

In These Last Days: The Message of Hebrews Jesus Opens the Way Through the Veil

Lesson #10 for March 5, 2022

Scriptures: Hebrews 9:24; 10:19-22; 12:18-21; Exodus 19:3-4; Leviticus 16:1-2; Colossians 3:1.

1. It is hard for us even to imagine the emotional highs and lows that the disciples and the other followers of Jesus went through between the time when they arrived in Jerusalem for that final Passover with Him and 47 days later as they walked with Jesus across the Mount of Olives and watched Him ascend as angels were saying He would return.
2. If it was you having spent years with Him, how would you feel if you knew that a close personal Friend was now sitting at the right hand of God in heaven?
3. Every time they prayed, did they visualize Jesus sitting at God's right hand? More than that, Jesus had made some spectacular promises to them.

John 14:13-14: ¹³And I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., John 14:13-14). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].[‡]

Jesus' ascension marks the moment that the new covenant, which provides the means through which we can approach God boldly through faith, has been inaugurated. It is our privilege now to approach God with confidence through Jesus and the merits of His righteousness.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath, February 26. [What does that mean?][‡]

4. What are "the merits of His righteousness"? Roman Catholics teach that people collect merits by doing good works. Jesus was the ultimate Example of that. So, they teach that He can share His merits with sinners to help pay the debts caused by their sins. How does that relate to the fact that Christ has defeated the Devil by answering his questions before the universe and disproving his misrepresentations about God? **This lesson focuses on the changes that have taken place following the ascension of Christ to heaven.**

Hebrews 9:24: For Christ did not go into a Holy Place made by human hands, which was a copy of the real one. He went into heaven itself, where he now appears on our behalf in the presence of God—*Good News Bible*.*

John 16:25-27: [Jesus said:] ²⁵ "I have used figures of speech to tell you these things. But the time will come when I will not use figures of speech, **but will speak to you plainly about the Father.** ²⁶When that day comes, you will ask him in my name; and **I do not say** [Notice that word **not** which so many ignore or leave out as they read this text because it does not fit their paradigm.] **that I will ask him on your behalf,** ²⁷**for the Father himself loves you.** He loves you because you love me and have believed that I

came from God.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡} [Did Jesus throw out the entire Old Testament sacrificial system when He spoke those words?][‡]

God instructed Israel that their males should go **three times every year up to Jerusalem** to “appear before the Lord” with an offering. **The appointed times were the feast of Passover (Unleavened Bread), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Booths (Exod. 23:14–17, Deut. 16:16).** Passover celebrated Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Pentecost celebrated the barley harvest, and by the time of the New Testament, it was associated with the giving of the law at Sinai. The Feast of Booths celebrated God’s care for Israel during their sojourn in the desert. **According to the New Testament, all the Old Testament feasts also have prophetic significance.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Sunday, February 27.^{†§}

5. It is interesting to notice how Jesus fulfilled many of the symbols from the ancient sanctuary system, each on the exact day when it was being celebrated in Jerusalem.

Jesus fulfilled the pilgrimage feasts’ prophetic significance with amazing accuracy. He **died** on the day for the preparation of the Passover at the ninth hour, the moment in which Passover lambs were sacrificed (*John 19:14, Matt. 27:45–50*). Jesus was **resurrected** on the third day and ascended to heaven to receive assurance that His sacrifice had been accepted (*John 20:17, 1 Cor. 15:20*), when the priest was to wave the sheaf of ripe barley as the firstfruits (*Lev. 23:10–12*). Then, He **ascended** 40 days later to sit at the right hand of God and inaugurate the new covenant on the Day of Pentecost (*Acts 1, Acts 2*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Sunday, February 27.^{†§}

6. When they were camping in the desert, it is easy to see why Israel would be expected to attend those special ceremonies three times a year. However, when they were scattered in Palestine from southern Judea to northern Galilee, it was difficult for all the males to go to Jerusalem three times a year. Under normal circumstances, the people from Galilee would travel down to the southern end of Lake Galilee, cross the Jordan River, travel south through Perea to an area across from Jericho, then cross the Jordan River again, and travel up the steep hill to Jerusalem in order to attend those ceremonies. Normally, that was about a one-week journey each way. That, of course, was in addition to the time they would spend in Jerusalem during the ceremonies themselves. Imagine making such a journey three times a year.

