



# Hebrews

## Advent Study

### Day 1

---

**Read: Hebrews 13:22-25**

#### The Mystery Epistle

We begin at the end, because there we find some hints about the writer of this long letter, which isn't even a letter, but more like a teaching sermon sent in a letter. However, the information in the final paragraph only raises more questions. Was the writer in Italy or just with some people from Italy? How does he know Timothy?

Thomas Long observed that Hebrews has both a unique style and content in the New Testament. Its highly structured and elaborate rabbinical style of Christian theological argument was written in the finest Greek of anything else in the New Testament. Because of the extensive use of the Old Testament, it is usually assumed it was directed to Jewish Christians. The author is not identified in the text. Strong speculation has named many possibilities: Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, Clement of Rome, Priscilla, Silvanus, and even the apostle Thomas. Most likely it was written by a well-educated Jewish Christian in 70 AD.

This "exhortation" (v.22) dealt with an urgent pastoral problem—a weary and burned out congregation, in danger of falling away from God. They had suffered much from persecution. The writer's solution was "grace" (v.25) from Christ Jesus that he presented through theology about Christ and salvation in him, seeking to encourage them to be steadfast in faith. Hebrews is richly rewarding in its beauty and helpful truths for any believer who invests the time and thought to enter into it.

*R&D What quotes have you heard from Hebrews? It has some popular ones.*

*Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and lead me into the word of God written that I may live it in Jesus.*

### Day 2

---

**Read: Hebrews 1:1-14**

#### The Supreme Christ

The author jumps right in to teach Christology, the theology of the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. Beginning with a concise summary of the gospel, contrasting the prophets of the Old Testament to the superiority of Jesus, who is greater than the angels and who alone sits "at the right hand of the Majesty on high." A basic theme of Hebrews is that Jesus is the supreme Son of God. Christ created and sustains all things as he also redeemed the creation from corruption (purified.)

This chapter not only presents the main themes of Hebrews, but it also presents the fullness of the offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. In each of these, he fulfilled and superseded the Old Testament holders of these roles. Jesus is the full and final revelation of God, the trustworthy Prophet, who not only speaks God's word, but who is the Living Word of God, to which the written word of Scripture testifies.

Jesus is also the Great High Priest, who fulfilled and completed the sacrifices of the temple in his perfect sacrifice upon the cross, making atonement for our sins. We are united by faith to his victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, over sin, darkness and death. The Church is a kingdom of priests as we are one in him.

Finally, Jesus is also the great and sovereign King over all creation, the Lord of Lords, who protects his people, governs them, and holds them accountable. His glory is the glory of God.

*R&D How have you experienced the three offices of Christ? How would you explain them to a new believer?*

*Prayer: The Lord has shown forth His glory: Come let us adore Him.*

---

### Day 3

**Read: Hebrews 2:1-18**

#### Christ the Savior

In this chapter, the author explores the great mystery of the incarnation, the cornerstone of our faith and life in Christ. That message is presented in the context of the danger of “drifting away” from the gospel of God. We are called to be intentional and committed to be faithful to Jesus because he is both our Savior and Lord. He was made like us in order to accomplish his mission of redemption—God and man in one person. This the key to our salvation: “that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone...that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil...to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

Jesus is the “second Adam,” who, through his obedience to the Father, fulfilled the purpose of our lives, as the servants and witnesses of God in this world. By him, and in him, we enter into the very glory of God—the glory of the Son. We do this by trusting him with our lives in this world and the world to come. He was tempted as we are tempted, and by faith and following him as disciples, we enjoy the freedom and peace of the children of God. Therefore, we “must pay much closer attention” to avoid neglecting “such a great salvation.” That is, we are to be alert and receptive to the Lord in word and sacrament, diligently laying hold of his grace that he offers freely out of his love.

*R&D Examine your rule of life—the habits of your prayer, worship, and service—to ensure you are attentive to the Lord in all things.*

*Prayer: The mercy of the Lord is everlasting: Come let us adore Him.*

---

### Day 4

**Read: Hebrews 3:1-6**

#### Jesus vs. Moses

Moses is honored as one of God’s most faithful servants who trusted and obeyed God as the people of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt. He challenged Pharaoh, led the people through the wilderness, and received the Law of God on Mount Sinai. Recognized as a humble, loving, and great prophet of God, nevertheless, Jesus is above him in honor, glory, and power.

Hebrews used the metaphor of a house to illustrate the difference between Moses and Jesus. A faithful servant in the house is subject to the owner’s will. That’s Moses. He is part of the house of which the builder is the Lord. The house is named for those who own the house—the Lord. And

here's the good news for us: "And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." We share with Moses a servant role to the Lord of the Household.

