

In These Last Days: The Message of Hebrews

Jesus, Our Faithful Brother

Lesson #4 for January 22, 2022

Scriptures: Leviticus 25:25-27; Hebrews 2:14-16; 5:8-9; 11:24-26; 12:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:50.

1. Last week we talked about some of the implications from Hebrews 1.

Comparing Hebrews 1 with Hebrews 2 paints a picture of contrasts. In Hebrews 1, Christ is superior to the angels (*Heb. 1:6*), whereas in Hebrews 2, He is inferior to the angels, at least, for a certain time (*Heb. 2:9*). In Hebrews 1, Christ is close to God, at His right side (*Heb. 1:13*); in Hebrews 2, Christ is close to and not ashamed of us, His brethren (*Heb. 2:11*). Contrasting the pre-incarnate Christ to human nature, Hebrews tells us that Christ adopted flesh and blood in order to be like us (*Heb. 2:14*). [Jesus] Christ also died as we humans do (*Heb. 2:14*). **But the big difference between our death and His is that His death accomplished what our death never could.** His death freed us who all our “lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (*Heb. 2:15, NRSV*). Christ is like us, yet different from us. He was truly human, yet without sin (*Heb. 4:15*). Like Moses who chose shame over fame (*Heb. 11:25*), Christ despised the shame of becoming human and dying on a cross but accepted it anyway. He became like us so that we might become like Him. In our becoming like Him, “He is not ashamed to call” us “brethren” (*Heb. 2:11*), even when we might “put Him to open shame” (*Heb. 6:6, NASB*). Humans go through trials and testing, which produce endurance and, finally, maturity of character. Paul describes Jesus in a similar manner. He “learned obedience through what he suffered” and was “made perfect” (*Heb. 5:8, 9, NRSV*). How did Jesus learn obedience? At some point in time, was He disobedient? That notion would contradict Hebrews 4:15, which says that Jesus was tested in everything as we are, yet He remained without sin.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 52.†‡§

2. In the Old Testament, God made provisions for the Israelites that a person could be bought back, if, for one reason or another, he had sold his property or even himself into slavery to pay his debts. Even today, people in some countries are selling their children, usually daughters, to buy food and/or pay their debts.

Leviticus 25:25-27,47-49: ²⁵If an Israelite becomes poor and is forced to sell his land, his closest relative is to buy it back. ²⁶Anyone who has no relative to buy it back may later become prosperous and have enough to buy it back. ²⁷In that case he must pay to the man who bought it a sum that will make up for the years remaining until the next Year of Restoration, when he would in any event recover his land....

⁴⁷ Suppose a foreigner living with you becomes rich, while a fellow-Israelite becomes poor and sells himself as a slave to that foreigner or to a member of his family. ⁴⁸After he is sold, he still has the right to be bought back. One of his brothers ⁴⁹or his uncle or his cousin or another of his close relatives may buy him back; or if he himself earns enough, he may buy his own freedom.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News*

*Translation** (2nd ed., Leviticus 25:25-27,47-49). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].[‡]

- Remember that every 50 years, the property was to be returned to its original owner, whether or not he could pay, making a sale of property in ancient Israel like a 50-year (or even shorter period) lease in the United States. However, 50 years is a long time to wait. So, God made the additional provision that a person or even his property could be bought back. That special provision was known as the “nearest relative” provision. (Remember the story of Ruth and Boaz, the nearest relative willing to pay for the land that Ruth’s family had owned.) That nearest relative would also be the one responsible for pursuing anyone who might have murdered or accidentally killed a relative. He came to be known, in that case, as “the avenger of the blood.” See Numbers 35:9-15. That was the reason God provided cities of refuge in the land of Palestine. They did not have a system for dealing with injustice. Additionally, they did not have banks to offer loans for one to deal with debts.

- So, what lessons did Paul want us to understand from those ancient Hebrew provisions?

Hebrews 2:14-16: ¹⁴ Since the children, as he calls them, are people of flesh and blood, Jesus himself became like them and shared their human nature. He did this so that through his death he might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death, ¹⁵and in this way set free those who were slaves all their lives because of their fear of death. ¹⁶For it is clear that it is not the angels that he helps. Instead, he helps the descendants of Abraham.—*Good News Bible.** [But, see below.][‡]

Let us not forget that we have “sold ourselves into slavery” to the Devil. Jesus is offering now to come and serve as a Kinsman/Redeemer. But, unfortunately, like Paul, we are slaves to sin. (Romans 7:14-24) It is not easy for us to overcome those natural tendencies. But, we need to recognize the truth spelled out in Romans 6:23.