7. Consider the following about those trips for religious purposes to Jerusalem.

The purpose of pilgrimage in ancient Israel was to “**behold the face of God.**” (*Ps. 42:2, NRSV*). This meant **to experience God’s favor** (*Ps. 17:15*). Similarly, the Hebrew expression to “seek the face of God” meant to ask God for help (*2 Chron. 7:14, Ps. 27:8, Ps. 105:4*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Sunday, February 27.^{†§} [We must assume that away from Jerusalem, the ordinary people did not receive much in the way of careful instruction about how to serve God. However, Levites lived

in many of the villages to instruct people, especially the children. The visits to Jerusalem were supposed to bring them into His presence spiritually.][‡]

8. What would be an equivalent experience in our day?

Hebrews 6:19-20: ¹⁹We have this hope as an anchor for our lives. It is safe and sure, and goes through the curtain of the heavenly temple into the inner sanctuary. ²⁰On our behalf Jesus has gone in there before us, and has become a high priest for ever, [*sic*] in the priestly order of Melchizedek.—*Good News Bible*.^{*‡}

9. Does it give you assurance to know that Jesus Christ lived His life as He did on this earth and then died and rose from the dead and went to heaven where He is now continuing to answer Satan's accusations against us? Does the realization that Jesus is now in heaven alongside the Father and along with the Holy Spirit, defending us against the accusations of Satan give us assurance?

Romans 8:26,31-34: ²⁶In the same way **the Spirit also comes to help us**, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; **the Spirit himself pleads with God for us** in groans that words cannot express....

³¹In view of all this, what can we say? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²Certainly not God, who did not even keep back his own Son, but offered him for us all! He gave us his Son—will he not also freely give us all things? ³³Who will accuse God's chosen people? **God himself declares them not guilty!** ³⁴**Who, then, will condemn them? Not Christ Jesus, who died, or rather, who was raised to life and is at the right-hand side of God, pleading [along] with him for us!**—*Good News Bible*.^{*‡} [Does that mean that God the Father is pleading **to us** to accept His gift of salvation along with Jesus pleading **to us**?][‡]

Zechariah 3:1-5: ¹In another vision the LORD showed me the High Priest Joshua [This is the Joshua who was high priest for the people who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity and exile.] standing before the angel of the LORD. **And there beside Joshua stood Satan, ready to bring an accusation against him.** ²The angel of the LORD said to Satan, "May the LORD condemn you, Satan! May the LORD, who loves Jerusalem, condemn you. This man is like a stick snatched from the fire."

³Joshua was standing there, wearing filthy clothes. ⁴The angel said to his heavenly attendants, "Take away the filthy clothes this man is wearing." Then he said to Joshua, "I have taken away your sin and will give you new clothes to wear."

⁵He commanded the attendants to put a clean turban on Joshua's head. They did so, and then they put the new clothes on him while the angel of the LORD stood there.—*Good News Bible*.^{*‡} [Compare the experience of Job as recorded in Job 1&2. Could God praise you as He did Job?][‡]

Daniel 7:9-10,22: ⁹While I was looking, thrones were put in place. **One who had been living for ever** [*sic*] sat down on one of the thrones. His clothes were white as snow, and his hair was like pure wool. His throne, mounted on fiery wheels, was blazing with fire, ¹⁰and a stream of fire was pouring out from it.

[That would have been God Himself!] **There were many thousands of people [angels] there to serve him, and millions of people stood before him. The court began its session, and the books were opened....**

22Then the one who had been living for ever [sic] came and pronounced judgement in favour of the people of the Supreme God. The time had arrived for God's people to receive royal power.—Good News Bible.*†

10. It is hard for us even to imagine the experience of the children of Israel living through the plagues on Egypt, traveling through the Red Sea, arriving at Mount Sinai, and then having that epiphany at Mount Sinai. Did they think those miracles to save them from “Pharaoh” and preserve them in the desert were just normal? Notice what Paul said about that.

Hebrews 12:18-21: ¹⁸ You have not come, as the people of Israel came, to what you can feel, to Mount Sinai with its blazing fire, the darkness and the gloom, the storm, ¹⁹the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of a voice. When the people heard the voice, they begged not to hear another word, ²⁰because they could not bear the order which said, “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” ²¹The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling and afraid!”—*Good News Bible.**

11. God tried to establish in their minds two apparently conflicting realities. He warned them not to get too close to the mountain or they would be destroyed; however, at the same time, He wanted a personal relationship with them! How could God accomplish such a dichotomy?