The message of the rest of the chapter (which we'll explore next) is that we should therefore be careful by not imitating the rebellious Israelites who defied Moses, and God, in the wilderness.

*R&D Look up the references in the Bible to "house" and "stones," especially in 1 Peter 2.*

*Prayer: The Lord is glorious in His saints: Come let us adore Him.*

---

## Day 5

---

**Read: Hebrews 3:7-19**

### Neglecting Salvation?

Hebrews contains several warnings—something that's familiar to us in our safety-conscious society. There are warning labels on everything! Nearly every package has some kind of caution along with directions for use. Here are some of the Bible's caution labels, and we should pay attention to them.

Few of us would suspect ourselves of having an "evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." Additionally, it's likely that few of us are acutely aware of the "deceitfulness of sin." The Devil is the Deceiver, from Adam and Eve through today and tomorrow until the Lord returns to finish the job of bringing in the kingdom of God, the new Jerusalem. Reading C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* is a helpful exercise in discerning the guises of evil and sin.

A large number of Israelites rebelled in the wilderness and the result was dreadful—they would not enter in to God's rest. That means they didn't make it to the Promised Land—the fulfillment of which is heaven itself, eternal life and joy in the presence of God. God's rest is His Shalom, His peace—harmony within us, among us, and, above all, with Him.

To fall away from God is from the same root as apostasy—to deny Christ, to follow an idol. When we fall for temptation and throw away our inheritance—our citizenship in heaven—we are saying to God, "My will be done!" The antidote to this danger is the rule of life by regular prayer, Bible study, worship, and, especially, some kind of small-group experience with fellow disciples: prayer group, Bible study, etc. We need the encouragement and accountability of brothers and sisters in Christ to stay the course.

*R&D Read and pray through Psalm 95 in more than one translation.*

*Prayer: Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: Come let us adore Him.*

---

## Day 6

---

**Read: Hebrews 4:1-13**

### Wrath and Rest

God's promises play a large part in Hebrews as well as the whole Bible. (Like the modern Bible translation titled *The Message*, the whole Bible could be called *The Promise*.) God's promise here refers to the promise of the Good News, the gospel of God's peace, which Hebrews expresses as God's "rest," His eternal Sabbath "rest." This is His gift to His people: to dwell in and enjoy harmony with the living Lord and, through Him, within ourselves, and even with others.

This Sabbath rest is both now and in the future. It was inaugurated by Jesus in his death, resurrection, and exaltation. It is also waiting for future consummation in the end times when he returns to complete the kingdom on earth, the new Jerusalem. This rest is both now and not yet. Also, this rest is not passive but active—moving, full of worship, witness, and work in and for the kingdom of God.

What are we to fear since Jesus and the angels so often exhort us to “fear not”? The fear of God is something very different from the fear of man, the world, the flesh, and the devil. The fear of God is the earnest desire to pass the test—the danger of falling away from God. This is the trial we share with Jesus as he defeated Satan’s test in the wilderness. The Exodus generation failing that test in the wilderness serves as a warning to us. Rest in God is the opposite of dwelling in God’s wrath, in which Satan and the demons eternally dwell. The gift of perseverance/steadfastness is the antidote to the temptation of following anyone else besides God.

*R&D Use the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), the “love chapter” (1 Corinthians 13), or the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26) for regular self-examination.*

*Prayer: Give us Your grace, Lord, to trust and fear to fail You by living in Your will.*

---

## Day 7

**Read: Hebrews 5:11—6:12**

### Immaturity

One of the chief problems with which Hebrews dealt was the temptation of Christians to turn their backs on Christ and the Church and return to the political safety of the synagogue and the Jewish law. This would mean renouncing Christ. Hebrews diagnosed the root problem as spiritual immaturity. The symptoms of that danger: dullness of hearing the gospel and apostolic teaching, and the need to re-learn the basics of the faith.

Hebrews uses the hyperbole of “crucifying Christ anew” to describe falling away from Jesus, yet there is truth in that phrase. When baptized believers deny the Lord Jesus, it is, indeed, as if they were driving another nail into his body. It is very serious business to reject Christ after we have accepted him as Savior and Lord and been made part of the household of God by Holy Baptism. We cannot start at the beginning again. But, after a long dispute, the early Church was led by the Holy Spirit to decide in ecumenical council that they could be restored—but only after long, severe penitential discipline, confession of sin, and acceptance by the bishop.

Finally, the weakening believers needed remedial training in conversion to Christ, in the difference between the Jewish ritual purifying washings and Christian Baptism, the “laying on of hands” (the sealing by the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:14-17; 9:12, 17-19; 19:5-6), and the hope of the resurrection and the last judgment upon Jesus’ return.