Romans 6:23: For sin pays its wage—death; but God’s free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.—*Good News Bible.** [Why is it that we fear God, and love sin? That is completely backward!][‡]

- But, the amazing thing is what we read in Hebrews 2:11.

Hebrews 2:11: He purifies people from their sins, and both he and those who are made pure all have the same Father. That is why **Jesus is not ashamed to call them his family.**—*Good News Bible.**[†]

- Think of that! Jesus the Son of God, as spelled out in Hebrews 1, chose to take our nature and become fully human as well as remaining fully divine to come as close as possible to us so that we might better understand God. Several passages in the Old Testament talk about this.

Psalms 19:14: May my words and my thoughts be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my refuge and my redeemer!—*Good News Bible.**

Isaiah 41:14: The LORD says,
“Small and weak as you are, Israel,
don’t be afraid; I will help you.
I, the holy God of Israel, am the one who saves you.”—*Good News Bible.**
[See also Isaiah 45:14; 44:22; and Jeremiah 31:11.][‡]

7. Could it really be true that God wants to come closer to us than our nearest human relative? God, our supreme and infinite Creator and Redeemer, chooses to call us His *brothers and sisters*.
8. The people to whom Paul was writing were being shamed by their neighbors for their rejection of the Greek and Hebrew gods that others worshiped. They were ill-treated. Sometimes, they lost all their property. Sometimes, they even faced death, all in the name of Jesus.
9. One of the illustrations that Paul used to help us to understand the condescension on the part of Jesus Christ is the story of Moses.

Hebrews 11:24-26: ²⁴It was faith that made Moses, when he had grown up, refuse to be called the son of the king's daughter. ²⁵He preferred to suffer with God's people rather than to enjoy sin for a little while. ²⁶He reckoned that to suffer scorn for the Messiah was worth far more than all the treasures of Egypt, for he kept his eyes on the future reward.—*Good News Bible*.*

10. Moses chose to reject his high standing as the son of Pharaoh's daughter—he likely would have been the next Pharaoh—choosing rather to ally himself with the shamed slaves who were his relatives.
11. So, what does God ask from us in exchange for this incredible condescension on the part of Jesus?

Matthew 10:32-33: ³²“For those who declare publicly that they belong to me, I will do the same before my Father in heaven. ³³But if anyone rejects me publicly, I will reject him before my Father in heaven.”—*Good News Bible*.*

2 Timothy 1:8,12: ⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of witnessing for our Lord; nor be ashamed of me, a prisoner for Christ's sake. Instead, take your part in suffering for the Good News, as God gives you the strength to do it....

¹²And it is for this reason that I suffer these things. But I am still full of confidence, because I know whom I have trusted, and I am sure that he is able to keep safe until that Day what he has entrusted to me.—*Good News Bible*.* [This was part of Paul's last message before he was beheaded.][†]

Hebrews 13:12-15: ¹²**For this reason Jesus also died outside the city, in order to purify the people from sin with his own blood.** ¹³Let us, then, go to him outside the camp and share his shame. ¹⁴For there is no permanent city for us here on earth; we are looking for the city which is to come. ¹⁵Let us, then, always offer praise to God as our sacrifice through Jesus, which is the offering presented by lips that confess him as Lord.—*Good News Bible*.*[†]

12. Have we ever been ashamed of our Christianity? Or, to admit we are Christians? Or, about our association with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer?
13. Therefore, Paul challenged us to hold firmly to the faith we have professed.

Hebrews 4:14: Let us, then, **hold firmly to the faith we profess.** For we have a great High Priest who has gone into the very presence of God—Jesus, the Son of God.—*Good News Bible*.*[†]

Hebrews 10:23: Let us **hold on firmly to the hope we profess,** because we can trust God to keep his promise.—*Good News Bible*.*[†]

14. Try to wrap your mind around the idea that the Son of God Himself chose to associate with us permanently for the rest of eternity as a Human Being. Why would He do that?