Exodus 19:10-15: ¹⁰And the LORD said to him [Moses], “Go to the people and tell them to spend today and tomorrow purifying themselves for worship. They must wash their clothes ¹¹and be ready the day after tomorrow. On that day I will come down on Mount Sinai, where all the people can see me. ¹²Mark a boundary round the mountain that the people must not cross, and tell them not to go up the mountain or even get near it. If anyone sets foot on it, he is to be put to death; ¹³he must either be stoned or shot with arrows, without anyone touching him. This applies to both men and animals; they must be put to death. But when the trumpet is blown, then the people are to go up to the mountain.” [Is it possible that some of the children were curious?]

¹⁴ Then Moses came down the mountain and told the people to get ready for worship. So they washed their clothes, ¹⁵and Moses said to them, “Be ready by the day after tomorrow and don’t have sexual intercourse in the meantime.”—*Good News Bible.*†* [God wanted their full attention!][†]

12. However, there were some who were allowed to ascend partway up that mountain.

Exodus 24:9-11: ⁹ Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the leaders of Israel went up the mountain ¹⁰and **they saw the God of Israel. Beneath his feet was what looked like a pavement of sapphire, as blue as the sky.** ¹¹**God did not harm these leading men of Israel; they saw God, and then they ate and drank together.**—*Good News Bible.*†*

13. Notice how the children of Israel felt about that.

Deuteronomy 5:25-27: [Moses recounted what the people had said:] ²⁵ “**But why should we risk death again? That terrible fire [of God’s presence] will destroy us.** We are sure to die if we hear the LORD our God speak again. ²⁶Has any human being ever lived after hearing the living God speak from a fire? ²⁷Go back, Moses, and listen to everything that the LORD our God says. Then return and tell us what he said to you. We will listen and obey.”—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

Exodus 20:18-20: ¹⁸ When the people heard the thunder and the trumpet blast and saw the lightning and the smoking mountain, they trembled with fear and stood a long way off. ¹⁹**They said to Moses, “If you speak to us, we will listen; but we are afraid that if God speaks to us, we will die.”**

²⁰ Moses replied, “Don’t be afraid; God has only come to test you and make you keep on obeying him, so that you will not sin.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

God’s manifestation of His holiness at Mount Sinai was to teach the people to learn to “fear,” or respect, Him. The “fear of the LORD” leads to life, wisdom, and honor (*Deut. 4:10; compare with Ps. 111:10, Prov. 1:7, Prov. 9:10, Prov. 10:27*)—and also to the lesson that He is merciful and gracious (*Exod. 34:4–8*). Thus, while God wanted Israel to come to Him, the people became afraid and requested for Moses to be their intermediary. The description in Hebrews of the events at Sinai follows, primarily, Moses’ reminder to the people of their lack of faith and their apostasy with the golden calf, and how he was afraid of meeting God because of their sin (*Deut. 9:19*). The people’s reaction was not God’s plan for them; it was, instead, the result of their faithlessness.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, February 28.[§]

14. **Notice that this is the first time that a mediator is mentioned in the Bible; and it was the people who asked for a mediator, not God.**
15. Now that Jesus has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, how does He want to relate to us? We have already noted in previous lessons that **His primary reason for coming to this earth was to teach us the truth about the Father!**

The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and **God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary. He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God.** [Those were the words of Satan, the father of lies!] **Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth.** Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. **The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes....**

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of **the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right** through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before

men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, "I have manifested thy name." "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." **When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men.**—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* January 20, 1890, par. 6,9.^{†‡} [That is exactly what John said in John 17:3-4.][‡]

16. There were three curtains that served various functions in the ancient tabernacle in the wilderness. The first one was at the opening of the courtyard. The next one shielded the entrance to the holy place. The final one separated the holy place from the most holy place. These curtains were supposed to be for the protection of the people, and especially the priests. We know the story of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who went into the temple apparently under the influence of alcohol and may have actually tried to go into the most holy place. Notice this warning in Leviticus 16:1-2:

Leviticus 16:1-2: The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who were **killed when they offered unholy fire to the LORD.** ²He said, "Tell your brother Aaron that only at the proper time is he to go behind the curtain into the Most Holy Place, because that is where I appear in a cloud above the lid on the Covenant Box. If he disobeys, he will be killed."—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [It is deadly serious to disobey God!][‡]

17. Despite these facts—trying to protect the holiness of God and warning the people against violations,—God chose to place His tent-tabernacle in the center of Israel's encampment.

Israel camped in a strict order that created a hollow square in the middle, where the tabernacle was pitched. In addition, **the Levites** camped around the tabernacle in order to protect the sanctuary and its furniture from encroachment by strangers (*Num. 1:51, Num. 3:10*). They were, in fact, **a kind of human veil that protected the people of Israel:** " 'But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the people of Israel. And the Levites shall keep guard over the tabernacle of the testimony' " (*Num. 1:53, ESV*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, March 1.^{†§}

18. We know that Jesus came to this earth, veiled His divinity with humanity, and did His best to get close to the Jews and other people in His day.