*R&D Review your Christian life, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal any temptations to turn away from the Lord. Ask his grace to strengthen your faith and obedience to Christ.*

*Pray: Come, Holy Spirit, fill us with the light and wisdom of Christ to be steadfast in faith and obedience to him.*

## Day 8

---

**Read: Hebrews 6:13—7:10**

### The Trustworthy God

After challenging and then encouraging the believers in danger of giving up and renouncing faith in Christ, Hebrews continues with more reasons to be hopeful for salvation. First, the Lord committed Himself to fulfill His promises in His covenant with Abraham and, second, the very character of God is trustworthy for He is the source of all truth, all steadfastness, all love, and all justice. His promise is reliable. This is the “anchor of the soul,” an ancient and strong image of stability and hope that is confident in Jesus, the priest “after the order of Melchizedek forever.”

This hope in God is the opposite of wishful thinking. It is not an “if” or “maybe” project, but a powerful gift from God. The character of God is unchangeable and holy. He is the only one who will never fail us. Jesus’ sacrifice opened the temple curtain to the Holy Place (sanctuary) for us so that we can draw near to God (see Exodus 26:31; Numbers 18:7; Matthew 27:51).

Melchizedek was both priest and the king of Salem (translated “righteousness” and therefore, the king of peace). Salem is from the Hebrew *shalom* and, later, the name of Jerusalem. Since there is no biblical record of his origin or death, he is considered a symbol—a foreshadowing—of the eternal priest, Jesus Christ, who is both the great high priest, King of all creation, and the only giver of eternal peace.

Abraham offered him tithes in thanksgiving for God’s blessings and, since both he and Melchizedek preceded the Levitical priesthood to whom tithes were given by Israel (Numbers 18:21-24), Melchizedek is superior to them as Christ is superior. Therefore, we can “hold fast to the hope set before us” because of faith and baptism, for God is true to His promises and doesn’t revoke His gifts. We can ignore and renounce them, but they are always there waiting for our return.

*R&D Read and pray though Psalm 110 as it applies to our priest and king, Jesus.*

*Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the one Body, the one Spirit, the one hope, the one Lord, the one Faith, and the one Baptism.*

## Day 9

---

**Read Hebrews 7:11-28**

### The High Priest

A priest in Latin is *pontifex*, which is literally translated as “bridge builder.” The Old Testament priests of the old covenant served in the Jerusalem temple, in which the high priest was the only one to enter the Holy of Holies (like the tabernacle during the Exodus), and the only one who offered a sacrifice for his sins and the sins of Israel there once a year (see Exodus 28:1; 29:1-46). In this passage, Hebrews uses a rabbinic style of argument presenting Jesus as superior not only to Moses, the Sabbath, the Law, but also the Levitical priesthood.

Jesus as the great high priest had a prototype in the Genesis figure of the priest and king, Melchizedek. The main point of this section is that Jesus is the only bridge between God and us. Christ is our intercessor in heaven, continuing his eternal sacrifice (see Romans 8:34). The high priesthood of Jesus is dealt with throughout the New Testament, but Hebrews presents the clearest picture of him in this saving ministry.

Jesus was called to his ministry by God the Father and, in his incarnation, Christ has perfect priestly compassion. He entered the heavenly temple when he ascended with his risen body and

reigns as the victor over Satan, death, and darkness (see Galatians 3:13, 14; 1 John 4:10) and the only sinless eternal priest (in contrast to the generations of many sinful, mortal Levitical priests), perpetually praying for us (see Romans 8:4; 1 John 2:1). While the Jerusalem priests offered daily sacrifices with the blood of animals, Jesus offered himself only once. He is our hope and our helper.

*R&D Look up information about the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple in order to understand how far Jesus surpasses the earthly ministries of the old covenant.*

*Prayer: Jesus, my Savior, thank you for your sacrifice on the cross for my salvation; help me to see you as my great high priest who is praying for me now.*

---

## Day 10

### Read Hebrews 8:1-13

#### The Better Covenant

The theme of chapter 7 continues here with the main point of the ascended Jesus seated (position of authority) at the right hand of the Father in glory. He is the Lord of the “true sanctuary” since the earthly tabernacle, temple, and, for that matter, all our churches, are copies—reflections—of the eternal Holy Place in heaven in the presence of God (see Exodus 25:9).

Since the Old Covenant was not able to save due to the disobedience and rebellion of Israel, a new covenant has been given to fulfill the purpose of the previous covenant—to form a holy people of God. Hebrews uses Jeremiah 31:31-34 to illustrate the point that through Christ Jesus we have access to know God in the biblical use of being one with him. Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament foreshadowing and prototypes in his supreme self-sacrifice as the only, last, perfect, and eternal sin offering—once for all and forever. He alone can cleanse our souls. Redemption in the Savior has replaced the ceremonial rites of the temple.

