, we do not deserve the love and mercy of God. When we confess and repent our sins, He is faithful and gives us His free forgiveness and salvation. We call this the grace of God.

God set aside the old sacrifices and established a work of grace through the blood of Jesus.

God will never again accept sacrifices for sin. He accepts only the sacrifice of His Son. We can therefore come to God through Jesus (John 14:6). We are made holy before God because Jesus sacrificed His own body for our sins. When we believe and repent, we become holy through this salvation plan of God (Hebrews 10:10). And we can now receive this forgiveness at any time anywhere in the world. We do not need to visit special religious buildings to get right with God.

Jesus now sits at the right hand of God (10:12). There, "He waits for them to be put under His control" (1:13; 10:13).

Meanwhile, the sacrifice of Jesus makes all believers holy and righteous. His sacrifice completes the purpose of God for us forever. The sacrifice of Jesus begins a work of holiness in the lives of those who are called and saved (10:14).

The apostle Paul said God chose us and called us to be holy and free from sin (2 Corinthians 6:17). This was because of the love of God for us (Ephesians 1:4).

WE ARE MADE HOLY TO COME CLOSE TO GOD

The writer of Hebrews quotes again from the Old Testament prophet (Hebrews 10:15-17; Jeremiah 31:33-34):

- God will make a new covenant with His people.
- The laws of God will be written on their hearts and in their minds.
- God will not remember their sins any more.

The Holy Spirit confirms these things (Hebrews 10:15). For those who are forgiven through Christ, there is now no need of any offerings for sin (10:18).

Because of this great work of God in Christ for us, we have confidence in our salvation. We can now enter boldly into the presence of God by the blood of Jesus (10:19). This way to God is now open to all, Jews and non-Jews, who accept Jesus as their Saviour.

This was a shock to many Jewish believers. They knew that no-one was allowed into the holiest place in the Temple apart from the high priest of Israel. Before Jesus died, no-one else could enter the holiest place. The big curtain

1. ***Repentance and faith*** in God through accepting Jesus for our salvation from sin.
2. A new beginning in life through ***baptism*** by water and by the Spirit.
3. The promised ***gifts of the Holy Spirit*** passed on to believers through the laying on of hands.
4. The promise of ***eternal life*** through the resurrection of Jesus and our own new birth.

Note that the writer does not go on to teach about the spiritual gifts. Nor the importance of communion, that is sharing bread and wine together to remember Christ's sacrifice. Instead, the writer lists just the basic teachings and warns them not to fall away.

"If God allows, we will go beyond these teachings and grow up" (6:3). Many, however, who know these good things of God do not go on in the faith (6:4).

It would be a terrible thing for someone to reject or neglect their salvation. Apart from the mercy of God, it would not be possible to bring them to repent (6:4-5).

- These people saw the light of Jesus.
- They shared in Holy Spirit power.
- They received blessings from God and His word.
- They saw the powers promised for them in the future.

The writer warns them what will happen if they fall away from the faith. This warning of the judgment of God lasts for ever. If they keep refusing to turn from their sins, it is not possible to bring them back. They behave as if they "are nailing the Son of God to the cross all over again" (6:6).

These people had each read and understood the truth from God in the Old Testament. They heard about the teachings and miraculous powers of Jesus and His apostles. Some, however, were falling away from the faith. Other believers put their faith in the man-made religious systems and traditions. They did not trust in the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Many Bible verses remind us that God cares for those who continue to trust His plan for their salvation and eternal life (John 5:24). To continue to experience these blessings of God, we must not weaken our faith in Jesus who is our salvation. Therefore, if we continue in sin and do not r ever repent, we lose everything. But the writer wants to speak of "better things".

TWO DIFFERENT LIVES

First, the writer talks about two different lives: a healthy life and a sick life. He compares this to two different soils. Rain from God falls on good and bad soil. Good soil produces good crops. It is useful land and receives the blessings of God. Bad soil produces only weeds (6:7-8).

A healthy life receives the truth from God. It receives the truth and gives good fruit. A life that does not receive the truth is unfruitful. Too often, we allow the old life to get in the way of our new life in Jesus. Our salvation through Jesus should make our lives fruitful for God (Galatians 5:22-23).