15. Back before our world was created, Jesus was Michael the Archangel. He moved among the angels as if He were an angel. That may be partly why Lucifer began to feel that he should be treated the same as Jesus was.
16. **But now, shockingly, Jesus Christ has decided to come down and adopt us as His brothers and sisters. Satan tried to move up in status; Jesus stepped down to the lowest level as a human. No longer was Jesus operating at the level of an angel; but rather, He became a Descendant of Abraham.**
17. But, we must not forget that **the plan of salvation was not only for the benefit of us humans but also for the benefit of the entire universe.**

Ephesians 1:7-10: ⁷For by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, ⁸which he gave to us in such large measure!

In all his wisdom and insight ⁹God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. ¹⁰This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is **to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

Ephesians 3:7-10: ⁷I was made a servant of the gospel by God's special gift, which he gave me through the working of his power. ⁸I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ, ⁹and of making all people see how God's secret plan is to be put into effect. God, who is the Creator of all things, kept his secret hidden through all the past ages, ¹⁰in order that at the present time, **by means of the church, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.**—*Good News Bible*.*† [What could the universe learn about God through us?][‡]

Colossians 1:19-20: ¹⁹For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. ²⁰Through the Son, then, **God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself.** God made peace through his Son's blood [Footnote: *his Son's blood*; or *his Son's sacrificial death*] on the cross and so **brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.**—*Good News Bible*.*†§

Through the plan of salvation a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ, the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and results of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* February 13, 1893, par. 12.† *The Signs of the Times*,* December 22, 1914, par. 4^{€†}; *The Messenger*,* June 7, 1893, par. 5^{€†}; *Bible Echoes*,* July 15, 1893, par. 3^{€†}; *That I May Know Him** 366.4.^{€†}

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate

the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, **will draw all unto Me.**” John 12:31, 32. **The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan.** It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 68.2-69.0 (1890).† [Contrast *Reflecting Christ* 50.3-4 (1985) in which the wording is “draw all **men** unto me,”† thus, leaving out the beings in the rest of the universe who are also key in the great controversy.]‡

18. While the plan of salvation clearly involves the entire universe and not just human beings, we were the ones in the greatest need and the ones that Satan had claimed as belonging to him. It was to us and for us that Christ came.

Hebrews 10:10: Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that he made of his own body once and for all.—*Good News Bible*.*

The expression “flesh and blood” emphasizes the frailty of the human condition, its weakness (*Eph. 6:12*), lack of understanding (*Matt. 16:17*, *Gal. 1:16*), and subjection to death (*1 Cor. 15:50*). Hebrews says that Jesus was made like His brothers “in all things” (*Heb. 2:17*). This expression means that Jesus became fully human (*NIV*). Jesus did not simply “look like” or “seem to be” human; He truly was human, truly one of us.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide for Tuesday, January 18.†§ [Jesus was called *the Son of David*. If He had not inherited any DNA from Mary, He could not have been called a Son of David. He was truly human as well as truly divine.]‡**

19. While it is true that Jesus became fully human, there were **other ways in which He was definitely not like us.**

First, Jesus did not commit any sin (*Heb. 4:15*). Second, Jesus had a human nature that was “holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners” (*Heb. 7:26, ESV*). We all have sinned, and we all have evil tendencies.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide for Tuesday, January 18.†§**

20. So, what did Jesus need to do to destroy the Devil? He needed to: (1) Fully, completely, and convincingly refute all of Satan’s accusations; and (2) Answer all of Satan’s questions against the character and government of God. Thus, Jesus broke the power of sin and gave us guidance to live a righteous life according to His new covenant promise.

21. We have the example of Jesus before us; His promise was to become one of us. In fact, He promised to be a faithful and merciful High Priest, (*Hebrews 2:17*) in order to help us. So, why is it that so many of us still struggle with sin? How can we do better? Unfortunately, Satan is alive and well on this earth. We are born in sin; sinning comes very naturally to each one of us.