As Eugene Peterson has described it, Jesus is the better priest, seated in a better place, as mediator of a better covenant, based on better promises of God, reaching the goal of spiritual formation in the disciples of Jesus as we seek the Lord’s will in us. Jesus is the only true bridge over the troubled waters of sin that separates us from God. We can know we are forgiven because God has now planted His grace in our hearts, which is the unique gospel compared to all other religions.

*R&D There is a difference in translation between Jeremiah 31:32 and the one in Hebrews due to the latter using the Septuagint version. Look up Septuagint, which is still in use by many Christians.*

*Prayer: The Lord has shown forth His glory: Come let us adore Him.*

---

## Day 11

### Read Hebrews 9:1-10

#### The Tabernacle

What begins now is a cycle of repeated themes based upon the practices of worship in the Old Testament contrasted to the saving sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. There are many details of the ceremonies of the tabernacle, later followed in the Jerusalem temple. The Mosaic covenant and law laid out the way Israel was to worship God through the ministry of the Levitical priests,

and especially the high priest who alone entered the Holy of Holies once a year to offer sacrifice for sins.

The tabernacle was an elaborate tent described in Exodus 25:9 and 26:1-37. All the items specified by the Old Testament law were listed in Exodus 25, 30, and 37. The most important part of the tent was the Most Holy Place (the Holy of Holies) where the high priest met the Lord “enthroned upon the cherubim” over the atonement cover of the ark of the Covenant (see Psalm 80:1; 1 Samuel 6:2; Isaiah 37:16).

The Holy Place was the area in front of the curtain dividing it from the Most Holy Place, and in it was the table for the bread of the Presence, the golden lampstand (symbolizing the tree of life in the Garden of Eden), and the altar of incense from which smoke rose to fill all of the tabernacle—including the Most Holy Place. All of this is understood by Hebrews as prefiguring the ultimate reality of Jesus Christ and the true, heavenly temple of God’s eternal presence. Jesus inaugurated the “time of reformation” by his atoning sacrifice and resurrection to be completed at his second coming in glory.

The tabernacle symbolized our need for an inner spiritual renewal in contrast to the external ceremonies that could never provide for the new life by the forgiveness of sin through Jesus. In Christ we enter into the presence of God with no barrier between our hearts and the Lord.

*R&D Look up a diagram or drawing of the tabernacle in a study Bible and reflect on how it all points to our eternal great high priest in Jesus.*

*Prayer: Lord God, we lift up our hearts to Your holy presence through Jesus Christ, our one, great high priest now and forever.*

---

## Day 12

---

**Read: Hebrews 9:11-22**

### Lifeblood

In contrast to the Old Testament tabernacle (and later, the temple) and all the repeated sacrifices of animals for sins, Christ is the great high priest of the New Covenant who offered a single, superior, and eternal sacrifice and carries his wounds in the heavenly sanctuary in God’s very presence. By his atoning sacrifice Jesus brings us forgiveness, salvation, peace, and union with God.

What Jesus sacrificed on the cross was his lifeblood, for the Old Testament understood life was in the blood and, therefore, blood is sacred to God for it represents life that belongs to God. The “eternal Spirit” in verse 11 refers to the spirit of Christ, rather than the Holy Spirit of the Trinity. Every act of offering was summed up in the sacrifices of blood offered since the Law was given to Moses. Only Christ is the pure, perfect, and complete offering sufficient to cleanse us from sin and give us new life in the risen and ascended Jesus. As the mediator of a new covenant (v.15), Christ is the only one in whom we receive an inheritance that is eternal.

The sacrifices of the Old Covenant could only give purification from ritual uncleanness that was only temporary and never an inner cleansing of the heart, where sin or holiness dwells. The salvation in our Redeemer is God’s promise to us that Jesus fulfilled and continues to fulfill in heaven.

*R&D Consider the greatness of Jesus’ sacrifice of his lifeblood for our redemption and how incomparable this offering was and is for you and all disciples of Jesus.*

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, only through you am I in the presence of God. Give me a grateful heart for your saving work and open my mouth to praise you, now and always.*

---

### Day 13

---

**Read: Hebrews 9:23—10:7**

#### The Sacrifice

Hebrews continues the argument that Christ has entered into the heavenly sanctuary (Holy Place) where the real heavenly things are as opposed to the “copies” that needed purification. While this is similar to the platonic worldview, it is the true biblical understanding that “God is the only reality and we are real only insofar as we are in Him” as St. Augustine wrote. In a very real way, the churches in which we worship are copies of the eternal, heavenly temple of God’s presence—with the difference that animals are not sacrificed to cleanse them—in which we worship the one, true Deliverer.