The writer said, "We have to say these things. But we are sure of better things in your case" (Hebrews 6:9). "God is fair and He will not forget what you have done." This comes through the power of the Holy Spirit producing fruit within us. God will never forget the love you show to Him and to others. So do not give up loving Him and helping others (6:10). Be faithful and keep living in hope to the end (6:11). "We do not want you to slow down. Instead, be like those who have faith and are patient. They will receive what God promised" (6:12).

THE PROMISE OF GOD IS CERTAIN AND IS FOR ALL

When God made His promise to Abraham, He said, "I will certainly bless you and give you many children" (6:13-14; Genesis 22:17). His purpose was to bless the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (later called Israel). He then blessed the world through Jesus, the Son of God, who came as Israel's Messiah.

The promise of God to send a Saviour is written many times in the Old Testament. God kept His promise when Jesus was born in Israel over 2000 years ago. Jesus came to be the Saviour of all those who believe in Him.

The faithful promises of God are a good reason not to give up. Be patient and prepare to receive fully the promises of God for yourself. We have a good reason not to give up! Leave the old life behind and take hold of the hope offered to us in the promises of God. All the promises of God are fulfilled through Jesus. "He put His Spirit in our hearts and marked us as His own" (2 Corinthians 1:22).

Our hope in God is certain (Hebrews 6:19). Jesus opened for us a way to be with our Lord God Almighty (6:20). He became priest and king just like Melchizedek who lived at the time of Abraham.

Our hope now is in Jesus Christ, God's promised Messiah and Saviour. He is our Great High Priest forever. As the Lamb of God, He has gone ahead of us into Heaven. He offered His own blood on our behalf. The sacrifice of blood began at the time of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-4). Noah continued to offer blood sacrifices to God after the Great Flood (9:20). The sacrifice of Jesus was the final sacrifice of blood for our salvation. He is the sacrificial Lamb of God. We can join with all other true believers who say, "We are saved through the blood of the Lamb."

Every tribe and family and language will be blessed by this Good News!

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 10

JESUS, THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

In the first half of this chapter, the writer explains again the purpose of the sacrifice of Jesus:

1. His sacrifice was the perfect sacrifice for God to forgive our sins.
2. His sacrifice provided everything necessary for our salvation.
3. His punishment for our sins brings an opportunity for forgiveness to believers for all time.
4. His death was for us. He died in our place. He took the punishment that we deserve as the perfect Lamb of God.

The writer of Hebrews repeats this message to the Jewish believers. He wants their minds and their hearts to be changed. He wants them to know that the old animal sacrifices for sin have been replaced and renewed. The laws of Temple sacrifices were not perfect. Therefore, they could not make perfect the people who came to the Temple to worship God (10:1).

Gentiles, too, must leave behind the old life. We are all saved through the sacrifice of Jesus. In order to be saved, God does not ask us to do anything except believe, repent and receive His forgiveness through what His Son did for us. "Believe in the Lord Jesus. Then you and your family will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

The Old Testament Law was only a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 10:1). The blood sacrifices were not perfect and had to be repeated (10:2). The sacrifices were repeated year after year but could not take away the guilt of sin. It was impossible for the blood of bulls, lambs and goats to take away sins for all time (10:4). Only the blood of Jesus was able to do that.

The animal sacrifices pointed the way forward to the perfect sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross. The writer quotes words of prophesy from King David in Psalm 40:6-8. A thousand years before Jesus was born his words told us what the Messiah would say to His heavenly Father. "You did not want sacrifices and offerings. You were not pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings… God, I have come to do what You want" (Hebrews 10:5-7; Psalm 40:6-8).

Through these words, David prophesied that a future Messiah would come to totally fulfil God's plan of salvation. God required a perfect sacrifice for sin. There was no perfect man on Earth, because all people have the same sinful nature of Adam and Eve. God accepted the sacrifice of His own sinless Son for the salvation of all who believe in Him.

Jesus therefore came down from Heaven and was born without sin to the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:30-33). He lived a holy life as a man. He loved and obeyed

forgiven. Without a blood sacrifice, there is no covenant between God and mankind. This was His choice from the beginning.

