

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

Week 8 | Jesus Brings a Better Covenant | Hebrews and Galatians

The Letter to the Hebrews: *Jesus is God's only provision for eternal salvation*

The book of Hebrews was written to a community of Hebrew Christians—former Jews who had embraced faith in Jesus. These Hebrew Christians had suffered persecution, and there was the possibility of more intense suffering to come. They were tempted to shrink back and return to Judaism in order to avoid persecution.

The book of Hebrews is a strong warning to these Hebrew Christians that a return to Judaism is not a valid option. Jesus is God's *only* provision for eternal salvation. Jesus brings a better covenant than Judaism's Old Testament covenant. A return to Judaism is a *rejection* of Christ; it's a *rejection* of the salvation God has provided. Jesus is the best and final revelation from God. The book of Hebrews warns of the danger of neglecting the salvation that God has provided in Jesus.

Although we are not Hebrews and we are not facing persecution; nevertheless, the life problems we face raise the same questions the Hebrews had raised: *if God is so committed to us as Christians, then why are our lives so hard? If God truly loves us, then why do we endure so much suffering?* The book of Hebrews addresses our questions by challenging us to *keep our eyes on Jesus*—to focus on who He is, what He has provided, and how He will bring us home.

1. Read Hebrews 1:1-3

Jesus is the perfect revelation of God

- a. List 3 things you observe about Jesus in verse 2.

- b. List 3 things you observe in the first sentence of verse 3.

- c. From Hebrews 1:3, where is Jesus now? How is He qualified to be there? (1:3)

2. Read Hebrews 2:1-4, 9-10, 14-15

Jesus became one of us so that He could die in our place

- a. What strong warning is given in Hebrews 2:1?

- b. *For personal reflection:* Consider Hebrews 2:3. What do you think it would look like in our lives if we were “drifting away” or if we were to “ignore” this great salvation? Think about the concept of “drifting away” as contrasted with “sailing away.” How might one be in danger of doing this?

- c. Consider Jesus' exalted status as eternal God the Son, the One who created all things. What did Jesus do in order to accomplish salvation for us? (2:9, 17)

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The book of Hebrews was written to 1st-century Christians who were struggling with fear and discouragement because their lives were so hard—their lives were full of fear and trouble. They needed relief; they needed peace; they needed rest. We don't face the same trouble that they faced; but nevertheless, we also long for relief. There is suffering in our lives, and sometimes we long for rest. We long for an end to pain and stress and worry.

In chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews, the author recounts the story from the book of *Exodus* when God's people Israel failed to stay faithful to God as He took them on their journey to the Promised Land. God had been faithful every step of the way. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt; God had protected them and provided for them; God had guided them on their way—but they refused to believe in His goodness. God was taking them to a place of rest, but because they didn't trust God, they refused to obey Him. As a result, God declared that this wilderness generation would not enter His rest; they would not enter the Promised Land.

Like Israel, we also are people of faith are traveling to a Promised Land—a future place of fulfillment and rest.

3. Read Hebrews 3:12-15; 4:9-16 *Jesus will bring a future rest for His people of faith*

- a. How did the wilderness generation fail to enter God's rest? (3:15)
- b. In light of Israel's failure, what warning is given to us? (3:12; 4:11, 14)
 - i. In Hebrews 3:12?
 - ii. In Hebrews 4:11?
 - iii. In Hebrews 4:14?
- c. What resources do we have to help us heed this warning?
 - i. From Hebrews 3:13?
 - ii. From Hebrews 4:12?
 - iii. From Hebrews 4:14-15?
- d. What great privilege do we enjoy? (4:16)

Jesus is better than any Old Testament law, sacrifice, or priest

The book of Hebrews argues that Christianity is infinitely superior to Judaism, and the author builds his argument by demonstrating that every element of Judaism has been superseded by Christianity.

In chapters 5-7, the book of Hebrews considers the role of the priesthood in Judaism, and the author explains that Jesus is a far better High Priest for mankind than the priesthood established under Jewish Law. Jesus has come as a true and better mediator (peacemaker) between God and man. Jesus is the perfect merciful High Priest.

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Jesus brings the New Covenant relationship with God

In chapters 8-10, the book of Hebrews argues that Jesus has brought the New Covenant with God—a covenant promised by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel—a covenant that sets aside the *Old* Covenant Law (the Torah).

4. Read Hebrews 8:7-13

[*Note: Hebrews 8:8-12 is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34]

- a. List the aspects of the New Covenant that demonstrate its superiority to the Old Covenant. (8:10-12)

- b. Given that Jesus brings the New Covenant, what is the status of the Old Covenant? (8:13)

5. Read Hebrews 10:5-25 *Jesus' death is the final sacrifice for the sin of the world*

[*Note: to be "made holy" or "sanctified" means to be set apart for God's service]

- a. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was the ultimate and final sacrifice. The sacrifices offered under Judaism had to be brought again and again, but Jesus' sacrifice of Himself was offered once for all time. What does Jesus' sacrificial death accomplish? (10:10,14,17)

- b. What is to be our response to the gospel of forgiveness through faith in Christ? (10:22-23)

- c. How are we to live in community with other Christians? (10:24-25)

- d. *Personal reflection:* What practical steps can you take in your life to live as the sort of person described in 10:24-25?

Conclusions from chapters 1-10:

- In Jesus we have God's very Word—a superior *revelation* of God (chapters 1-2)
- In Jesus we have the confident hope of *rest* in the Kingdom of God (chapters 3-4)
- In Jesus we have the perfect High Priest who has *reconciled* us with God (chapters 5-7)
- In Jesus we have the *final sacrifice* for sin (chapters 8-10)
- In Jesus we have the New Covenant with God (chapters 8-10)

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Consider the examples of others who persevered in faith

How may we heed the warnings in Hebrews and continue the course of life with confident hope in the goodness of God? Hebrews 11 is often called “The Hall of Faith,” for this chapter shows how God’s people in the past—heroes of faith—endured hardship, pain, and suffering—and yet they persevered to the end.

