

In These Last Days: The Message of Hebrews

The Promised Son

Lesson #3 for January 15, 2022

Scriptures: Isaiah 2:2-3; Hebrews 1:1-5,10; Exodus 24:16-17; Isaiah 44:24; Luke 1:31-32.

1. Before Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, they had a promise from God that a solution to the sin problem would be coming. That promise was to be embodied in a Son.

When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer. But the fulfillment of the promise tarried.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 31.2.

2. Similar promises were made to Abraham, David, etc. (Genesis 22:16-18; 2 Samuel 7:12-14; Psalm 89:27-29; Galatians 3:16)
3. The amazing thing is that none of them recognized—not Adam and Eve, not Abraham, not David—that the promised Seed would be none other than God Himself, their Savior and Redeemer.
4. Paul suggested to us that he was living “in the last days.” What did he mean by *the last days*? No doubt, he thought he was living near the second coming of Jesus Christ. Numerous expressions in the Bible talk about *the last days* or *the latter days* and some, reaching down to our day, even describe “the time of the end.” (See Daniel 12:4.)
5. What are we supposed to conclude from all of these passages? Scripture seems to speak of *the last days* as beginning with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and continuing through all the events over the next 2000 years to the second coming. A number of passages in the New Testament teach us that with the promise of Jesus come many other promises: (1) A future resurrection, (2) a new creation, (3) new hearts living in full cooperation with God, (4) a permanent and perfect kingdom ruled by Jesus, (5) the second coming, and finally, (6) the third coming which was revealed only to John.

Hebrews 1:1-4: ¹ In the past, God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, ²but in **these last days** he has spoken to us through his Son. He is the one through whom God created the universe, the one whom God has chosen to possess all things at the end. ³He reflects the brightness of God’s glory and is the exact likeness of God’s own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word. After achieving forgiveness for human sins, he sat down in heaven at the right-hand side of God, the Supreme Power.

⁴ The Son was made greater than the angels, just as the name that God gave him is greater than theirs.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Hebrews 1:1–4). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].^{†‡}

6. Clearly, the greatness and identity of God’s true Son is the emphasis. While God had spoken to His people in many and different ways in the past, His ultimate revelation was coming through Jesus Christ Himself, the divine Son of God. And that promised revelation would be superior to any previous revelation.

7. So, why had God failed to accomplish what He wanted to do for the world through His people in the Old Testament? Considering that long history of failure, (Would we dare to speak of God's actions as failures?) what did He accomplish in the life and death of Jesus that had never been demonstrated, even to the onlooking universe?
8. In these verses, clearly, Paul was telling us that Jesus Christ, the baby Boy born to Mary in Bethlehem was none other than God Himself in human form. At the same time, He was fully human and fully God.
9. Sometimes, God's presence—His glory—is described as *fire*. Ezekiel, and even Paul at the end of Hebrews, described God's presence as a kind of fire. (Ezekiel 1:27-28; Hebrews 12:29) No doubt, this description is necessary because we do not have any other words to describe the light or radiance of God. (See Isaiah 33:10-16.) In any case, the Scriptures assert that in His divinity, Christ is an exact equal and a perfect image of God the Father. (John 14:9)
10. Another puzzling bit of information from both Old and New Testaments is that God created and the Son created. The same is true when talking about the resurrection of Jesus. So, which was it? Was the Son only an instrument in God's hands to do the creating? There was perfect agreement between the Son and the Father in the planning for and the carrying out of the creation of our world.
11. But, God does a lot more for us than just creating us. Scripture affirms that our entire existence every day and every minute is sustained by God. (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17; and **Acts 17:25,28**)

The physical organism of man is under the supervision of God; but it is not like a clock, which is set in operation, and must go of itself. [That was the teaching of Deists.] The heart beats, pulse succeeds pulse, breath succeeds breath, but **the entire being is under the supervision of God.** "Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." In God we live and move and have our being. **Each heart-beat, each breath, is the inspiration of him who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life,—the inspiration of the ever-present God, the great I AM.**—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* November 8, 1898, par. 13;†† *SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol. 1, 1081.6.†††