The sacrifice of animal blood cost the high priest nothing. The sacrifice of Jesus cost Him everything. He did it for us. His life was not taken from Him, rather He gave Himself for us. He then entered Heaven to be there for us in the presence of God. He lives there now (9:24).

God sent Jesus to be born in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He lived as a human being and suffered and died as a human being to destroy the power of sin by sacrificing Himself. There was no other way to forgive the sinner and to remove the sin. Jesus did this only once. Sacrifices made under the Old Testament Law were not perfect and had to be repeated every year (9:25). But the work of Jesus on the cross is complete for all who believe. It is for all time (John 19:28-30).

Yes, Jesus came only once to destroy sin for all time (Hebrews 9:26). He came first to the Jews, the people of Israel. Then through His disciples to the rest of the world (Acts 1:8, Mark 16:15-16). Jesus now takes away the sins of "many people" (Hebrews 9:28). We remember this each time we take the bread and wine at communion. We do this to remember His persecution and crucifixion until He returns. We also remember this led to Holy Spirit power and access to God Himself.

Jesus will come again a second time. "At that time, He will not suffer for sin. Instead, He will come to bring full salvation to those who are waiting for Him" (9:28). This is for Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female, young and old. He is our King.

Satan tries very much to ruin the lives of people. The Holy Spirit, however, shines the light of the truth from God into the lives of believers today. This opens up an opportunity for freedom from sin plus eternal salvation in Jesus, God's Messiah and Christ.

Talk about this:

1. What was the most important thing the high priest of Israel did (9:7)?
2. What can make us clean and holy and free from the guilt of sin (9:14; 1 John 1:9)?
3. Why will Jesus come a second time (9:28)?

Think about this: Ask for wisdom to understand the costly sacrifice of Christ our Saviour in human form for our eternal salvation. Jesus took the punishment that we deserve upon Himself. He suffered and died for our sins to be forgiven, sins known and unknown. He also removes the guilt of sinning. Thank God that through the ministry of Jesus our Christ, the sins of whole nations can be exposed and forgiven! "The main blessing of Christ's salvation is to prepare us for that close fellowship with God for which we were created." (Andrew Murray)

Talk about this:

1. Describe in your own words the basic Christian teachings given by the writer of Hebrews (6:1-2).
2. How can we warn those whose lives have not changed and have grown tired and whose faith has not grown (6:7-8)?
3. Describe the fruitful life of a Christian who grows in faith through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (6:9-11).
4. How did God keep His promise made to Abraham for Israel and for the world?

Think about this: Have you fully experienced and understood the basic teachings to become a follower of Christ (6:1-2)? Does your church encourage laying on of hands to invite the power of the Holy Spirit into the lives of baptised believers?

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 7

MELCHIZEDEK, THE ANCIENT PRIEST OF GOD

The writer of Hebrews talks again about the king and high priest Melchizedek. The Old Testament tells us that Melchizedek served the LORD God Almighty, who created the world. We know very little about him. He lived in Salem, which is now Jerusalem (Genesis 14:18-20). He met Abraham and blessed him (7:1). Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything he gained from wars with his enemies (7:2, 6).

The name Melchizedek means king of righteousness. He was king of Salem which means peace (7.2). Melchizedek was both priest and king. The Jews believed that their coming Messiah would also be priest and king. Melchizedek is a mysterious person who has no beginning and no end. Many Jews believe that he remains a priest for ever, just like the Son of God (7:3).

Melchizedek gave Abraham the blessing of God. He was therefore more important than Abraham (7:6-7). No one was greater than Melchizedek and Abraham until Jesus came.

The high priest Melchizedek lived before Aaron and the priests of Levi (7:10). The writer of Hebrews wanted to make it clear to his Jewish readers that Melchizedek was not a high priest from the tribe of Levi and Aaron. He was greater than them. Nor is Jesus from the tribe of Levi and Aaron (7:14). He was born to Mary by the Holy Spirit. Mary later married Joseph from the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:2, 16; Luke 3:23, 30).