Verse 27 gives us the assurance that even as everyone dies in this world and will face judgment, that judgment for sin has already been borne by our Redeemer who will return in his second advent to complete our salvation. The “many” in verse 28 is a Hebrew expression that means “all.” Here we have the heart of the Advent season with its themes of the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. These are the destinies that are determined by our relationship to God.

Jesus came to do the will of the Father (see Psalm 40:6-8) which was to open heaven for us through him. And because this passage speaks of our life and death, it is clear that the idea of reincarnation is not the biblical revelation. We have one life to live in this world, one death, and one Savior who is the way to eternal life in and with him.

The “body” that has been prepared is the pre-existing incarnate Lord Jesus, perfectly divine and perfectly human, born of Mary in Bethlehem and crucified for our sins. He is the source of our peace so that we can freely and fearlessly accept that our life is mortal with the sure and certain faith that in Christ we have a new and eternal life.

*R&D Discuss with someone why reincarnation is not real, but the one life we have is to be taken seriously as a precious gift from God that, in Christ, goes to God.*

*Prayer: Praise Him from whom all blessings flow, praise Him all creatures here below, praise Him all ye heavenly hosts, praise Him, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

---

### Day 14

---

**Read: Hebrews 10:8-18**

#### Forgiveness

The Good News of salvation to which Hebrews gives witness is now becoming clearer. Doing away with the old system of sacrificial offerings, Jesus has brought the better sacrifice to sanctify us, to make us holy, a new people of God. Doing the will of God, Jesus has made the one sacrifice we need for a new life in him.

That Christ now sits in glory on the right hand of God; he shows that he has completed this saving work in the atonement, the resurrection, and the ascension (see Psalm 110). In contrast, all the Old Testament priests had to stand to offer their sacrifices. And, “waiting until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet” refers to the completion of his kingdom when he returns.



How are we “made perfect” (v.14) by Christ? It doesn’t mean that we are sinless and flawless, but that Christ has earned our final perfection which will be applied to us when he returns. Therefore, we are in the “in between” time of growth toward the maturity (perfection) by which we have only a single focus in life and a heart totally focused on the Lord. We are between Jesus’ inauguration of his kingdom and his completion of that kingdom in the new heaven and new earth. In Jesus, we have forgiveness and the Holy Spirit writing the law of love on our hearts (see Jeremiah 31:31-34).

*R&D Meditate upon Jeremiah 31:31-34 and pray for both understanding and the grace to live God’s law of love as we enjoy the gift of forgiveness.*

*Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus, and build your kingdom in my heart and my life to your glory.*

---

## Day 15

**Read: Hebrews 10:19-39**

### Living Faith

We are entering a word of great encouragement and one of the most popular sections of Hebrews. The “therefore” of verse 19 is based upon all that has gone before in Hebrews and speaks of our “confidence” in the “new and living way” which Jesus opened for us by his blood; we actually enter into the Holy Place behind the curtain. As it was torn in two at the death of Jesus on the cross, so the “tearing” of his body opened for us a direct path to God.

What follows are three exhortations to strengthen us for steadfastness in Christ each starting with “Let us”: an assured faith in Christ (v.22); a firm hope in God’s promise (v.23); and an active love for God and neighbor in worship and service (vv.24-25). The first refers to our baptism in Christ, the second addresses the very real temptation to escape persecution, and the third speaks to the reality that we cannot be “Lone Ranger” Christians. We need each other, in both corporate worship and in small group prayer and Bible study, in order to run the race of faith.

After these encouragements there is a stern warning from falling away from God by habitual and intentional sin that separates us from Christ. This is always a danger when we relax and seek an easy life of “cheap grace” which glosses over our turning away from God. Nevertheless, because we have been steadfast in the past since baptism (“enlightenment” was an early church synonym for baptism) we can endure to the promised reward.

*R&D Consider how you can encourage someone who is becoming inactive in church. How can you help them renew their active faith?*

*Prayer: Good and gracious Lord, deliver us from wandering away from Jesus and keep us close to him, now and forever.*

---

## Day 16

**Read: Hebrews 11:1-16**

### Who’s Who

From *The Message*: “The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see.” That first verse from chapter 11 opens an important section about the magnificent testimony the saints of the Old Testament give us as models of faith and hope. For neither hope nor

faith is wishful thinking or believing in the irrational, but a firm, unyielding trust in the living God and His promises. For God is faithful to the covenants He has made. All the examples that follow are examples of the practical faith of an assured confidence in God. Neither faith nor hope is passive but acting upon the trust we have in the Lord. It is a lived faith—a living faith.