12. But, there is one other challenge with which we need to deal. What did God mean when He said, "Today I have begotten You" as recorded in Hebrews 1:5 (*NKJV**)?
13. As we look to Scripture to determine what this expression might have meant to the original hearers, we realize that on other occasions God stated that He begat the children of Israel. God also said: "I will be his father, and he will be my son," speaking of Solomon as recorded in 2 Samuel 7:12-14 (*GNB**). There are several special times when Jesus was "adopted" or recognized by God as His Son. He was installed in new ways that could fulfill this statement at His baptism when the Father descended upon Him and said, "This is my beloved Son." (Matthew 3:17, *KJV**) However, the ultimate installation of Jesus was when Jesus returned to heaven in His human form and was seated at the right hand of God. There was never a time when Jesus Christ did not exist. We cannot talk about His being born. (Hebrews 13:8)
14. Notice Ellen White's very significant words about the following statement: "This is my

beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17, NKJV*)

The word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” Ephesians 1:6. The glory that rested upon Christ is a pledge of the love of God for us.... The light which fell from the open portals upon the head of our Saviour will fall upon us as we pray for help to resist temptation. The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 113.1.

15. So, why was it necessary for God to take this ultimate step of sending His own Son to represent Himself on this earth? Think of the New Testament parable of the husbandman who sent his son; the workers took him outside of the vineyard and killed him. (Mark 12:1-9)
16. As we scan through the book of Hebrews, we see that Christ is regarded as: (1) Superior to angels; (2) Superior to Moses, the father of the Hebrew nation; and (3) Superior to the prophets. So, what did Christ do that made His ministry so superior? To represent God, no one could do it as well as God Himself.
17. In order to understand clearly the book of Hebrews, we need to understand it in the setting of the 1st century in which Paul was writing and also in the much larger context of the great controversy that began in heaven over God’s character and government. The early Christians were struggling with an understanding of how the ceremonial system that the Jews had revered for almost 2000 years should apply to Christians. This led to many discussions and even to some very interesting conclusions at that first “general conference” session as recorded in Acts 15:28-29.
18. We are not aware whether Paul ever had any idea that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed by the Romans. He died about three years before that happened. However, he died only one year after Jerusalem was besieged briefly for the first time in 66 A.D.
19. The books of Daniel and Revelation have a number of interesting prophecies, stretching down through the history of our world, almost to the end. **The book of Hebrews describes what will be happening in the courts of heaven during those same times.** So, a better understanding of Hebrews, Daniel, and Revelation might impact us to a considerable degree.

When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience. They will be given such glimpses of the open gates of heaven that heart and mind will be impressed with the character that all must develop in order to realize the blessedness which is to be the reward of the pure in heart.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers** 114.3; *The Faith I Live By** 345.3; *18MR** 24.2 (1900).[€]

20. We have often focused on identifying every horn and every date in Daniel and Revelation. But, is that what would give us an entirely new religious experience? Or, do we need to focus on what is happening in heaven as described in Hebrews? And what do we know about the sanctuary in heaven? Moses was told to make a copy which became the tabernacle or tent in the desert. Of course, we recognize that the tiny little tent in the

desert could not possibly fully represent what is happening in heaven. Think of all the killing that took place in and around the tent! Nothing like that will be seen in heaven! We need to look a lot higher!

21. **So, with the great controversy in view, remember that Hebrews is very much about heaven.** What is going on in heaven? If we look at Hebrews 2:14-18 and Hebrews 4:14-16, we get expressions and symbols about the work of Jesus based on the Hebrew understanding of what went on in the sanctuary. Should we look back to what happened in the Old Testament to try to understand what is going on in heaven now? Or, should we look at passages in the Bible which clearly describe God's way of judging in heaven? So, what should it mean to us today to know that Jesus is our High Priest? And how does His death destroy the Devil?
22. Do we clearly understand why Jesus came? And what He intended to accomplish? And **if we are going to include the entire universe in our perspective, it will change our picture!**
23. **What did the onlooking universe think of what was happening on this earth before the coming of Jesus?**

A crisis had arrived in the government of God... All heaven was prepared at the word of God to move to the help of his elect. One word from him, and the bolts of heaven would have fallen upon the earth, filling it with fire and flame. God had but to speak, and there would have been thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes and destruction.

The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. **Every move was watched with intense anxiety. The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth.** But "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "I will send my beloved Son," he said. "It may be they will reverence him." Amazing grace! Christ came not to condemn the world, but to save the world. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

The heavenly universe was amazed at God's patience and love.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* July 17, 1900, par. 5-7.†

24. What was God going to do? The onlooking universe was given a view of God such as they had never seen before. When Jesus cried out, "It is finished," they essentially said: "You are absolutely right; it is finished." **It was finished because they had seen the full truth about God and the full truth about Satan demonstrated on Calvary.**

That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels.... The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. [We think only of ourselves as being involved in the plan of salvation. We have been very selfish with the plan of salvation! It is for the whole universe!] **Without the cross they**

[“the angles of heaven”] would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven.... The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an **eternal safeguard** against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* December 30, 1889, par. 4^{†‡}; *SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol. 5, 1132.8-9.^{†‡} Compare *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7a, 576.3; *Our High Calling* 45.4; *The Truth About Angels* 205.2.