JESUS IS NOW GREAT HIGH PRIEST OF GOD'S COVENANT

Jesus is a priest who lives forever. Melchizedek also lives forever since he went directly to Heaven and never died (Hebrews 7:3, 17). The rules, however, about the priests and their animal sacrifices have come to an end (7:18). This is because of the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. There is now a better way to God through the final sacrifice of Jesus our Great High Priest (7:19). God promised a better covenant for our salvation through Him (7:22).

In the Old Testament, we read how God made a covenant or agreement with His people. In addition to the Ten Commandments and His other laws given to Moses, God promised salvation and forgiveness for sins through blood sacrifices, if the people obeyed Him. The blood of an innocent animal was sacrificed to remind the people of the punishment that they deserved.

In the New Testament, we read how Jesus took the punishment that we deserve. God agreed to accept the sacrifice of His Son as the price for our sins. This agreement requires sinners to repent and to obey God and to believe that they are forgiven through the blood of Jesus. God had promised a better covenant for our salvation through Israel's promised Messiah. That was through the sacrifice of the blood of the Lamb of God. We are all reminded of His sacrifice for us when we share communion together.

Jesus gave many examples of life under this new and improved covenant. These are written down in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. "Jesus makes the promise of a better covenant certain" (Hebrews 7:22).

Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to destroy what is written in the [Old Testament] Law or in the Prophets… I have come to give full meaning to what is written" (Matthew 5:17).

The old covenant provided a relationship between God and His people based on obedience to the Ten Commandments and other laws. The people, however, could only approach God through the priests during their animal sacrifices. Under this renewed covenant of God in Christ, we are made holy because of His sacrificed blood for our sins. True believers can now approach God at any time through Christ the Messiah (Ephesians 2:18). His blood was the final sacrifice that God required for sin. Jesus is now our Great High Priest and our way to God (1 Timothy 2:5). He takes the place of the priests and the sacrifices they offered at the Temple altar though His Spirit within us.

JESUS PAID THE PRICE FOR VICTORY OVER SIN

God gave these laws until the time of Christ's ministry on Earth (9:10). Today, God forgives all who obey Him and who confess, repent and accept Jesus as Saviour. This is only possible through the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. There is forgiveness in the blood of the innocent Lamb of God.

The writer then explains again to the Hebrews the purpose of God in Jesus. Under the new covenant, Temple worship and sacrifices are no longer necessary to forgive sin. The death of Jesus replaces the animal sacrifices on the altar. His death replaces the sprinkling of animal blood on the Ark of the Covenant. And His resurrection and ascension complete God's purpose and provision of His Holy Spirit power on Earth and His intercession in Heaven for all believers.

Many think of Jesus as a great teacher and prophet. Others say He was just an example for us to follow. He was all of these and much more. He is the promised Messiah or Christ. He came to destroy the power of sin by sacrificing His own blood. This was the perfect plan of God for all time for the salvation of all who believe. God raised Him from death and Jesus ascended to Heaven to petition for those who believe.

When Jesus sacrificed His life, the old system of priests came to an end. "Jesus came as the Great High Priest of the good things that are now here" (9:11). "He did it once, and for all time. His own precious blood paid the price to set us free from the power of sin for ever" (9:12, 26).

After centuries of animal sacrifices from the time of Noah (Genesis 8:20), God sent down from Heaven His perfect sacrifice for sin. He offered His own Son as the sacrifice (9:12). God renewed His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David, but Jesus was perfect, without fault. Therefore, by faith in Him, our lives are made clean from sins that deserve death. His blood also washes away the feelings of guilt. We are set free from the power of sin and guilt that lead to death. "Now we can serve the living God" (9:14).

JESUS SETS US FREE FROM SIN

Jesus is now the mediator of a transformed covenant (9:15). He talks to His Father about us. He brings us to God. God looks at us and accepts that we are holy. We are forgiven because of the sacrifice of His precious Son. Jesus said, just before He gave His life for us on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus finished God's plan of salvation for all who repent and believe. We have been set free from sin to receive His forgiveness, salvation and eternal life.

From the beginning of the world, God was pleased with the sacrifice of innocent animal blood (Genesis 4:4; 8:20). This was acceptable by God for sins to be forgiven (Hebrews 9:22). Without a blood sacrifice, no-one can be

prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled when Jesus sent His Holy Spirit. He tells us that the way to God in Heaven is now open for us. Jesus brings believers to God where they belong as His children. Alleluia!