John 1:14-18: ¹⁴ The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son.

¹⁵ John spoke about him. He cried out, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'He comes after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.' "

¹⁶ Out of the fullness of his grace he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another. ¹⁷God gave the Law through Moses, **but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.** ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. The only

Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known.—*Good News Bible*.*†

19. Once again, try to imagine what the universe must have thought **as God Himself came to live in the midst of a group of escaped slaves and called them His people.**

20. Now that Jesus has finished His ministry on this earth and ascended to heaven, He is inviting us to follow Him into the most holy place in the temple in heaven.

Hebrews 10:19-22: ¹⁹ We have, then, my brothers and sisters, complete freedom to go into the Most Holy Place by means of the death of Jesus. ²⁰He opened for us a new way, a living way, through the curtain—that is, through his own body. ²¹We have a great priest in charge of the house of God. ²²So let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, with hearts that have been purified from a guilty conscience and with bodies washed with clean water.—*Good News Bible*.*

21. What do you think that portion of Hebrews means?

22. **Remember what Jesus Himself said in John 16:25-27 (as quoted in Item #4 above), telling us that there is no reason why we cannot approach even the Father freely.**

23. As Jesus has entered the most holy place in heaven to serve as our High Priest, let us not forget that Exodus 19:4-6 and 1 Peter 2:9 clearly say we are to serve God as priests.

24. The ascension of Jesus to the throne of God starts a new era for the people of God in the antitypical day of atonement. What is Jesus doing in heaven right now? See Zechariah 3:1-5 as quoted in Item #9 above.

25. **What would it be like to hear Satan, spelling out before the entire universe all of your sins and why you should not be allowed to enter heaven! Can you imagine?**

Hebrews 11:1: To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.—*Good News Bible*.*†

While true, this is not the whole meaning of this passage. We also have arrived at Mount Zion, in the very presence of God, through our representative Jesus (*Eph. 2:5, 6; Col. 3:1*). Jesus' ascension is not a matter of faith, but of fact. It is this historical dimension of Jesus' ascension that provides compelling force to the exhortation of Hebrews to hold fast to our confession (*Heb. 4:14, Heb. 10:23*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, March 3.[§]

26. The fact that Jesus, who has adopted human nature forever, has ascended to be seated on God's throne, tells us that it is possible for humans to be taken into heaven. This is made very clear in several places in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 7:15-17: [One of the elders said:] ¹⁵ "That is why they stand before God's throne and serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will protect them with his presence. ¹⁶Never again will they hunger or thirst; neither sun nor any scorching heat will burn them, ¹⁷because the Lamb, who is in the centre of the throne, will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."—*Good News Bible*.*‡

Revelation 21:1-4: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. ²And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. ³I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: **“Now God’s home is with human beings! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. ⁴He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.”**—*Good News Bible*.*†

Revelation 22:1-5: The angel also showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, and coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²and flowing down the middle of the city’s street. On each side of the river was the tree of life, which bears fruit twelve times a year, once each month; and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. ³Nothing that is under God’s curse will be found in the city.

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. ⁵There shall be no more night, and they will not need lamps or sunlight, because the Lord God will be their light, and they will rule as kings for ever [sic] and ever.—*Good News Bible*.*††

Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 173*,* 1902†; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,* vol. 4, 1161.6†; *1MR** 249.2-250.0†; *10MR** 252.1†; *Maranatha** 200.2†; *OFC** 328.2.† Compare *LDE* 219.4; *FLB* 287.7; *OFC* 83.6.

All who enter will have on the robe of Christ’s righteousness and the name of God will be seen in their foreheads. This name is the symbol which the apostle saw in vision, and **signifies the yielding of the mind to intelligent and loyal obedience to all of God’s commandments.**—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*,* August 18, 1886, par. 4.† Compare *SD* 370.2.

Christ’s ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. For this they were to wait before they entered upon their work. When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. **As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents,** and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king,

received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles** 38.3-39.0.†

They could speak the name of Jesus with assurance; for was He not their Friend and Elder Brother? Brought into close communion with Christ, they sat with Him in heavenly places. With what burning language they clothed their ideas as they bore witness for Him!—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 46.1.

27. Do you feel comfortable with the idea that through prayer, we can approach God directly? Or, do you feel more comfortable praying in the name of Jesus?