22. So, what was required for Jesus to do in order to be a faithful High Priest for us?

Hebrews 5:8-9: ⁸But even though he was God's Son, he learnt through his sufferings to be obedient. ⁹When he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him, ¹⁰and God declared him to be high priest, **in the priestly order of Melchizedek.**—*Good News Bible.*†*

23. This should surprise us. If Jesus was the perfect Son of God, our Creator and Redeemer, why does He need to be made “perfect through sufferings”? He certainly did not have to overcome any sins or any moral or ethical imperfections. It is important to recognize that **in the New Testament Greek, the word translated into English as *perfection* means *mature, growing up as a sinless Human Being***. Jesus had to live His whole, perfect life before He could accomplish what God had sent Him to do. Remember that Satan had claimed that no human being could live a sinless life on this earth. So, Jesus did it, throughout His whole life up to and through the day He was crucified.
24. At this point, we run into **some big differences in the way people explain why Jesus had to die**. Some people suggest that Jesus had to die on the cross as a Sacrifice so that the Father could have the legal means to save us. Jesus became the perfect Offering, the only One qualified to die in our place, that is, to “pay the price” for our sins. Was that because God would only accept that kind of sacrifice? Was it because He was, first of all, a perfect Example, and therefore, could die as the perfect Sacrifice?
25. Jesus has adopted our humanity, has lived among us, and has proved that it is possible—in contradiction to Satan's claims—to live a perfect life as a human being. We needed, and we still need, to see what God is like, lived out in the perfect human life. **Jesus was able to destroy the Devil because He was able to refute all the misrepresentations of God that the Devil had been claiming. *The truth ultimately destroys lies.***
26. In Hebrews 11, Paul briefly sketched the lives of some of the saints whose histories are recorded in the Old Testament. He focused particularly on Abraham. Then, he told us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. (Hebrews 12:1-4) Considering what He went through, is there any reason for us to complain?
27. In Hebrews 6:20, Jesus is described as a Forerunner or Pioneer of the course that we need to run. He showed us what living by faith is all about.
28. Try to imagine how challenging it was for Jesus to maintain His trust in God while He was dying, hanging on the cross!
- Amid the awful darkness, apparently forsaken of God, Christ had drained the last dregs in the cup of human woe. **In those dreadful hours He had relied upon the evidence of His Father's acceptance heretofore given Him. He was acquainted with the character of His Father; He understood His justice, His mercy, and His great love. By faith He rested in Him whom it had ever been His joy to obey. And as in submission He committed Himself to God, the sense of the loss of His Father's favor was withdrawn. By faith, Christ was victor.**—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 756.3.†
29. Can we make daily choices that confirm our trust or faith in God? How do we do that on an hour by hour, minute by minute basis?
30. In the days in which Paul was writing, there was a Roman custom that people were aware of. If a father should die with a number of young children, an older son or brother was appointed as guardian.

“A tutor, often an older brother, became responsible for the care of minor

children and their inheritance until they reached the age of majority, thus heightening the older brother's natural duty to take care of his younger siblings."—*Godly Fear: The Epistle to the Hebrews and Greco-Roman Critiques of Superstition* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 126.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, January 21].[§]

31. And surely, Jesus Christ is our elder Brother! He is our Tutor, or Guardian, and our Protector, our Redeemer, Creator, and Savior.

Christ came to the earth, taking humanity and standing as man's representative, to show in the controversy with Satan that man, as God created him, connected with the Father and the Son, could obey every divine requirement.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages**, Book 1, 253.4.

In His life and lessons, Christ has given a perfect exemplification of the unselfish ministry which has its origin in God. God does not live for Himself. By creating the world, and by upholding all things, He is constantly ministering for others. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Matthew 5:45. This ideal of ministry God has committed to His Son. Jesus was given to stand at the head of humanity, that by His example He might teach what it means to minister.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 649.4.

32. Considering all of this, how foolish it would be if we turn our backs on His offer!

33. There are at least four questions that Hebrews 5:7-9 raises.

First: What does it mean when it says that Christ offered prayers to God who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard? Didn't Jesus die?

We do not know any specifics about those prayers that He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, since the disciples fell asleep and did not hear. We do know that His stress was so great that He was sweating drops of blood! And at the end of that session, He fell dying to the ground until an angel revived Him.