Remember that the sacrifice of Jesus has been made once and for all times. We accept it by faith. His sacrifice is at work for ever. It goes on working for us throughout our lives. Our salvation remains true through the mercy of God and the sacrifice of Jesus. We are given a new life freed from the power of sin when we follow Jesus and obey God.

"The first covenant is old and out of date" (Hebrews 8:13). Jesus has given us a new understanding and fulfilment of the wonderful Law and the Prophets. At His Last Supper, Jesus said, "This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many… This cup is the new covenant in My blood" (Mark 14:24).

This offer of direct access to God Almighty is for all people who believe in Jesus as Saviour and accept forgiveness of eternal salvation. Isaiah said that "God will make a covenant with you that will last for ever" (Isaiah 55:3).

Talk about this:

1. Every priest offered to God both gifts and sacrifices. What did Jesus offer? (8:3, 6)
2. Where is Jesus ministering for us now? What does He do there?
3. How is the new covenant better than the old covenant (8:9-10)?
4. What did Jeremiah prophecy about the new covenant (8:11-12)?

Think about this: Close your eyes and think about Jesus at the right-hand side of His Father in Heaven talking to Him about the prayers we ask in faith. Thank Him that through His sacrifice, we now live under a renewed and wholly better covenant relationship with God our Father.

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 9

WORSHIP IN THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

This chapter reminds us how the people of God worshipped in the Tabernacle before God sent His Son as a sacrifice for sin (9:1-10). The writer describes the work of the priests and the high priest (9:6-7). Blood sacrifices and offerings were required under the Old Testament Law for sins known and unknown (9:7).

The Old Testament animal sacrifices, however, did not remove the guilt of the sinner. They did not enable sinners to live a holy life (9:9). They sacrificed the blood of innocent animals again and again to be forgiven. There were also rules for food and drink. Also, special cleansing instructions (9:10).

The Old Testament Laws given to Moses

God's Laws given to Moses are upheld and fulfilled in Jesus. They are still important today, especially the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments *and their application by Jesus in the New Testament.*

Commandment One: WORSHIP GOD ONLY

"I am Yahweh, the Lord your God. Worship no other god." (Exodus 20:2, 3) See Matthew 4:10.

Commandment Two: NO IDOLS

"Do not make statues [images, KJV] … or worship them." (Exodus 20:4-6) See Luke 16:13.

Commandment Three: RESPECT GOD'S NAME

"Do not use the name of the LORD your God in wrong ways." (Exodus 20:7) See Matthew 5:34.

Commandment Four: REMEMBER GOD'S DAY

"Remember the Sabbath day. Keep it holy. Do all your work in six days." (Exodus 20:8-11) See Mark 2:27-28.

Commandment Five: RESPECT YOUR PARENTS

"Respect [honour, KJV] your father and mother, so you will live a long time." (Exodus 20:12) See Matthew 10:37.

Commandment Six: DO NOT KILL ANYONE

"Do not murder." (Exodus 20:13) See Matthew 5:21, 22.

Commandment Seven: NO SEXUAL ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE MARRIAGE

"Do not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14) See Matthew 5:28.

Commandment Eight: DO NOT STEAL

"Do not steal." (Exodus 20:15) See Matthew 19:21.

Commandment Nine: DO NOT LIE

"Do not accuse anyone falsely." (Exodus 20:16) See Matthew 12:36.

Commandment Ten: DO NOT ENVY

"Do not wish for anything that belongs to your neighbour." (Exodus 20:17) See Luke 12:15.

Other laws given to Moses

God gave 613 commandments to Moses, called the Torah, and told him to write these down. God repeated some of them to Ezekiel 900 year later which was 600 years before the ministry of Jesus Christ on Earth (Ezekiel 18). These God-given laws remain today to guide us and judge us. But they cannot be fulfilled without the power of the risen Christ within us.

The priests who descended from Levi and Aaron died (Hebrews 7:23). But death cannot destroy the priesthood of Jesus. God raised Him from death on the third day. This new order of Great High Priest is the planned work of God.