We understand through Hebrews that these Old Testament servants of God were placing their trust in God, which means they were placing their faith in the coming one, the Messiah Savior Jesus Christ and his kingdom, the better heavenly country that fulfilled the Promised Land. In the meantime, they all were strangers and exiles on earth. None of them was anymore perfect than we are, but they held on to God as models for our faith.

Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph with all the other names to follow in this chapter, are the heroes of the faith that gave life to them and to us. We need to give thanks for each and every one that they were pioneers into the kingdom of God.

*R&D Write down a list of your own models of faith in your life who influenced and encouraged you to believe in and follow Jesus as Lord.*

*Prayer: God of our fathers, whose almighty hand leads forth in beauty all the starry band of shining worlds in splendor through the skies, our grateful songs before Thy throne arise.*

---

## Day 17

**Read: Hebrews 11:17-31**

### More Examples

As our text delves more deeply into the faithful actions of these Old Testament examples, we see that Abraham's trust in God was tested when he was asked to sacrifice his heir of the covenant promise, Isaac. Abraham obeyed while trusting God and his faith was rewarded. The sparing of Isaac became another prototype for the sacrifice of Jesus and his victory over death.

Jacob's blessing on his grandsons was an exercise of faith. Moses believed in the God he didn't see but who spoke through the burning bush. Rahab demonstrated her faith by her actions in helping the spies of Israel.

None of the above was remarkable by their natural abilities or advantages in life, but all were chosen and called by God for His purposes. He called them forward to the future kingdom of God and gave them the grace to follow. And none of them was flawless or sinless, but they persevered.

All of these Old Testament saints stand in contradiction to the presently popular "prosperity gospel" which is a false gospel, a heresy, that promises all kinds of earthly rewards for a selfish kind of faith that has nothing to do with the men and women we have been considering.

The rest of the chapter that follows will continue this theme.

*R&D Pick one of the Old Testament figures mentioned above and look them up in a Bible dictionary and the passages that relate to them.*

*Prayer: Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to Thee till death.*

## Day 18

---

**Read: Hebrews 11:32-40**

### The Marathon

Here we continue the summary of the Old Testament heroes of faith in the Lord. As we already know, they all made mistakes and even committed sins, but their claim to fame in God's hall of fame is that they persevered in trusting and following God. By His grace God enabled them to walk in righteousness by trusting His promises.

The fire and the lions refer to the dramatic and famous stories in Daniel 2:49—3:30 and Daniel 6:16-28 respectively. Elijah and Elisha both brought people back from death to live again (not like the resurrection of Jesus, but resuscitation). We find their stories in 1 Kings 17:17-24 and 2 Kings 4:18-37.

Although many of these heroes of the faith were very human and flawed, the world was not worthy of them. For by God's grace they saw something better, something beyond their time and place. They hoped in the God of redemption who will make all these Old Covenant figures perfect with us when Christ returns. Until then, we are all called to use these examples to encourage us to run the race that is before us—the only race that counts, the race of faith.

*R&D If you charted your life as a race of faith, where are you in the marathon line up? Make sure you have not dropped out of the race.*

*Prayer: Refresh thy people on their toilsome way, lead us from night to never-ending day; fill all our lives with love and grace divine, and glory, laud and praise be ever thine.*

## Day 19

---

**Read: Hebrews 12:1-6**

### How to Win

The first two verses of chapter 12 are among the most beautiful, encouraging, and inspiring of Hebrews and the entire New Testament. We are surrounded by the communion of saints who are cheering us on, praying for us to reach the finish line, the goal of faith in the kingdom of God. Jesus is our greatest, ultimate, most powerful example of endurance for the prize of new life. Where Jesus persevered through the greatest suffering of all—the wrath of God's judgment for all our sin—we can put our struggles with sin and spiritual warfare into proper context. He has already won the prize and is not only at the finish line to welcome us, but is with us every step of the way.

Thus begins this chapter given to us as motivation to endure and be steadfast in faith despite all the obstacles, temptations, and dangers on the way. This is the opposite of the romantic, sentimentalized, dumbed-down, casual, and soft religion peddled so often. This is tough faith; this is real Christianity. Jesus “never lost sight of where he was headed—in and with God” is how *The Message* presents our Savior's overcoming faith. Eugene Peterson wrote that the cross of Jesus “connects the worst humans do with the best God does.” That's Good News worth believing and living.

Therefore, we are called to put away all sin (or weights) that impede our progress in God. We don't want to be distracted from our goal or our guide. What this calls for is our own martyrdom—for the word *martyrea* in Greek basically means to be a witness. We are called to be part of the roll call of saints who denied ourselves and followed God's will rather than our own. The old word for this is “mortification,” or dying to self.