We can have but faint conception of the inexpressible anguish of God's dear Son in Gethsemane, as he realized the separation from his Father in consequence of bearing man's sin. **The divine Son of God was fainting, dying. The Father sent an angel from his presence to strengthen the divine sufferer.** Could mortals view the amazement and sorrow of the angels as they watched in silent grief the Father separating his beams of light, love, and glory, from his Son, they would better understand how offensive is sin in his sight. As the Son of God in the garden of Gethsemane bowed in the attitude of prayer, **the agony of his spirit forced from his pores sweat like great drops of blood.** It was here that the horror of great darkness surrounded him. The sins of the world were upon him. He was suffering in man's stead, as a transgressor of his Father's law. Here was the scene of temptation. The divine light of God was receding from his vision, and he was passing into the hands of the powers of darkness.... The wrath that would have fallen upon man, was now falling upon Christ.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times**, August 14, 1879, par. 3.[†] [What was happening? **Jesus was being treated as if He were a sinner; and, therefore, God had to separate Himself from Jesus.** (Isaiah 59:2)][‡]

Second: How did Jesus learn obedience? He lived that perfect life from infancy through dying on Golgotha without sinning even once. He proved that it was possible for a human being to do that. In those final hours, He had to overcome His natural desire for self-preservation and be willing to sacrifice all for our benefit, not being able to see through the portals of the tomb.

Third: Why does Hebrews 5:9 state that Christ was “made perfect”? Surely, we would recognize that Jesus was perfect from His infancy and through His entire human life.

In summary, we can say that Christ’s prayer to the One who was able to save Him from death was heard because He prayed for God’s will to be done. As a result, He was ultimately brought back to life. He learned obedience by submitting to, and trusting in, God’s will. **Finally, Christ was made our perfect High Priest through obedience to God, so that He could become “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,” meaning us** (*Heb. 5:9, NRSV*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 54.^{†§}

Fourth: Christ was like us, yet different from us. **In what ways was He different?** At no point in His life did He sin. Despite the worst possible temptations, He remained faithful to His Father’s guidance for Him each day. But, He maintained His likeness to humanity all the way to the point when He died on the cross. (See Philippians 2:5-11.) But, that was not the end for Him. He already knew that His Father had promised Him that He would arise in His human form and return to heaven. And He trusted His Father’s word.

Many claim that it was impossible for Christ to be overcome by temptation. Then He could not have been placed in Adam’s position; He could not have gained the victory that Adam failed to gain. If we have in any sense a more trying conflict than had Christ, then He would not be able to succor [help] us. But our Saviour took humanity, with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man, with the possibility of yielding to temptation. **We have nothing to bear which He has not endured.**—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 117.2.^{†‡}

34. Christ endured more than any of us would ever be asked to endure. However, we need to remember that those who will live through the time of the mark of the beast and the seven last plagues will be described as enduring also. (Revelation 14:12)
35. To many people, all of this suggests that the Father is the stern Judge, “high and lifted up,” and the Son needed to do all these things to meet the legal requirements of the Father. That is not a correct description of the situation.
36. In conclusion, let us look at a couple of statements from Ellen White and some words from Paul and John about what Christ accomplished by coming to this earth.

Hebrews 4:14-16: ¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, **but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.** ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.—*The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*.* (Hebrews 4:14-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers [abbreviated as *Revised Standard Version*].^{†‡}

37. Does this mean that Christ is more sympathetic now that He is back in heaven than He was before coming to this earth? Is He now better qualified to be our High Priest? Would it be correct to say that He is more sympathetic than the Father? Might the Father not be so sympathetic in the judgment as the Son will be? **Does the Son, then, need to plead with the Father to get Him to allow us into heaven? That would be pagan theology; however, it has permeated a lot of Christian thinking and many Christian pulpits!**

38. What did Jesus tell us plainly about the Father?

John 16:26-27: [Jesus said:] ²⁶ “In that day you will ask in my name; and I do **not** say [Notice the word **not**.] to you that I shall pray the Father for you; [Why not?] ²⁷ **for the Father himself loves you.**”—*Revised Standard Version*.^{*†‡}

Also, in John 14:9, notice Jesus’s answer to Phillip.

John 14:9: Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? **He who has seen me has seen the Father**; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”—*Revised Standard Version*.^{*†}

39. Would it have made a difference, for example, if the Father had come to this earth instead of the Son? Look at what Ellen White had to say on this subject.

Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, veiling His glory and humbling Himself, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed.... In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 83*,^{*} 1895 (21MR^{*} 393.1).[†] *That I May Know Him*^{*} 338.4.^{€†}

40. Could we ever ask for a clearer explanation about God than that?

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