Jesus will always be there for all sinners who repent and seek God (7:24). "People now come to God through Him. He is able to save them completely and for all time. Jesus lives forever. He prays for them" (7:25) and pleads for them to God His Father (Romans 8:34). This wonderful news means that we can ask in faith for the salvation of friends and relatives near and far away. Jesus hears us and talks to His Father about our prayers. He does this for us whenever we pray.

The writer of Hebrews says these things to remind the Jewish believers that now there is no need for high priests on Earth. Jesus meets all our needs because He is holy, pure and without sin (7:26). "Jesus gave one sacrifice for the sins of the people. He gave His life once and for all time. He did it by offering Himself" the perfect sacrifice (7:27). The Son of God was the perfect sacrifice for sin and remains perfect for ever (7:28).

Therefore, through Jesus Christ alone, we are saved and brought back to God. We do not need priests or special saints to seek and pray to God for us. Jesus died to fulfil all the many requirements of the Law. He died to set us all free from our sinful past and our failure to live righteously. He died to set us free from old religious traditions. His salvation brings us personally to our Lord God Almighty. He sent the Holy Spirit promised by His Messiah to help us to be free from the power of sin and fulfil the requirements of the old covenant with God.

Talk about this:

1. How did Jesus fulfil the requirements of the Old Testament Law (7:18-22)?
2. How do believers come closer to God under the New Testament covenant (7:24-25, 27)?

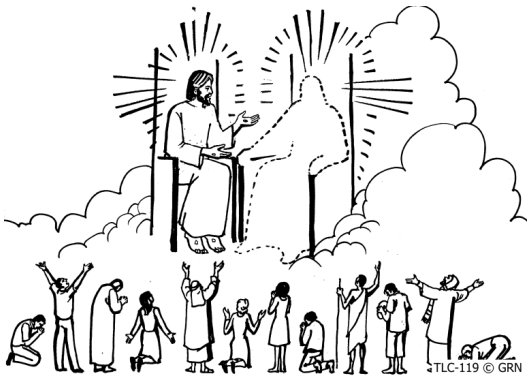
Think about this: Remember that access to our Father in Heaven is always possible through His Son who suffered the final blood sacrifice for our sins and now sits at God's right hand. Why was this teaching to Jewish believers so important? Why is it important for all believers today? Are there any religious traditions in your life that hinder a closer relationship with God?

Bible reading: Hebrews Chapter 8

THE NEW COVENANT IN JESUS

This chapter confirms why Jesus gives a better ministry than earthly priests. He is our Great High Priest and now sits at the right-hand side of the throne of God in Heaven (8:1). The right-hand side means that Jesus is in a special place of authority over God's people.

A priest on earth is only a copy or shadow of the perfect ministry of Jesus in Heaven (8:5). Jesus has been given a greater work to do there by His Father as the mediator of God's new and improved covenant with His people (8:6). He is our mediator in Heaven between God and mankind. He enables us to come close to His heavenly Father. Jesus hears our prayers and asks the Lord God Almighty to answer them.



Jesus intercedes for us at the throne of His Father in Heaven

Jesus totally fulfils the old covenant that God made with Moses. Jesus now serves the people of God from His position in Heaven. This was the plan of God from the beginning of time. God forgives us if we confess our sins and accepts Jesus as His perfect sacrifice for those sins.

The people of Israel often failed to keep the laws and commandments of God. They often repeated the animal sacrifices but were unable to achieve eternal salvation. Then God renewed His covenant and made it better than the old covenant. He promises forgiveness for all people everywhere who confess Jesus as Lord and put their faith in as God's Son and our Saviour. This promise is for all who believe He is the Son of God. They will also receive eternal salvation.

God promised it first to the people of Israel and Judah (8:8; Jeremiah 31:31). He promised, "I will put My laws in their minds. I will write My laws on their hearts. I will be their God. And they will be My people" (Hebrews 8:10; Jeremiah 31:33). However, this access to God is available to all people, everywhere, Jews and non-Jews. The Holy Spirit enables us to learn and to understand this eternal salvation plan of God promised in the Old Testament (Hebrews 8:10; 1 John 2:27).

The writer of Hebrews quotes more words of Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet of God (Hebrews 8:8-12; Jeremiah 31:31-34). He believed that the