6. Read Hebrews 11:1-16 and 11:32-40

The life of faith will bring suffering as well as victories

- a. Hebrews 11 gives many examples of dramatic victories for people of faith; nevertheless, being a person of faith is not a guarantee that we will never suffer. The world is still fallen, and we have an important role to play in advancing God’s Kingdom. What examples of suffering do you see in 11:36-38?
- b. *Personal reflection:* What conclusion do you draw from these contrasting examples of the lives of the faithful? How are your expectations of God changed by reading this chapter?

7. Read Hebrews 12:1-11 and 12:22-29

Fix your eyes on Jesus

- a. If we consider our lives to be a marathon course that we are running, how are we to run that race? List at least three tips for completing the course. (Hebrews 12:1-3)
- b. *Personal reflection:* What do you think it means to “*fix your eyes on Jesus?*” (12:2) What strategy might you implement in your life to enable you to live life with your eyes fixed on Jesus?
- c. How are we to deal with the hardships we will encounter in life? (12:7, 10-11)
- d. When God sends hardship into our lives as a measure of discipline, what is the end result? (12:10-11)

The book of Hebrews serves to warn us and encourage us. In this life, suffering will come, but because Jesus has suffered for us, our eternal destiny is assured—and it is glorious! Remember Him and stay the course.

Life is a long journey to a glorious destination.

The way to stay the course and finish well is to fix our eyes on Jesus

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The Letter to the Galatians: *Jesus brings A New Freedom for Living*

What is the rule of life for Christian conduct?

What are the rules for living the Christian life? What part does the Old Testament law play as a guide for our conduct? We understand that salvation is by faith alone, but how are we then to conduct our lives if we want to live a life that pleases God?

The book of Galatians is a passionate letter written by Paul to the churches in Galatia—a letter that was written to challenge the influence of Jewish Christians who had come from Judea, and who were teaching the Gentile Galatians that although Christians were *saved by faith in Christ*, their lives should thereafter conform to the requirements of the Old Testament Law. These Judean teachers (called Judaizers) were creating divisions in the church. They were teaching that *Gentiles* who had come to faith in Christ were then obligated to be circumcised and to live according to the *Jewish* Old Testament Law.

This was a corruption of the gospel, and Paul's response was intensely passionate.

1. **Read Galatians 1:6-7.** How does Paul describe the false gospel that has seduced them?

2. **Read Galatians 2:15-16.** *Paul affirms the gospel of Jesus Christ*

According to this passage, how are we *justified*? Take it directly from the passage: "*We...know that a man is not justified by _____, but by _____. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by _____ and not by observing the _____.*"

[*Note:* the term *justified* means "*declared righteous.*" A person who is *justified* has been forgiven of sin, infused with grace through the Holy Spirit, and has been adopted into Jesus' *New Covenant* family.]

If the Galatians were to adopt following the Old Testament Law as their rule of life, they would be setting aside the gospel of *grace* (Galatians 2:21), and they would be elevating observance of the Old Testament Law as a continuing requirement for acceptance with God. This is a serious error.

3. **Read Galatians 3:1-5.** *How were previously-pagan Gentiles included in the family of God?*

- a. What gospel did they hear? (vs.1)
- b. How did they receive the Holy Spirit? (vs. 2)

In that day, there was a dramatic difference between the lives of devout Jews and the lives of Gentiles in the Roman Empire. The Gentiles practiced infanticide—it was common for them to discard female babies. Women had no rights—a wife would be instantly divorced if she committed adultery, but a husband could freely indulge in adulterous affairs. Wives and slaves were subject to beatings and even execution. There was lewdness, drunkenness, shameless immorality, and wild orgies.

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It is not surprising that Jews, who lived such principled lives, would be shocked that these debauched Gentiles were being welcomed into the community of faith as they simply received God's grace and believed the message of the gospel. The Jewish Christians would have wondered, "*What is going to prevent these Gentiles from continuing in their prior lifestyle? Surely they need to follow the Torah as we have always done in the past.*"

4. **Read Galatians 5:13-25.** *The Christian's rule of life is love for God and for others*
 - a. How does Paul summarize the practical goal of the Old Testament Law? (5:14)
 - b. How can the Christian follow this rule of life? (5:16)
 - c. In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul lists the sorts of behaviors that issue from our fallen sinful natures. By contrast, what characteristics issue from the Holy Spirit? (vs. 22-23)?
 - d. We live a life pleasing to God not by following a set of rules, but by following our divine Companion and Guide, the Holy Spirit. How does Paul summarize this in Galatians 5:25?
5. **Read Galatians 6:9-10.** What practical instruction does Paul give for the daily conduct of our lives?
6. *Personal Reflection:* Gal. 6:10 says, "...as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people...". Can you identify an *opportunity* that beckons in your life? Is there someone for whom you may bring blessing? Consider that you are now empowered by the Holy Spirit to bestow grace to others.

Dr. John R. W. Stott, prolific author and rector of All Souls Church in London, prayed a prayer each morning that expresses the perspective of life that nurtures a Spirit-led life with God—a life that is not centered around rules for living, but a life that is centered around *pleasing the God who loves us* and has embraced us in His family.

Consider this excerpt from John Stott's daily morning prayer:

*Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more.
Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may deny myself, take up my cross, and follow you.
Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life:
Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control.*

Perhaps you will want to adopt this prayer as part of your quiet time as well.

***The book of Galatians teaches that Christians are not under the rule of the Old Testament Law;
rather, the rule we follow is to serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit.***

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