25. **The onlooking universe was not waiting for another ceremonial system full of confusing symbols. They too needed a clear demonstration of the issues in the great controversy.**

26. So, what do we mean when we suggest that there is confusion and symbolism? Let us take an example. What did Paul mean when he said: “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins”? (Hebrews 9:22) The blood that flowed through the veins of Jesus was no different from the blood that flows in your veins. Blood cannot give life; only God can give life. The Bible does not give life; God gives life. But, think of what the blood represented! The life and death of Jesus had an enormous meaning. Do we understand it?

Merely to hear or to read the word is not enough. He who desires to be profited by the Scriptures must meditate upon the truth that has been presented to him. By earnest attention and prayerful thought he must learn the meaning of the words of truth, and drink deep of the spirit of the holy oracles.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons** 59.5-60.0 (1900).[†] Compare *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 10, 1891; *Bible Echoes*, October 1, 1892; *FE* 169-170; *CE* 100-101; *The Signs of the Times*, January 30, 1893; and *The Signs of the Times*, September 26, 1895.

27. **Ellen White spelled out in very precise detail exactly why Christ needed to come and what He accomplished. Satan had been misrepresenting God so seriously that both human and heavenly creatures needed answers. The time had come for God Himself to respond.**

Christ came to represent the Father. [Why do so many people think that Jesus came only “to pay the price” for their sins?] We behold in him the image of the invisible God. He clothed his divinity with humanity, and came to the world that the erroneous ideas Satan had been the means of creating in the minds of men, in regard to the character of God, might be removed. We could not behold the glory of God unveiled in Christ and live; but as he came in the garb of humanity, we may draw nigh to our Redeemer. We are called upon to behold the Lord our Father in the person of his Son. Christ came in the robe of the flesh, with his glory subdued in humanity, that lost man might communicate with him and live. **Through Christ we may comprehend** something of him who is glorious in holiness. Jesus is the mystic ladder by which we may mount to behold the glory of the infinite God. By faith we behold Christ standing between humanity and divinity, connecting God and man, and earth and heaven. [That mystic ladder is the one that Jacob saw in vision while sleeping as he

was fleeing from his brother.]

Christ came to save fallen man, and Satan with fiercest wrath met him on the field of conflict.... Satan sought to intercept every ray of light from the throne of God. [What light was that?] He sought to cast his shadow across the earth, **that men might lose the true views of God's character, and that the knowledge of God might become extinct in the earth. He [Satan] had caused truth of vital importance to be so mingled with error that it had lost its significance.** The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and **God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary.** [Even today, how often is God represented in those ways from the pulpits of many Christian churches?] 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. [So] **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, [Doesn't that sound like Hebrews 1?] 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. That men might have salvation, he came directly to man, and became a partaker of his nature. [How is that for a comprehensive statement?]....**

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. [So far, how many times has she said that His whole mission was to correctly represent the Father?] 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." [John 17:6] "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." [John 17:4] [Jesus said this before He even reached the garden of Gethsemane.] **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. 5-9.†‡**

28. Ellen White's article from *The Signs of the Times*, as quoted above, is a great explanation of what we are taught in Romans 3:25-26.

Romans 3:25-26: ²⁵⁻²⁶God offered him, so that by his blood [Footnote: *by his blood; or by his sacrificial death*] he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to **demonstrate that he is righteous.** In the past he was patient and overlooked people's sins; but in the present time **he deals with their sins,** in order to **demonstrate his righteousness.** In this way God shows that

he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.—*Good News Bible*.*†‡§

29. **Jesus Christ came to demonstrate His own righteousness in contrast to Satan's accusations.**
30. So, in order to understand exactly what needs to be done in heaven, we need to examine carefully the words of Hebrews. God is not doing some fancy bookkeeping. We need to understand exactly: (1) What has gone wrong in the family of heaven, and (2) What needed to be done to make it right. That includes what has gone wrong in our own lives.
31. **If we are going to clearly understand the book of Hebrews, we need to put it in this larger context. Someday, we as Seventh-day Adventists will be known for our clear explanation of the three angels' messages and our picture of God.** When will that happen? Will we be a part of it? The three angels' messages are God's response recorded in Revelation 14 to Satan's accusations in Revelation 13.

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