R&D *Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the “weights” of sins that you need to lose in order to win the race. Write them down and offer them to Jesus the Victor for his help.*

Prayer: *Turn your eyes upon Jesus, my soul, for in him alone can I win the race of faith.*

---

## Day 20

---

**Read: Hebrews 12:7-17**

### Helpful Discipline

Discipline, whether its self-discipline or applied to us by an authority, is a negative and unpopular word today, especially in church and even among many parents of young children. Except there are many people who undergo severe and long discipline to achieve a goal—mothers preparing for childbirth, soldiers in training, students who succeed, athletes in all fields, musicians who never stop practicing, etc. The Greek word used here for discipline was commonly applied in the New Testament era to any and all instruction, training, correction, and even childbirth.

What’s the point of discipline? Some common ones are: 1) to reach some benefit (a new baby, a prize, an opportunity to serve, etc.); 2) to prove something; 3) as a response of respect and submission. This last one is the nature of God’s discipline—to shape and form us into mature disciples of Jesus, i.e., to focus on Him rather than ourselves. His discipline of us is not punishment, even if the result can be painful at times. God’s discipline is instruction and training to know and serve Him, to grow in His holiness. God loves us and, because He loves us, He disciplines us out of love. He does that to strengthen us, like in a rehabilitation center.

Take earthly fathers, for example (or any authority figure): some can fall short and become even abusive and toxic. The point is that God is not judged by the failures of men, but we are judged by the standard of God’s character as our loving Father. Part of our becoming mature in faith is to care for others and help all who need it, especially in the church. God’ grace both rescues us (pardons) and empowers us to live for Him in Jesus

R&D *Verse 15 mentions the “root of bitterness” from Deuteronomy 29:18. Look it up and ask yourself if in you, and/or others in your church, there lurks the toxic and contagious resentment. If so, what can you do about it?*

Prayer: *Since, Lord, Thou dost defend us with Thy Spirit, we know we at the end shall life inherit, then fancies flee away; I’ll fear not what men say, I’ll labor night and day to be a pilgrim.*

---

## Day 21

---

**Read: Hebrews 12:18-29**

### Grateful Worship

While the unseen God cannot be touched as if He were of the earth, He made His presence known through the signs of fire, darkness, and the law of Mt. Sinai in the Mosaic Covenant (see Exodus 19:12-25; 20:18-21; Deuteronomy 9:19; 18:16). In contrast, Christ has brought us to the heavenly Mount Zion, the new Jerusalem with the company of all the angels, all saints of the Old and New Covenants, and to the presence of God Himself. This is the picture we see in Psalms 26, 110; Isaiah 62:6-12; Revelation 21:1—22:5.

Whereas the blood of Abel cried out for vengeance, the blood of Jesus is the covenant of grace, atonement, and forgiveness. The Covenant of Grace has superseded the Covenant of Law. And unlike the generation of the Exodus from Egypt that never reached the Promised Land because

of their disobedience to the word of God, we are called to a powerful, authentic, grateful, and reverent worship. When we adore the Lord, we are one with all the “festal gathering” of heaven itself.

In verses 25 to 28 there is one more warning to be steadfast in faith and not fall away into apostasy for the latter will be swept away in God’s housecleaning at the last judgment. Those who are faithful are part of the eternal, “unshakeable” kingdom of God.

*R&D Evaluate the worship in your own church and consider if its fully reverent, grateful, and authentic in heartfelt, Spirit-filled worship. How can you help make it more authentic and powerful?*

*Prayer: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of Your glory.*

---

## Day 22

**Read: Hebrews 13:1-9**

### Saving Grace

The last chapter of Hebrews begins with a series of practical applications of the Gospel to the daily life of believers.

Love of our brothers and sisters in Christ is paramount. It is the fruit of faith and a warning to congregations that are torn apart by antagonistic factions struggling over power. This was as much a problem in the New Testament church as it is today.

Hospitality for strangers is essential, for not only does the Bible have stories about angels and the Lord visiting His people but, also, it’s a primary means of witnessing and evangelism.

Caring for those in prison and suffering for their faith with prayer and action is needed now more than ever.

Marriage is to be honored, for what we do with our bodies sexually has a deep impact upon our souls and relationship with God.

Reject greed with contentment that comes from trusting our loving God.

Respect and imitate the pastors and those who have helped you grow in Christ with the word of God.

Hold onto sound teaching of the gospel by rejecting the heresies of “diverse and strange teachings” which demand rigorous attention to a multitude of rules. One of the problems in the New Testament Church was the temptation to mix Judaism with Christianity or to return to the Old Covenant.