Hebrews 12:22-23: ²² Instead, you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, with its thousands of angels. ²³ You have come to the joyful gathering of God's firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, who is the judge of all people, and to the spirits of good people made perfect.—*Good News Bible*.*

28. One of the challenges in understanding this passage of Scripture is the question: Who are the "spirits of the righteous made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23, *NRSV** and *ESV**)? Are they disembodied spirits as many Christians think?

Who are the "spirits of the righteous made perfect"? Most scholars of the book of Hebrews employ Jewish apocalyptic literature (*e.g.*, *Jub. 23:30, 31; 1 Enoch 22:9; 1 Enoch 102:4; 1 Enoch 103:3, 4; 2 Apoc. Bar. 30:2*) to understand the phrase "spirits of the righteous made perfect." On this basis, they conclude that these spirits must be immaterial souls, devoid of the body, who are dwelling in heaven. Such a conclusion needs to be challenged by the data presented in the book of Hebrews itself. To that end, **we will analyze the noun "spirits," ... and the adjectival verb (participle) "made perfect."**

The noun "**spirits**," or "spirit," has three different uses in the letter to the Hebrews. First, "spirits" is used to designate angels who are ministering spirits (*Heb. 1:7, 14*). Second, "spirit" designates the Holy Spirit who gives gifts, speaks about the new covenant, and bears witness to it (*Heb. 2:4; Heb. 3:7; Heb. 6:4; Heb. 9:8; Heb. 10:15*). Sometimes the Holy Spirit seems to be described as the "Spirit of grace" (*Heb. 10:29*), or the "eternal Spirit" (*Heb. 9:14*). Third, "spirits" refers to human beings who are alive and who are subject to the piercing penetration of the Living Word of God (*Heb. 4:12*). Similarly, when Paul talks about God disciplining His children, he says "We have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?" (*Heb. 12:9, ESV*). Thus, we can conclude that the "spirits" in the phrase "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (*Heb. 12:23, NRSV*) are not angels, nor the Holy Spirit, but human beings who by faith have approached Mount Zion, the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (*Heb. 12:22*)....

The term "**made perfect**" appears several times in Hebrews, yielding three uses. First, Christ was made perfect through sufferings and becomes the Source of eternal salvation (*Heb. 2:10; Heb. 5:9; Heb. 7:28*). Second, the

law cannot make perfect the conscience of the worshiper (*Heb. 7:19; Heb. 9:9; Heb. 10:1*). Third, human beings are perfected. In Hebrews 10:14, Paul states, “For by a single offering he [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (*NRSV*), and in Hebrews 12:23 the “spirits of the righteous” are perfected. Thus, the objects of perfection are Christ and human beings, not bodiless beings in a metaphysical sphere....

In sum, the **textual evidence** points to the fact that the noun “spirits” is used for angels, the Holy Spirit, and humans. The adjective “righteous” is used for faithful people such as Abel and the audience of Hebrews. The term “made perfect” is used to describe Jesus being made perfect, the inability of the law to make anything perfect, and humans who have been made perfect by Christ’s sacrifice. **Thus, we can safely conclude that the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” are not immaterial souls, devoid of corporeal form, who are dwelling in heaven after their earthly sojourn and subsequent death, and who are now enjoying heavenly peace. Rather, the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” are human beings whose names have been registered in heaven.** Through faith, the addressees of Hebrews approach God, Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable angels, and these human beings who have been made perfect by faith and whose names are recorded in heaven....

As Seventh-day Adventists, we hold many beliefs in common with other Christian denominations, such as prayer, righteousness by faith, sanctification, the Godhead, tithing, et cetera. Besides distinctive Adventist beliefs, such as those connected with the sanctuary doctrine and our self-understanding as the end-time remnant of Revelation, some denominations can be found within Christianity that share our beliefs in the Sabbath, the Second Coming, the gift of prophecy, and the state of the dead. During this week’s lesson, we looked at the state of the dead through the passage of Hebrews 12:22. **As Seventh-day Adventists, we are distinguished from other Christian groups, though not exclusively, in believing that the soul is not immortal. We believe that God created Adam “from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (*Gen. 2:7, NRSV*).** Other translations render the phrase “living being” as “living soul.” With death, the living being ceases to exist. **Through the influence of Greek philosophy, most Christians throughout history have believed that humans are born immortal and that when one dies, his or her spirit goes to heaven or hell to live with God or to burn eternally.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 133-135.†§ [Brackets and content in brackets in the paragraph above discussing *made perfect* are in the Bible study guide.]‡**

©2022, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. *Electronic version. †Bold type is added. ‡Text in brackets is added. §Italic type is in the source. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: January 30, 2022