*R&D Read Genesis 18:1-15 for a story of providing hospitality and consider how you and your church welcome strangers.*

*Prayer: I thank and praise you, Lord Jesus Christ, that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

---

## Day 23

**Read: Hebrews 13:10-16**

### Outsiders

Verses 10-16 describe Christians as “resident aliens” in this world and the church as a colony of heaven pointing to the reality of God beyond this world. As witnesses to Christ and the

gospel, believers are a sign of contradiction to the lie that this world and this life is all there is. The church exists for the sake of those who are not its members, but to invite them into the household of God.

Verses 13-14 are an extended metaphor contrasting Judaism and Christianity. We are to join Jesus “outside the camp” for that is where he was crucified upon Calvary. We are saved and sanctified by his blood. The result of our union with Christ is that we are to offer a “name” (v.15). That is the heart of all true worship—to honor and adore the living God. That worship is to be continual—offered in all churches throughout the world so that the Holy Name of God is praised hour after hour as the earth turns. Instead of a sacrifice of animals, we offer this spiritual sacrifice to the glory of God.

Lastly, a call to do good and willingly share with others our kindness and mercy are God’s commands and, when we obey, we are pleasing the Lord.

*R&D Look up “praise” in a Bible concordance and write down the passages that speak to you most powerfully about worship. Then pray you may grow in that sacrifice.*

*Prayer: Lord, grant me Your Holy Spirit day by day that my lips may praise You and my hands serve You by serving others in Your Name.*

---

## Day 24

**Read: Hebrews 13:17-19**

### Leaders

Being in Christmas, when we give thanks for the Incarnation in the birth of the baby Jesus to Mary, the exhortation to care for the pastors and priests of our churches is important. Christmas (and Easter) is a stressful time for them when they are under great pressures to care for God’s people, prepare beautiful worship and sermons, and care for their own families as well. It’s timely that we read the exhortation to respect and care for the clergy of your church. Their spiritual responsibility is truly awesome, and they will be judged for their exercise of their care for your souls.

Therefore, the task of church members is to lighten their load by making their work “a joy and not with groaning.” Far too often clergy struggle with depression and discouragement—causing some leave the ministry—simply because the expectations are unreasonable and the burdens too heavy. Furthermore, it’s to your own “advantage” when the work of your pastor or priest is a joy to them. Then these shepherds will be a joy to you.

One of the most important ways to care for your clergy is to pray for them—consistently and with thanksgiving. No pastor or priest can meet all the needs of everyone in a church, nor is he or she called to do so. They are called and ordained to preach the word of God rightly and to administer the sacraments faithfully. That is truly what we need the most.

*R&D Review how you (and your congregation) support and care for your pastor or priest. Are you one who is regularly critical or one who prays for them?*

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, the Shephard of my soul, I lift up to you the under-shepherd you have sent to feed my soul with the means of your grace. May I pray for and encourage them in this sacred work.*

## Day 25

---

**Read: Hebrews 13:20-21**

### **The Blessing**

We end this study of Hebrews with the very best part of it: the beautiful doxology and blessing that is given in these two verses. In a very real way, they sum up the themes of Hebrews that encourage everyone who reads it or over whom it is read at the end of a worship service.

Here is how it is paraphrased in *The Message*: “May God, Who puts all things together, makes all things whole, Who made a lasting mark through the sacrifice of Jesus, the sacrifice of blood that sealed the eternal covenant, Who led Jesus, our Great Shepherd, up and alive from the dead, now put you together, provide you with everything you need to please him, make us into what gives him most pleasure, by means of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah. All glory to Jesus forever and always!”

This encapsulates the gospel as a prayer—affirming the divine Christ as superior over all the Old Covenant priests and sacrifices and as our Redeemer. It also is a strong support for anyone who may be weakening in faith. Jesus is all God has done, is doing, and will do for us. Jesus is our blessing. Jesus is our prophet, priest, and king, our rest, our peace, our hope, our strength, and our Lord. He gives us everything we need to follow, worship, serve, and share him. In him we know and receive the loving care and protection of God the Father. This masterful prayer grounds us in the incomparable Jesus Christ. His blood is our cleansing, our atonement, our forgiveness, and gives us new and eternal life in him.

*R&D Welcome the Lord Jesus into your heart and life in a new way this Christmas and ask for his grace to worship and follow him more faithfully.*

*Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, may I know you more clearly, serve you more nearly, and love you more dearly.*

*by Sudduth Rae Cummings*

Copyright © 2019 by the Bible Reading Fellowship  
PO Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790

This study is reprinted from *The Journey*, a publication of the Bible Reading Fellowship. For more information about our publications, please visit our website [www.biblereading.org](http://www.biblereading.org).